



*Read an interview with **Bart Spiewak**, owner of **Green Canoe Outfitters** store. Bart provides some interesting insight on his business decision to come to Cobourg, how business is going and why you might consider downtown Cobourg if you are opening a new business!*

1. Why did you choose downtown Cobourg for your business?

Cobourg has always been home and while we spent some time away, my wife and I always thought we'd end up back here to raise our family. We bought our home on University Ave before our first child was born and opened up Green Canoe Outfitters in 2013. It's great to be close to the lake and the downtown. We love being a part of the community here. Geographically, Cobourg is perfect for our business. We are close to an amazing waterfront and situated centrally between Toronto, Kingston, and Peterborough. Demographically, Cobourg has a great mix of people –coming by car, rail and boat. We meet adventurous seniors who hike, paddle and travel to young people who are just discovering the outdoors – and everyone in between. Customers from outside of Northumberland County have proved more important to our business than anticipated. We think that Cobourg is on the verge of big things to come, so the future looks bright!

2. Since opening, how's your business doing?

Our first five years have been great! There's nothing better than loving your work. We are actively involved in our community in so many ways. We've forged some great friendships and partnerships with other local businesses. Retail has gone through some significant changes that have taken many of the biggest players out of the picture, but we've been able to survive through the toughest years. We've done this through differentiating ourselves and establishing some special 'niches' for our store. I'm ecstatic about how it's going so far. I think we have a pretty cool store and it's only going to get better.

3. What has been your greatest surprise in opening your business in downtown Cobourg?

It's definitely been the amount of out of town business we're getting. While we thought we'd be catering to locals, we have a lot of customers from Oshawa and Whitby, where there is significant box store competition. When a customer drives past 'big box' stores to our store and buys our products, that's a compliment. The same goes for towns like Brighton and Belleville to the east of us - we are proud to bring that business to town. That revenue is a win for the whole community, as a large percentage of that will have a multiplier effect. In my wildest dreams, I would never have thought that people were going to call me from Ottawa or Toronto about a paddle board or kayak, and then drive all the way here to buy it from Green Canoe Outfitters. That's pretty sweet when you think about it.

4. What is your favourite or memorable customer story?

I'm always tickled whenever a customer comes back in to tell me about how great their trip went. It doesn't matter whether we outfitted them for an expedition, or just sold them a rain jacket that improved their experience. Sometimes people come back to thank us for advice we gave them. It always makes me feel good to know we helped make someone's day. Being a part of helping someone get into a new activity is my absolute favourite part of being in this business.

5. What do you consider to be your greatest achievement since opening your business?

Undoubtedly it was bringing the Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour to Cobourg for the first time this year. While that isn't our biggest business win, for me it was a huge personal achievement. Getting the Festival here was the culmination of years of work and it exceeded expectations. We were just hoping to break even and not lose any money, as the costs to bring it in are pretty steep. It was a little nerve wracking for us to tell you the truth. Yet, we sold almost every seat and the feedback couldn't have been better. Once established, partners wanted to join in for the next Festival. And as an added bonus, we made some new customers. It made us really happy to watch those films in our hometown and was a fun night! If you missed the festival last time, be sure to check it out next January.

6. What's the secret to your success?

For me, it's being passionate about what I do. In my basement, you'll find the same items that are in our store. Most items are hand-picked because we don't just sell our products, we use them. The product in our store is tried and true. It's a sign of the times that there's a lot of marketing hype on new products, yet I find that many products don't live up to it. We are always out there paddling new boards, trying new packs, and testing new fabrics. Our goal is to save our customers time and hassle. This creates the opportunity to build a trusting relationship with our customers. The added bonus is that many of them are now friends as well. We are trying to improve our customer's lives by empowering them to go on their adventures in the best possible way. We go all out and that's the recipe for a successful specialty store.

7. What do you want your customers to remember when they leave your store?

It doesn't matter to me whether a customer came in and made a major purchase, a small one, or just came in to look around. My hope is they enjoyed their experience, and felt our passion and enthusiasm for what we do. Hopefully that enthusiasm was passed on to them so that they can get out on their own adventures.

8. What one piece of advice would you offer someone who is considering opening a business in downtown Cobourg?

If you want to support your community as a business owner, shop in your neighbour's stores and eat in their restaurants. Promote them and help them out whenever you can. Form partnerships with other entrepreneurs. Hire local contractors. Support local charities, even when you can't really afford it. Volunteer on local committees. Make it a point to know where to send people if they come in looking for a product or service that another local business would carry. And you know what? Soon enough it catches on and other people will start doing the same thing for you - that's real community. ♦