

Co-workers cook up a bright business idea

by Heidi Riley

Small Business

“**M**aritime Lighting Solutions. How may I brighten your day?”

That’s the greeting customers hear when they call this new Charlottetown store which opened in March. This business was started by four people who worked together at a Charlottetown restaurant. They got along so well that they decided to go into business together.

The partners say that many of the skills needed to work in a restaurant can be transferred to other business settings. “Sales, customer service, and a willingness to do what it takes to get the job done are needed in any service industry,” says **Ryan MacDonald**, one of the four partners in this new venture.

Why this business?

Solatube is an international organization with offices in the US, Australia, Europe, and Canada. Maritime Lighting Solutions is the only Canadian distributor east of Ontario installing Solatube Daylighting Systems.

“We chose the Solatube because it’s a green product made of highly reflective material, and it saves electricity by bringing natural light into a room,” says Ryan.

“Solatube will brighten up dark corners and increase the value of a home,” says partner **Andrew MacLaren**.

Customer service

“We already know we have a great product, and we add to that by providing exceptional customer service,” says Andrew. “We are the kind of business that keeps our promises, arrives on time, and does what we say we will do.”

Getting the word out

To drum up business, the partners held an open house, advertised on the radio, dropped off information packages with contractors, and attended the PEI Home Show. Within a short time of opening, they installed their first Solatube Tubular Daylight.

Entrepreneurship

“It’s really exciting to start a business, and it will be really rewarding as we get rolling,” says partner **Jenn Zamora**, who is taking charge of the administrative duties in the new business. In addition to her restaurant experience, Jenn has worked in an office setting before, and she is putting those skills to work in this new business.



Ryan MacDonald (left) Jenn Zamora and Andrew MacLaren met when they all worked at a Charlottetown restaurant. Now they are partners in a new business, Maritime Lighting Solutions, located at 4 Walker Drive. Missing from picture: Paul Winters, Senior Partner.

“Owning a business makes you care more about the business and more willing to put in long hours,” says Ryan. “It gives me the power to make this business into something I would like to see if I were the customer.”

Training

Ryan, Andrew, and senior partner **Paul Winters** are **Certified Installation Consultants (CICs)**. Representatives flew in from the US and training was done on site at their new showroom on Walker Drive. They gradually honed their skills by installing Solatube Daylighting Systems one by one. Certification had to be completed before Solatube would allow them to do installations.

Future plans for expansion

These new entrepreneurs have already made plans to expand. “Within the next five years, we hope to open stores throughout the Maritimes,” says Ryan. “We have our core staff now, but as our business starts to grow, we will need more certified installers.

“We will be looking for people who can work well on their own, with a group, and with customers. Some construction experience would be an asset, but the skills can be learned during the training period.”

The employment scene on PEI

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