

Sisters combine skills and determination to start a business

by Stella Shepard

Violet Lanois of Sturgeon and Jeannie Weibel of Montague are sisters, best friends and business partners.

Violet and Jeannie are both single parents who worked outside the home while raising their children. In 2009, they decided to start their own business, **Grime Busters Cleaning Company**.

Grime Busters uses environmentally-friendly products and offers commercial, construction, and residential cleaning.

Combining transferable skills leads to self employment

“Between the two of us, we’ve worked about 20 years for cleaning companies,” says Violet. She has also been a bartender and general manager of a pub, where she did bookkeeping, staff scheduling, ordering and other duties. Jeannie has computer and public relations skills from telemarketing jobs. Over the years, they have both worked as waitresses, in fish plants, and other labour intensive jobs.

“We’ve talked about starting our own cleaning business for a few years,” says Jeannie. “We knew that we were more than capable of doing the work. As well, we also knew there was a need for more workers in the cleaning business. Violet and I combined our skills and experience and became self employed.”

Health issues fuel ambition

Violet has anemic and gastric conditions. As well, she had a serious a back injury. Jeannie has chronic migraines as a result of a car accident. The sisters have not allowed their disabilities to interfere with their plans to be self employed. Instead, their disabilities have fueled their ambition to be independent.

“Because of our disabilities, we found it difficult to find year-round jobs,” says Violet. “However, we didn’t want to depend on financial assistance. Being self employed allows us to work on our own schedule. We are sisters first, then business partners. We encourage and support each other personally and within the business. We appreciate each other more since going into business together.”

Steps to a new career

Violet and Jeannie contacted **Judy MacLeod**, Employment Specialist with the **PEI Council of People with Disabilities** in Montague. The employment service assists people with physical disabilities to find and retain employment. “Judy was very supportive of us starting our own business,” says Jeannie. “She encouraged us to contact **Karl Johnston**, Self Employment Manager of **Active Communities Inc.** with our business idea.”

Karl assisted Violet and Jeannie with a business plan and offered advice. The sisters were eligible for a program that is now called **Self Employ PEI**, which is administered through **Skills PEI**, a division of the Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning. The program assists individuals by providing financial support, business training, and counselling during the development and implementation of their business plan.

Hiring needs

“We hire people with disabilities because we understand their needs,” says Violet. “Hiring depends on the job contracts. We have a roster of casual staff. As we become busier, we will consider hiring full-time staff.”

“Jeannie and I both have four grown children who help with the business when needed,” says Violet. “Our parents taught us to work hard, enjoy life and laugh. We want to pass on the same values to our children and grandchildren.”

For more information about **Grime Busters Cleaning Company**, contact **Jeannie Weibel** at 361-3399 or e-mail GrimeBusters@hotmail.com

For more information about the **PEI Council of People With Disabilities**, contact the location nearest you. Charlottetown: 892-9149 Montague: 838-5878 Prince County: 436-9259 Visit the website at www.peicod.pe.ca

For more information about **Active Communities Inc.**, contact **Karl Johnston** at 838-7034 or toll free at 1-800-953-4030.



Violet Lanois, left, and Jeannie Weibel started their own mobile cleaning business called Grime Busters Cleaning Company. “We never could have launched our business in such a timely fashion without the support of PEI Council of People With Disabilities and Active Communities Inc.,” says Violet.

Employee acknowledged at small business week event in Summerside

by Patrica Roy

Barbara Arsenault received the **Employee of the Year** award at the 16th Annual Greater Summerside Chamber of Commerce Excellence in Business Awards dinner held during Small Business week in October. Awards in seven categories were presented.

Barbara has worked at the **Loyalist Lakeview Resort** since it opened in 1991. She is now the facility’s **Food and Beverage Manager** and is responsible for the restaurant, lounge and the banquet area of the hotel.



Barb Arsenault was presented with the Employee of the Year Award by award sponsor Wayne Linkletter of Linkletter’s Welding Ltd. Upon receiving the award, a surprised Barb had one comment. “What can I say? I really like my job.”

Training expanded skills

“Barb is the epitome of an outstanding employee,” says her award citation, which was provided by her employer, General Manager **Nick Ribeiro**. “While working as a full-time waitress, Barb put forth both the time and the effort to update her skills and knowledge to the highest level.

“Up to a couple of years ago, Barb did not want to touch or even hear the word computer. Today she can be found e-mailing clients and printing up contracts at a rapid pace. She is well-liked by all employees of the hotel and takes pride and satisfaction in her everyday duties,” Nick says.

Community involvement

Over her years of employment, Barb has become actively involved in the community and the Greater Summerside Chamber of Commerce. “A year ago, she was instrumental in organizing a fundraiser for the Summerside Boys and Girls Club,” says Nick.

Job description for Restaurant & Food Service Manager

Restaurant and food service managers plan, organize, direct, control and evaluate the operations of restaurants, bars, cafeterias and other food and beverage services. They are employed in food and beverage service establishments or they may be self employed.

Employment requirements

Completion of a college or other program related to hospitality or food and beverage management is usually required. As well, several years of experience in the food service sector, including supervisory experience, are required.

Job prospects and wages

www.labourmarketinformation.ca considers the job prospects for this occupation as **good**. The 2009 wages for Restaurant and Food Service Managers are listed as ranging from \$10.35 to \$16.10 per hour.

For more information, visit www.labourmarketinformation.ca

For information about training in this occupation, visit www.hollandcollege.com



For more information about the Greater Summerside Chamber of Commerce, visit www.chamber.summerside.ca