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NEWS



Tiny's Mary Crossley started her web-based gift basket business Bananabaskets.com in 1995, and quickly turned her hobby into an international success

Tiny firm big success

By Nicole Million: Staff

It's hard to miss Mary Crossley when she is out and about in the Midland area in her bright yellow SUV with the large toucan on the back.

The Tiny Township entrepreneur's unique mode of transportation is fitting, as her business is also unique.

Crossley started her web-based gift basket business Bananabaskets.com in 1995, and quickly turned her hobby into an international success, shipping baskets from coast to coast and across Europe.

With about 100 baskets to choose from, the choices are unlimited, she noted, as she provides baskets for nearly every occasion.

Crossley was known among her friends and family for making her own preserves, and said it was after years of giving away gift baskets as presents for the holidays that she realized she could turn her hobby into a full-time business.

"It was costing a lot of money to make up these gift baskets and give them away. Every time I gave them away, people would say I should sell these," she said. "I didn't think anyone was going to buy any of these, (but) one day I decided I would try it and got some business cards done up... I started right from scratch."

With no previous business background, Crossley signed up for a government-sponsored

business course, which helped support her financially until the business started to take off.

"I was living in Midland at the time and I started by doing only preserve baskets locally," she said, adding her original business plan included selling only locally as she wanted to grow her own produce and make her own products.

After a while, however, she said customers started asking for additional items like crackers or coffee. Crossley said there are some challenges with being a web-based business.

"I have to do more networking (and) more advertising... I think I have to do a little bit more of everything because I don't have the walk-by traffic," she said.

"You can reach me easily by the Internet. In the yellow pages, in the phone books and I'm a member of the chamber... I just belong to as many groups as I can."

There are some benefits to being only on the web. "I can get orders from all over the world," she said, adding it also allows customers to do most of the paperwork.

Crossley said she is still amazed at how well her business has been received since she started it nearly 15 years ago. "In (about) my fourth year... I started getting orders from around Canada and all over the world... I never thought that would happen," she said.

Securing the paper trail

By Bruce Hain: Staff

It's one business that actually doesn't want people to know where it is.

"We purposely made ourselves invisible to the public," said Daryl Woytowicz, GM of Archive Document Storage.

The newest member of Craig Busch's Group of Companies, the firm offers offsite storage for corporate records and documents. The growing epidemic of identity and intellectual property theft has resulted in new regulations concerning document management, retention and disposal.

"From a security reason, our clients are pleased," Woytowicz says.

Located in a modern, yet nondescript industrial mall in south Barrie, the enterprise opened its doors in January 2008.

Entry is gained through controlled access doors and there is a 24-hour surveillance camera. Busch recognized there was a solid business case to be made for starting up the company. "For the past five years, we've been selling containers to the documents industry. We've gone to a number of conferences and learned all the best techniques of the industry.

"It amazed me that this type of service wasn't available in Simcoe County or York Region," Woytowicz says. "There's more paper being generated than ever before. Our clients keep quite a paper trail."

There are numerous reasons for a business to invest in keeping its sensitive information private and secure, Woytowicz says. "Number one is cost. You don't need to use your office space to store data. Your critical data is stored away from your business location in a facility that has been designed to be safer, and more affordable, than storing information in your building.

"Number two, if you're using a self-storage unit, on a cold day, the file you need is always in the last box you open. Liability is another issue," he said.

"If you've subcontracted to a company to look after your records, you've fulfilled your obligations. Another aspect is for disaster recovery, in the event such as a flood or fire. It's a pretty cheap way to have things offsite. It also avoids any in-house security issues.

Busch sums up his company's mission statement succinctly: "We save our clients' money, reduce their labour and eliminate liability."

Security units withstood -40 degree weather, says Wilde

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Several arrests have been made as a result of the unit."

The product went over well in Alberta and Wilde came to London, Ontario last year to help start a marketing program.

"It's been very well-received out west and we're just introducing the unit to south western and south central Ontario. We thought it work well here," Wilde says.

For Reeves, whose territory extends from Lake Huron to the east shore of Lake Simcoe, north of Richmond Hill to Parry Sound, the unit has considerable potential, he believes.

"We're finding a bit of a different story in Ontario than in Calgary," Reeves says. "We're

seeing people are cutting back on security guards.

"We analyze our client's needs. There could be a mix of guards and the mobile unit. It can be very cost-effective."

"There's no capital outlay," Wilde says. "It is a month-to-month lease. One monthly cost includes placement, monitoring, training and servicing."

"The units we have out now cost approximately \$100 a day, and that includes a 24-hour mobile response," Reeves adds.

"To put that in perspective, you're looking at about one-half the cost of having a guard."

The units can withstand the rigors of the Canadian climate, too.

"We had some in central Alberta," Wilde says. "The worst I remember was three weeks at -40 C. None of the units failed."

The client list to date includes construction companies, school boards, office buildings, condominiums, owners of vacant buildings and car dealerships.

Reeves has one placed with a utility company. "In addition to 24-hour monitoring, the unit is recording, too," he says.

"They even work in extreme low light conditions. We can download data and send it to the police, or to our client."

More information about the MSU can be obtained by calling Reeves at 705-728-7777, or e-mail john.reeves@securitas.ca