

# Women Driving Downtown

Sackville, New Brunswick

By **CATHY FYNN**

If you had been driving downtown in the 1850's, you would have traveled the "Great Road" connecting Sackville to Nova Scotia, across the Tantramar River. Your vehicle would have been a coach, or a wagon, and if you were a woman, you likely would have been in the passenger's seat.

Today, women along the "Great Road", now known as Bridge Street, are most decidedly in the driver's seat. On the block between Main and Lorne Streets, 60% of the businesses are owned or managed by women.

This figure reflects a regional, and national trend. In Atlantic Canada, women launched three times as many new businesses as men during the past decade. According to Statistics Canada, between 1981 and 2001, the number of female entrepreneurs in Canada increased 208% compared to a 38% increase in men.

Women in business are clearly here to stay. But the challenges loom large. Sackville is a town of 5,361 wedged between two urban centers with retail giants such as Wal-Mart and Chapters.

The women on the Bridge Street Block, like other enterprising Sackville women, have confronted these challenges in innovative and interesting ways.

Ellen Pickle, owner of Tidewater Books, is a prime example of a Sackville savvy businesswoman who outsmarted the competition. Ellen opened her shop in 1995. A year later, Chapters moved into Dieppe.

"We survived by finding our niche — offering personalized service, specialized buying, promoting local writers and artists," says Ellen. "In a small town it's possible to know your market well. We've found excellent staff and we're very responsive to our customer's needs."

Her bookstore's website focuses on local book-related news and events, where national chains fear to tread. Tidewaterbooks.ca also features RSS (off-site) book reviews and custom-order service.

Doreen Beaton and Irene Chapman, owners of Reen's Fashions have weathered 25 years of economic ups and downs, including growing competition from nearby malls.

"Sometimes we wonder how we've managed to keep going," says Irene. "It hasn't been easy. But we've stuck it out, through

good years and bad. Becoming a Sears catalog agency in 1986 certainly helped." The service saves Sackville residents from going to Amherst or Moncton.

"We're happy to offer this service to the community," says Irene. "Community is what keeps us here."

Bridge Street Café owner, Cathy Keeling, credits the community for inspiring her business innovations. The popular coffee shop hosts Celtic music nights, poetry readings, the Saturday morning Farmers' Market, and offers free wireless internet.

"When the community comes to us with such neat ideas, how can we say no?" Cathy asks.

Cathy has not only created a niche for her enterprise, but also a bustling, energetic gathering spot for coffee connoisseurs — and music lovers — of all ages.

Next door, Sara Phelan of Wanderlust Outdoor Outfitters, the Block's most recent addition, has found her niche.

"I always said that if I won a million dollars I would open my own store," says Sara. "I didn't win a million, but I'm where I want to be and I'm the only retailer of high-quality, specialized outdoor clothing in southeastern New Brunswick. That's worth a lot."

Sara has lived in small towns across the country. She says none of them are like Sackville. "The University adds an important element that other small towns don't have, but it's more than that. There is history and culture, there are also friendly, smiling faces, parks and green space. The town is so active, lively and outdoorsy. It's a great fit for my business."

Life-long resident and owner of Fog Forest Gallery, Janet Crawford, echoes Sara's sentiments.

"We have a unique situation here. The business dynamic works well. We have relat-



Left to right starting top row: Ellen Pickle, Sara Phelan, Irene Chapman, Doreen Beaton, Janet Crawford, Heather Gilbert-Patterson, Cathy Keeling, Susan Pauley.

ed enterprises that are not competitive: The Owens Art Gallery and Fog Forest Gallery, Windsor Theatre and Live Bait Theatre, Tidewater Books and the Mt. A. bookstore. This nucleus of complementary activity enriches the offering, much more than one business could."

Sackville's rich cultural history has bred an appreciation for the Arts, she adds, which makes it possible for a private gallery, and the artists it supports, to survive in a small town.

"When I told people I was going to open an art gallery in Sackville, most were trying to be helpful when they said I didn't have a snowball's chance," laughs Janet. "But that was 21 years ago, so I guess I'm not doing too badly."

Creativity is key to Janet's success — she recreates her gallery for each exhibition.

Across the street at The Crofter Gifts and Flowers, Heather Gilbert-Patterson is busy recreating her shop.

"If I have any advice to give, it's to be open to new ideas. Don't be afraid to reinvent your store. Keep it fresh. Keep it interesting."

Heather and her husband acquired The Crofter in 1999. Her first child, Quinn, was five months old. In 2001 her second child, Cohen, was born. A year later she expanded the business by opening a flower shop.

"It's been tough trying to balance home and work, but that's not unique to owning a business. Every woman has to deal with that," she says.

What keeps Heather, and all the women on the Block going, is their commitment to living in Sackville.

"I have a genuine love for Sackville and it's people," Heather says. "It's a great place for young families. We could start a business somewhere else, but this is where I want to be."

And that is the common thread running through this diverse group of entrepreneurs.

They come from small towns, and from big cities. Some have lived here all their lives. Some have lived in places from British Columbia to Newfoundland. Some are young mothers. Some are empty-nesters. Some share the financial support of their family. Some are the major breadwinner.

None of them want to live anywhere but Sackville.

All of them are willing to create their own opportunity, find the special niche that will enable them to live in Sackville.

Their determination to succeed in business in the place they love has rejuvenated the core of Sackville's downtown. Bridge Street is a hub of activity, energized and exciting. And while the Street still ends abruptly at the banks of the Tantramar River, it is no longer a street to nowhere. It has become, once again, the "Great Road" that connects Sackville businesses to their community, and these Sackville women to their hearts.

## ♀ Business Block Bridge Street Between Main and Lorne

Business Name	Owner/Manager
A Touch of Class	Susan Pauley
Bridge Street Café	Cathy Keeling
Crofter Gifts & Flowers	Heather Gilbert-Patterson
F.R.S. (Supplies) Ltd.	Diane Morrison
Fog Forest Gallery	Janet Crawford
Heads Up Hair Care & Barbering	Hedy Dobson, Kathy Richard
Reen's Fashions Ltd.	Doreen Beaton, Irene Chapman
Salvation Army Thrift Store	Susan Cole
Strike 2 GOODTIMES Bar	Lorna Tower
Subway Subs and Salads	Donna Colburne
Tidewater Books	Ellen Pickle
Wanderlust Outdoor Outfitters	Sara Phelan

*In all of downtown Sackville, including the Bridge Street Block, 36 businesses are owned by women or have women as partners.*

# Getting Started

www.Sackville.com Toll-Free 1-800-249-2020 (within Canada & New England States)

If you're interested in starting your own business, these organizations can help.

Organization	Phone #	Web Address
ACOA Women in Business Initiative	1-800-567-4030	acoa.ca
Canada Business Service Centre	1-800-668-1010	cbsc.org
Enterprise South East	533-8711	enterprisesoutheast.ca
Greater Sackville Chamber of Commerce	364-8911	sackvillechamber.ca

## How I Got Started



Hedy Dobson & Kathy Richard  
Heads Up Hair Care & Barbering

Hedy: I enjoy the independence of running my own business — that's why I work for myself. I started by working out of my house so I could be with my children. When my youngest daughter went to play school last year, I moved into the Bridge Street location. If I had known how much fun it was going to be, I might have moved sooner. It gets pretty lively in here with the three partners (Hedy, Kathy, and Butch Estabrooks). Sometimes the customers come in just for the entertainment!

That's the beauty of a small town. You get to know your customers well. Sackville is a great place to bring up a family, and run a business. It's a quiet, safe community with good schools and friendly people.



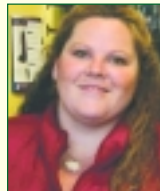
Cathy Keeling,  
Bridge Street  
Café

I wanted to start a coffee shop when we moved to Sackville 11 years ago. I ended up opening a daycare centre instead. After nine years of running

the daycare, I was ready for a change. I learned that the former owners of the coffee shop wanted to sell the business. So we went for it!

The first year I worked 16 hours a day. You expect that with a new business. Now that I have an assistant manager, he's taken on some of the responsibility. And I'm able to take more time off. Balance is coming.

Sackville is an amazing spot. For the size of the town, there's so much going on. We've lived in places on the east coast and west coast of Canada. There isn't another town like this one. That's why we decided to live here, to raise our family here, and to open a business here.



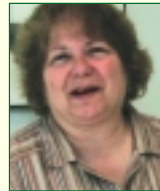
Sara Phelan,  
Wanderlust  
Outdoor  
Outfitters

I've worked in boutique stores like this one in Banff, Victoria, and other places in western Canada. I knew from those experiences that I wanted to open my own store. When my partner, Darren, found work in Pugwash, I found my opportunity.

I noticed people in the area wearing the kind of clothing I wanted to sell, but I couldn't find anyone selling it in southeast New Brunswick. So I decided that this was the time, and Sackville was definitely the place, to open Wanderlust!

People here are interested in my product, and in good quality. I can't say enough about the support I've had from

the community, especially from the women on this street. They're very strong, very supportive.



Janet  
Crawford,  
Fog Forest  
Gallery

It started with an opportunity, rather than a plan. A friend opened a restaurant in town and asked me to create a gallery in her space. My daughter Kate was two years old, Leighan was 3 months old and I wanted to be home with them. But I also needed the stimulation of outside work. It seemed like a perfect fit, so I said yes. And I just kept going!

Showing in restaurants allowed me to learn without a lot of pressure. I didn't have the financial obligations of high overhead, bank loans or payroll. The business expanded as the demand grew and revenue increased.

I'm not sure I could have done this anywhere but Sackville. The town is so supportive. We have a cultural history over 100 years old. Most people in the community have been exposed to art, and that makes for an appreciative audience. Mount Allison brings in talented students and professors, alumni and parents who are interested in art and in staying connected with Sackville. We have the kind of advantages in Sackville that other communities would love to have.



Lorna Tower,  
Strike 2  
GOODTIMES  
Bar

I've been managing bars for almost 30 years, and owning my own business has always been in the back of my mind. I just needed the opportunity. When

Strikers became available, I decided to go for it. I opened on May 5, 2005.

I find Sackville people enjoy the small bar, cozy atmosphere. I certainly do — it gives me a chance to spend time with my customers and get to know them. It's difficult to give that kind of personal service in a bigger place.

The community has been incredibly supportive. The business community has been phenomenal. Other business owners, even other bar owners, stop in and offer help — everything from offering advice to picking up an order!

Community support allows me to get involved in charity work, such as Toys for Tots. I held a New Stuff Yard Sale and the local businesses donated many of the items; they're incredibly generous.



Doreen Beaton &  
Irene Chapman,  
Reen's Fashions Ltd.

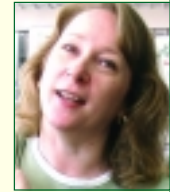
We're both from Sackville, and we both worked in retail. This clothing store came up for sale in the fall of 1980. We wanted to see the business stay in town, and we had always wanted to work for ourselves, so we bought the business that November.

Everyone told us not go into a partnership — that it would never work. We decided from the beginning that it would work, and that to make it work we would have to get along. And we have. For 25 years.

It's satisfying to offer personal service to our customers and friends in the community. We love Sackville, it's a great place to live.

Why would we go anywhere else?

Ellen Pickle,  
Tidewater Books  
Retail is in my blood. My parents owned a Home Hardware store for many years. After graduating from Mount Allison,



I stayed in Sackville, managing a local restaurant for several years. I decided that since I was working so hard, I wanted to put that effort into my own business. There wasn't an independent bookseller in the area, so I did the research and made the commitment to go into business for myself.

The diversity in the cultural offering here in Sackville is unique; it's also what allows a business like mine to survive. The Town and the University attract people who are interested in books, in the arts. The community is supportive; it's a great place to live and work.

Heather Gilbert-  
Patterson,  
Crofter Gifts &  
Flowers



Going into business just seemed like a natural thing to do. My mom and dad have had a business for years, so does my brother. When the opportunity arose, my husband, Craig, and I acquired the Crofter, and things took off quickly.

It's a perfect fit for me. I like all the aspects. I love the creating the in-store displays and floral designs. I love getting to know my customers. My staff is like family. I even enjoy the bookkeeping!

Everyone on Bridge Street has been so friendly. I've had business conversations with all the women here and they've been very helpful. We've felt welcome on this street.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT LYON