

Cabinetmaking business continues to expand workforce to meet demand

by Patricia Roy

CARPENTRY & CABINETMAKING

Alfred Gallant is the owner of **Alf's Custom Cabinets Ltd.** in Huntley, located near Alberton. Alfred began making cabinets in 1981 and opened his business in 1989. "I built a workshop when I first started the business and expanded the building a couple of times since then," says Alfred.

"When the business started, I was working on my own," says Alfred. "About seven years ago, the workforce expanded to four full-time and one part-time employee. One of my workers is a **licensed carpenter** and two are **licensed cabinetmakers**. My wife Maureen, who is a **Certified General Accountant**, does the administration work. She also has another job outside the home."

Need for extra workers

"I could use a licensed cabinetmaker right now," says Alfred. "Depending on the amount of work we have over the winter months, I might consider hiring a second person."

About the business

"We do some carpentry work when we install the cabinets, but most of the work is cabinetmaking," says Alfred. In the manufacturing facility close to his home, he and his crew build everything from kitchen cabinets to entertainment centres and office furniture. The finished products are then transported to clients' homes or businesses.

Besides making cabinets, Alfred also builds reproductions of 19th century mantels. "The demand for these mantels became so great that I expanded the business to include **Timeless Mantels** a number of years ago," says Alfred.

What makes a successful Cabinetmaker?

Cabinetmakers must be detailed-oriented and have great hand-eye coordination. They construct and repair wooden cabinets, furniture, fixtures and related products. They are employed by furniture manufacturing or repair companies, construction companies and cabinetmaking contractors, or they may be self employed.

Employment requirements for cabinetmakers from the PEI Job Futures website

- Completion of Grade 12 or equivalent is usually required.
- A Certificate of Qualification is available but voluntary on PEI.
- To be eligible for a Certificate of Qualification as a cabinetmaker, new entrants are required to have completed Grade 12 or equivalent, as well as a four-year Apprenticeship program.
- A Certificate of Qualification is also available to carpenters who have worked in the trade for 5 out of the last 10 years (equivalent to 10,000 hours), and who have some high school, college-level or industry courses in cabinetmaking.



Alfred Gallant is the owner and designer of **Timeless Mantels** and **Alf's Custom Cabinets Ltd.** Alfred started out in his career by taking carpentry courses but decided to specialize in cabinetmaking. He was able to take training offered in Elmsdale at the time. He then followed the steps necessary to obtain his Red Seal as a cabinetmaker.

- By writing an Interprovincial Standards Examination, qualified cabinetmakers may obtain a "Red Seal" endorsement on their Certificate of Qualification. This allows cabinetmakers on PEI to work in other provinces.

For more information about **Alf's Custom Cabinets Ltd.**, call 853-3028 or visit www.timelessmantels.com

To explore a career as a **carpenter** or **cabinetmaker**, visit www.pei.jobfutures.org



Several services under one roof requires trades skill sets that are in demand

by Patricia Roy

The ability to service a number of different vehicles under one roof is the niche that has helped this Island company thrive, says **Susan Williams**, Manager of **Johnston's Tire Truck & Automotive** in Summerside. The business was a family-owned operation until it was purchased by **Amalgamated Dairies Limited (ADL)** in 1997. Susan says that ADL has a number of bulk milk trucks, frozen food trucks, and home delivery vehicles on the road, and purchasing the service center was good for the company.

"Johnston's can accommodate passenger cars, trucks, transport trucks, recreational vehicles, farm tractors, and even fire trucks," she says. "We are the only place on PEI that can do a complete alignment on transport trucks and trailers."

"We also do a lot of frame work and custom work on older or antique cars, and we are the only business of this kind on PEI with a forge on the premises," she says. "Johnston's also has 24/7 after-hour tire and mechanical mobile (cell) services."

Variety of occupations in different departments

"We have great staff, and many have the ability and expertise to pitch in where and when they are needed," says Susan. "Some have been with us for close to 25 years. The 23 people who work here have a variety of occupations. We have a **licensed diesel mechanic** who oversees the heavy truck department, a **service writer** who writes up work orders and invoicing, **department managers, supervisors, mechanics, tire technicians** and people in the **parts department**. We also have people in **tire sales** and some in **administration**."

"The business can certify its tire technicians through one of the tire companies," says Susan. "Most of the people who work in that department have been certified

by us. Certification requires a certain number of hours of experience installing all sizes of tires from passenger cars and diesel trucks to farm tractors."

Need for mechanics and parts persons

"Right now, I would like to hire a diesel mechanic and another with experience in radiator work," says Susan. "We have several people who plan to retire in a few years, so we are always on the lookout for mechanics and parts persons. It has been a challenge to find people with the skills we need. We will train anyone with the aptitude for this work as long as they agree to a verbal contract to stay with us for five years. It is a huge investment in time and effort for an employer to train someone. "People can also follow the steps necessary to earn their mechanic's license through the Apprenticeship program, as long as they work under the supervision of an experienced mechanic."

Susan adds that mechanics today need to be computer literate if they are going to be involved in any type of electronic engine repair. "These computer components can be even more complicated on diesel trucks."

Training for workers

"We usually send our staff for the training offered by parts or car manufacturers," says Susan. "We do warranty work, so our staff must know what to do to comply with manufacturers' requirements. Although there usually is no cost for the training, the software needed to service today's vehicles is expensive. Another expense for a business such as ours is the large amount of shop equipment needed."

"All of our mechanics are required to purchase their own tools. Most experienced licensed mechanics have acquired a vast number of tools

over their working years. Owning your own tools is a standard requirement in the Automotive/Heavy Truck and Transport repair industry.

Greatest need in the industry

"One of the greatest needs in our industry on PEI is for people to be trained to work on diesel trucks and refrigeration. There is no training available in this province. Students must go to the **New Brunswick Community College** in Moncton, where only a couple of seats are available to Island students. We have been involved in discussions with the **PEI Trucking Sector Council** and **Holland College** to see if we can find a way to make this type of training available here on PEI. Talks are ongoing and hopefully we will see a positive result in the very near future."



Johnston's Tire Truck & Automotive Manager **Susan Williams** (left) with Apprentice Mechanic **Susan Woods**, who plans to write her Red Seal exam in January. The two women are also offering evening clinics on basic car maintenance for women over the next number of weeks.

