

# Retail business expands to appeal to changing trends in tourism

by Heidi Riley

Business Expansion

**M**oonsnail Soapworks in Charlottetown has just been renovated to double the retail space and increase the production area. The building had a face-lift, with refinished hardwood floors, paint, plumbing and insulation. The retail space is open to the production area and allows customers to see behind the scenes.

## Tourists' interests are changing

"We will be offering tours to anyone who wants to watch soap making," says owner **Jennifer Ridgway**. "We want to continue to appeal to the new breed of tourist who wants something different. Instead of souvenirs, more people want to bring home memories of a unique experience. They want to meet the people who make the products, and they want to watch the production process and learn about the ingredients. It's that personal connection that sells our products."

Jennifer is an entrepreneur who loves the creative side of building her Charlottetown businesses. She develops new product lines and packaging for Moonsnail Soapworks, and finds unique home decor and clothing items for her other business, **Luna**. This spring, Jennifer's creative juices are flowing again. She is developing a new product line, experimenting with new ingredients, packaging and labeling, and redesigning her website.

Jennifer started her business career by making natural body-care products and selling them at the Farmer's Market. They sold so well that she expanded her product lines and opened Moonsnail in 1995. Last year, the business made 60 types of natural bath and body care products, including 25,000 bars of soap in 16 different varieties. The ingredients are all natural, with no artificial fragrances, dyes or preservatives.

In 2005, Jennifer opened Luna close by on Richmond Street. "I opened Luna because I thought there was a real need for a place to find unique, interesting, high-quality clothing, accessories, and home decor items in Charlottetown," says Jennifer.

## Staff positions

Moonsnail employs three full-time and one part-time **sales people** in the winter. From April to October, that number grows to six full-time staff. There is also a full-time **manager**



Jennifer Ridgway has renovated her business, Moonsnail Soapworks.

who works year round. Along with selling in the store, another important part of the business is on-line mail order sales. Mail orders are received mostly by e-mail and are processed and mailed out daily.

One **production worker** works full-time year round making soap and other body products, as well as packaging, labeling, and ordering ingredients. "Soap making is precise work, which needs attention to detail down to the exact temperature, the number of grams, and the processing time down to the minute," says Jennifer.

Luna employs one full-time and one part-time sales person year-round. Four full-time

seasonal staff are hired in the summer. "Luna will move to a new location in May," says Jennifer. "It will have much more space, so I will require more staff."

## Finding the right staff

"I receive a lot of résumés, and I don't have a problem finding staff," says Jennifer. "To stand out from the crowd, it's very important for job seekers to make a good first impression. I can tell right away if someone is just passing out résumés without having a good idea of what this store is all about. I like to hire people who have a genuine interest and a desire to learn about natural skin products and to share that knowledge with customers."