

Employment takes trades person full circle

by Patricia Roy

It was not that long ago that **Jeffrey Gallant** graduated from **Évangéline** school in Abram-Village. He was back this summer, but this time it was as job foreman on a major renovation project.

“It was really cool to see that some of the teachers I had are still here,” says Jeffrey. “And it was great to see my graduating class photo on the wall.”

After graduating Grade 12 in 2003, Jeffrey took a one-year course in electrical construction at **Holland College** in Slemon Park. He is now a licensed electrician and earned his **Red Seal** certification this summer.

“My father is in automotive, and I wanted to take a trade because I like to work with my hands. I could not see myself sitting in an office all day. I decided to become an electrician. I had the choice of specializing in industrial or construction electrical. I chose electrical construction because I like the variety.”



Jeffrey Gallant, a former student of Évangéline school in Abram-Village, was foreman on a major renovation project at the school this summer.

Training led to immediate employment

Jeffrey says he had no problem finding work because employers were contacting the college and asking for students to apply. He had a job at **Hansen Electric Ltd.** in Charlottetown the same day he sent in his resumé. After working for about two years, Jeffrey went to Alberta for 18 months. Once he returned to the province, he was re-hired by his former employer.

Physical demands of the trades

Jeffrey says a person needs to be fit to work in some of the trades because the work can be physically demanding. “There is some heavy lifting, especially in the commercial side of the electrical trade. You often have to move large panels, heavy transformers, and pipes. But you work as part of a team, so there is always someone to give you a hand.”

Advice for students

“If you like working with your hands, I would advise you to consider working in the trades,” says Jeffrey. “As more and more people retire, more skilled workers will be needed. If you are willing to work hard and get the marks and education you need, you can make a very good living in any trade.” To prove his point, Jeffrey says he was able to afford to have a house built last summer, when he was just 23 years old.

Évangéline school expansion

The new facility is a renovation to the old industrial arts area, which had been used for computer training and woodworking in recent years.

“The renovated space will offer trades training for students from grade 7 to 12,” says **Albert Arsenault**, French Language School Board’s Career Education Consultant. “Trades is one of three new specializations in this year’s curriculum. The other two are **Health & Well-Being** and **Arts & Culture**.”

The new trades shop space will introduce carpentry to students this year and welding and automotive next year.

Jeffrey says it would have been great to have had an introduction to trades training when he was in high school. “But future students, including one of my younger siblings, will be able to take advantage of the options this space now offers.”

Award-winning chef influenced by life on the farm

by Stella Shepard

Chef Shirleen Peardon of New Perth was raised on a family farm in Valleyfield. Shirleen’s parents **Roy** and **Shirley** and grandparents, **Seymour** and **Lola Peardon** were a strong influence in her life and later when choosing a career.



Chef Shirleen Peardon of The Merchantman Pub has worked in restaurant kitchens for more than 20 years. “The industry is changing and more females are becoming chefs,” says Shirleen. “Talented chefs must constantly prove themselves. You are only as good as the last meal you served.”

Shirleen grew up tagging along with her grandfather around the farm. She also spent time cooking, baking and pickling in the kitchen with her grandmother. Growing up in this environment, she developed a love for cooking.

“My nanny inspired me at a young age to become a chef,” says Shirleen. “She taught me to not take short cuts cooking or baking. She always told me, ‘if you’re going to do it, do it right!’ I cook from scratch using fresh and local products just the way Nanny did.”

Post Secondary

After working as a line cook for two summers, Shirleen enrolled in the **Culinary Institute of Canada** in 1989. “The line cook jobs prepared me for the realities of being a chef.”

Non-traditional career

In 1991, Shirleen graduated from the Culinary Institute. To get more work experience in the culinary field, she left Canada to work in a kitchen at the Hilton Hotel in Zurich, Switzerland.

“Working in Switzerland was very challenging. First, there was the language barrier. As well, I was considered to be in a non-traditional career. There was only myself and another woman working with nationalities who believed women should not be chefs.

“I was stubborn, had strong work ethics, and refused to quit. I did not allow anyone to tell me that I didn’t belong in the kitchen. Eventually, I earned the respect of the sous chef who managed the kitchen. It was a great experience and I ended up staying an extra seven months after the work placement was over.”

Career advancement

Shirleen returned to Canada from Switzerland with invaluable work experience and easily found employment in her chosen career. Since 2003, she has been the head chef at the **Merchantman Pub** in Charlottetown.

“It’s a massive responsibility managing the kitchen,” she says. “It’s not just about cooking and baking. I’m responsible for ordering, menu planning, and scheduling staff. I love what I do, despite the long days and working weekends and holidays.”

In 2008, Shirleen placed second in the “*Taste Our Island*” award competition. The following year, she won first place for the Merchantman Pub. As well, Shirleen’s recipes were featured in several popular international magazines.

PEI International Shellfish Festival

Shirleen was one of four judges in the International Chowder competitions at the festival. She also encouraged a co-worker to participate. “Nicole started working at The Merchantman as a cook two years ago,” says Shirleen. “She had no prior experience in the kitchen but she had passion for the job. This year, I encouraged Nicole to enter her best chowder in the local chowder competition.

For more information about the Merchantman Pub, visit www.merchantmanpub.com



For more information about a culinary career, visit www.jobfutures.org Click on **Prince Edward Island** and search **chef**.