

Rocky Lake Birchworks



Owner: Johanna, Alan,
Andy and Peter McLauchlan

Product: Birch Syrup

Established: 2010

Market: National

Number of Employees: 2-6

Website:

www.rockylakebirch.com



“...Move forward with your ideas... there are a lot of people out there who want to see you succeed.”

The Business

Rocky Lake Birchworks started as a retirement project to keep Alan and Johanna McLauchlan busy; however, their ‘little project’ has now grown into a commercial business. Johanna, Alan and their two sons, Andy and Peter, began experimenting with birch syrup in their garage in 2004 with 15 trees. Now they have 1500 trees and have been on the market since 2010. Rocky Lake Birchworks is primarily a wholesale business that produces birch syrup, however they are also branching out into other boreal forest products, such as Chaga mushrooms. They currently have two types of birch syrup; pure and breakfast blend they sell across Canada.

Alan and Johanna chose to develop their business in rural because it is home and it was their location that inspired them to produce birch syrup. The McLauchlan’s were able to build their processing plant on Rocky Lake, about 50 km north of The Pas, Manitoba. One of the biggest challenges associated with their remote location is transporting supplies to the facility. However, the McLauchlan’s believe the benefit of being in nature and the ability to process and package the syrup on site outweighs those challenges.

The Motive and Skills

The motivation for this business started out as the couple wanting to stay busy while also getting back to nature and enjoying their time in the bush. However, their motivation has grown along with their business and they are now also driven by their desire to see their business grow and meeting their consumer’s needs. Alan said the most important skills for success were flexibility and curiosity

and “not being afraid of hard work. Once we knew we had a product it was kind of, go big or go home.” Johanna also added problem-solving, multi-tasking, marketing and determination as important skills needed for success.

Challenges and Support

One of the biggest challenges for Johanna and Alan was they knew they had a good product but it was a matter of convincing others it was a good product. Another challenge highlighted by Alan was start-up financing, “if it weren’t for programs like *Growing Forward* and others, Rocky Lake Birchworks wouldn’t be where it is today.” Rocky Lake Birchworks has found support from many places including the Food Development Centre, a graphic designer, the Manitoba Rural Food Initiative, their retailers and local media. “We had an unknown product in Manitoba and now all of a sudden here comes these people from The Pas trying to market it and if it wasn’t for our retailers and consumers we wouldn’t be in this business.”

A Piece of Advice from Johanna and Alan

First, “trust yourself;” and second, “never say it’s not possible because anything is possible, and don’t pay attention to the negative people. Move forward with your ideas... there are a lot of people out there who want to see you succeed.”



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