



YMM PARENTFAMILY MATTERSISSUE 5 - 2022/2023

Small Businesses and Their Communities in Fort McMurray are 'One Big Family'
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Family-operated businesses relay a familiar theme in pop culture; they are small to midsize companies with a power struggle rivalry amongst those involved.

While plenty of mom-and-pop businesses do fit this description, Fort McMurray's family businesses continue to thrive as they work hand-in-hand with each other and their communities.

Mohamed Tarrabin, General Manager at Prestige Jewellers in Fort McMurray, attributes the strength of family business to a family's lifestyle.

"If your family style is healthy your family business approach will be healthy and it'll reflect in your daily transactions. A healthy family produces a healthy family business which creates a healthy loved community like YMM," said Tarrabin.

In the current time where it is crucial to support local, residents of Fort McMurray and small businesses work together to support each other whether it is to shop local, or small businesses giving back to communities.

In a recent poll administered by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, it reports that 86 per cent of consumers in Canada say that shopping at small businesses is important to them with the most supported reason to do so is to help their community, to help small businesses succeed and because of the friendliness of owners and staff.

With a passion to make personal moments even more special, Tarrabin's location does not shy away from helping others.

"By participating in my community's upsides and downsides we have made our clients family members. Your kids are inspired by your actions. If you want them to follow your lead and take care of you when you grow up, take care of the community around you when they are young and they will grow to do the same for you," he said.

Ginger Auger, Owner of Ginger's Bannock House also feels the love of the community as she explains it here as 'one big family.'

"Here, [Fort McMurray] we are part of a community supporting each other. Success in most communities is the support and feeling like family and home. It is important we work with each other and know everybody's passions and respect them and support them," said Auger.

Inspired to bake by her mother, Auger began her business part-time as part of her healing journey almost eight years ago. Due to the demand for her baked goods she has been successfully operating her business full-time since 2017.

"Ginger's Bannock house was there for me when I had nothing. I lost my home, my job, my, my vehicle, I lost everything and I knew that I knew how to cook. I've always had a passion for cooking. So, I started cooking for people and they loved my food."

She credits her family as part of her biggest influence and supporters inwith the business.

"My roots come through my mom and my sons even talk about having their own Bannock House. There is a sense of pride, belonging and a sense of their culture because we integrate that with the food. For us, it goes pretty deep with culture, origin, and a sense of who we are."

Auger's family assists her at festivals and markets to help with merchandising, deliveries and concessions. Auger says this experience teaches her kids how to become their own entrepreneurs.

"I love being a family business. I like my family being a part of this. They have so much pride. The other day I asked my son 'who is the bravest person you know?' He said, 'you, because you have a business and you do everything even if you're scared.' I wanted to cry. I can't believe all the support given here because it is what got me here."

Although work-life balance can be difficult in a family business, Auger says communication and understanding each other's personalities are key.

"To know what role works best for everyone is important. To know where the family is comfortable, where they are happy, that is a big thing and to use their greatest strengths."

Like many, one other small business in town's customers have become extended family.

"Family doesn't always just mean blood relatives to us," said Trish Van Der Haegen, Managing Partner at Paddy McSwiggins.

"One of our staff got really busy and was working by herself so our really good friend stepped up and started helping her out and that's kind of the uniqueness of Paddy's; our customers have become family as well."

Gareth Norris, Owner of Paddy McSwiggins said he always wanted to introduce a family-oriented pub just like the ones his family ran in the United Kingdom. Now, Paddy McSwiggins' location has been part of Fort McMurray for over 20 years.

"All we can offer is an experience and an atmosphere. That's sort of the only thing that identifies any business, especially in the service industry. We all serve burgers, we all serve beer, we all have pop. It just comes down to that experience, and what we can offer," said Norris.

With many small businesses in town, it can be difficult for similar services to compete for the crowd. Paddy McSwiggins' owners explain their business not only serves food, but quality service.

"As a place where we gather as a family ourselves, we try to make it very family oriented. Our staff is very good at making families feel like this is their home. We always have stuff for the kids to do. But our staff go above and beyond. A lot of them will bring in crafts or extra things they have kicking around at home for kids to play with when they're in the pub like colouring books and extra games," said Van Der Haegen.

Like many small family businesses, work-life balance can be difficult for families at home, at the workplace and during family events.

"A lot of our own family gatherings for birthdays and things are at the pub because that's the easiest place for us to gather together. Sometimes even when we're having our own personal family gathering, business steps in and takes us away from those things. It gets very difficult to separate the two," she said.

"It's that balance. That's the tough part. Sometimes you have to remember they are your family and not your employees. And the flip side of that is they have to remember they're family, and not employees," said Norris.

The support between local businesses and the community isare wholeheartedly mutual in Fort McMurray. As businesses like Prestige Jewellers, Paddy McSwiggins and many more donate to local community events and teams, the community does its part to visit urban markets; the ultimate hub for small businesses, so to see what is new or simply to visit the existing fan favourites.

Paddy McSwiggins owners say that even though they have dealt with some tough times, they always try to give back and support the community in whichever way that they can.

"It is just about giving back because we understand without that community, we don't exist. What we are doing is promoting families and that's what Fort McMurray is about," said Norris.

"The support here is amazing, if it wasn't for the support of Fort McMurray and everybody, all the businesses and nonprofits here, I wouldn't be this far," says Auger.