

# Showing businesses how to save time and money

by Patricia Roy

Self Employment

**L**ike Nobody's Business is a service that shows small business owners how to save time and money, generate more revenue and gain a sense of control over their business.

**Ronda Bellefontaine**, owner, ventured into self employment in 2007. "I always wanted to branch out on my own, and the timing was right," she says. At the beginning she did mostly contract work. By networking at Business Women Association meetings, farm organization events and Chamber of Commerce meetings, Ronda soon had lots of clients. "Word of mouth from clients and industry contacts is the best form of advertising," she says.

## About the business

Ronda describes her service as a bridge between bookkeeping and accounting. "I help my clients to improve computer use and focus on computerized records. I also counsel them on financial management. Having the books in order enables business owners to use the time with their accountants more effectively. I usually go to the clients' location, because it is easier for them and for me."

Ronda is a farm co-owner, and she has had experience as a farm management specialist, a bed and breakfast operator, and has volunteered for not-for-profit organizations. In each of these areas, Ronda saw the need for the services she now offers.

"There is so much technology now. I often thought how great it would be to have someone come in, set up a computer program for me, show me how to use it and I could take it from there." Now with years of experience behind her, Ronda does exactly that for others, along with her other services.

## Challenges and benefits of working from home in rural PEI

She says for those who work from home in particular, there is a tendency to take on too much, because the work is so close at hand. "It was two years before I took a real vacation. I had tried taking time off before, but always ended up working in the home office. One of the obvious benefits of working from home is that you have a little more flexibility. You can work early in the morning or late at night."

## Future plans and hiring needs

Ronda plans to expand her business soon and hire staff to fill the need she has identified in the farming and business community.

"The number one requirement of people I would hire is having the right attitude. They would also need to have an aptitude and an understanding of the needs of small businesses. Another asset would be an ability to problem solve, be familiar with an office environment, and bookkeeping skills. A university education would be a plus, but a business education would not be as important as a good attitude and aptitude for this type of work."

## Advice for entrepreneurs

"My best advice to entrepreneurs is to take it one step at a time," she says. "Start with getting to know your market and getting statistics on the number of potential customers. When I started my business, my goal was to work within a 30 minute drive from home. Knowing how many small businesses were in that range gave me a good idea how many clients I could potentially have."

Another key is pricing. "Be honest with yourself about what you need to charge for your service and/or product," says Ronda. "You will work long, hard hours and if you are not rewarded with a good income, you will burn out. Access money where you can, but be careful what program or process you agree to, because you may change your mind about how you want your business to evolve. And last but not least, do not be afraid to ask for help."

# A slowdown in one sector opens the door for opportunity in another

by Patricia Roy

Self Employment

**L**esa and Shawn Handrahan fished lobster together for 15 years. A slowdown in the fishery prompted the couple to look at business opportunities in or near Tignish. Shawn is still fishing, and Lesa is now the owner of **Cascumpec Gas & Convenience**, in Cascumpec near Alberton.

"After working on a fishing boat for all those years, the time was right for me to do something else," says Lesa. "We were also looking for a business that might provide future summer employment for our four children. When we looked at starting this business, we felt the community needed these services. It is a growing area with many young families, and there are a lot of summer residents in cottages along the Cascumpec River."

Before opening a little over a year ago, the large building was renovated. Lesa initially opened the business with the a gas bar and convenience store. A bakery, laundromat and café soon followed.



**Lesandra Handrahan with some of the products from the bakery at her business, Cascumpec Gas & Convenience.**

## Employment requirements

The business has nine employees, including Lesa. There are three bakers and six sales and/or gas attendants.

When Lesa began looking for employees for the bakery, she did not advertise. "I got to know the customers who came into the convenience store," she says. "I talked with them to see who might have a background of working in a bakery and I looked for someone with a reputation as a great cook."

## Long-term goals

"I would like to eventually expand and improve to provide an even better service for the community. We had a better summer than the previous year. Even though we will soon be back to a smaller crew for the winter months, I will probably hire additional staff in the spring. The business is growing with each summer season because customers are getting used to having these services here again and they are a great support."

## Background and business support

Even though Lesa had attended business college several years ago and had been keeping records for their fishing business, she took advantage of an opportunity to upgrade her knowledge. She took the small business course offered through **Resources West Inc.** in Alberton. "It really helped to refresh my memory on the many facets of operating your own business."

**Resources West Inc.** is a community-based economic development agency. It provides entrepreneurial development and training, community planning and support, project management, business counselling and support and help with research and development.

**David Gamble** is the **Resources West Inc.** Small Business Officer. David acts as a resource for clients applying for the **Self Employ PEI** program, administered through **Skills PEI**, a division of the **Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning**. Lesa was eligible for the Self Employ PEI program. The program assists individuals by providing financial support, business training, and counselling during the development and implementation of their business plan.

## Advice for entrepreneurs

"In any setting, there are only so many people and so much money to go around," says Lesa. "Service is very important no matter what your business is. The key is to be as unique as you can in what you offer."

"Be prepared," says Lesa. "Opportunity rarely knocks, but you can make your own opportunity. Find out all you can about the business you are getting into. Know your market and if everything feels right, go for it."

For more information about **Cascumpec Gas & Convenience**, call 853-3423.

For more information about **Resources West Inc.**, call 853-4555 or visit [www.resourceswest.pe.ca](http://www.resourceswest.pe.ca)

