



June 17, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Town of Smiths Falls Business Recruitment + Expansion Media Series: Smiths Shoes

Following participation in the Lanark County Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) Survey in 2018, the Town of Smiths Falls is launching a series of profiles to highlight the businesses who took part in the survey. This series will celebrate the successes of local businesses doing amazing things and contributing to the growth and prosperity of the region; they are prime examples of BR+E done right.

Smiths Shoes: Better service, better quality the secret to 75 years of success

Step inside the door of Smiths Shoes and you're stepping into the world of yesteryear, to a time when customer service was king, and quality above all else was the standard. At Smiths Shoes, the secret to their 75 years of longevity isn't complicated, it's about promoting the fundamentals of business acumen: a friendly smile, excellent customer service and quality products.

Operating in downtown Smiths Falls for more than seven decades, Smiths Shoes is more than just a local footwear resource, drawing customers from Deep River to Prescott, Kingston, Perth, Carleton Place, Ottawa, and beyond.

Smiths Shoes is a stellar example of business retention at its best, and a business that has proved its ability to withstand the test of time. Its story is a tale of the leaders in the Smiths Falls' business community, a story of perseverance in times of economic downturn, and prosperity in times of market upswings, enduring to this day a community icon.

Smiths Shoe's story begins in 1944 when Bill Smith purchased Barr's Shoe Store and renamed it "Smith's Shoes," a name which still stands for quality service and fit to this day. In 1968, Bill Smith's daughter and her husband, Joan and Ray Blair, purchased the store from Smith, and carried the family torch with great success for 26 years. In 1994,

Ralph Heron purchased the store, which was then sold to current owner, Cyril Wells in 2006.

Today, after 38 years in the industry, including 22 years at Smiths Shoes in downtown Smiths Falls, it's fair to say Wells knows the foot and shoe industry from the feet up.

Wells calls service like the kind his customers receive at Smiths Shoes "a lost art," something you don't find very often at other retailers. It's the store's customer loyalty and personalized service sets Smiths Shoes apart, and Wells understands that one can't exist without the other.

"Customers are everything, I understand that without that door swinging, we don't need to be here," Wells said. "If it takes 15 minutes or two hours to look after a customer, that's how long it takes."

According to Wells, some of the younger generations may not know what it's like to receive the kind of service you can expect at Smiths Shoes, but customers in their 40s or 50s remember when you walked in a store and were served to your satisfaction, where you didn't need to find your own shoes or guess your shoe size, and someone looked after you throughout the process, from start to finish.

"It's pretty hard to find that level of service these days, but it's because of this level of customer service that we're a destination store in the valley," Wells said.

When Wells took over Smiths Shoes in 2006, he was taking on more than a business, he was taking on a customer relationship reminiscent of what you would find in a doctor's office. At Smiths Shoes, each customer's information is as individualized as a footprint and recorded and filed to provide the very best in customer service.

In fact, for customers who have bought shoes at Smiths Shoes, chances are good there is an index card with their name on it, filed away along with the names of hundreds and thousands of other customers, creating a database that tells a story of the business' success as much as its balance sheet.

"When I got here 22 years ago, the filing system was in a shoe box," Wells said, laughingly acknowledging the irony of using a shoe box in a shoe store. "We need a filing system, that's how we keep in touch with our customers."

Today, Smiths Shoes employs four full-time staff and one part-time staff, and carries footwear for women between sizes 4 and 12, and for men between sizes 7 and 14 or 15. Custom fitted off-the-shelf orthotics is another stock item for the shoe store, and Wells explained they receive referrals from medial professionals which is another sign of the quality products they offer their customers.

Passionate about his work and the footwear industry, Wells appears to have landed in the right place at Smiths Shoes.

“My dad told me a long time ago, I don’t care what you do, but make sure whatever you do, you love doing it,” Wells said, “It’s fun here, it’s always been fun for me. I love what I do, and every day is exciting and challenging.”

Businesses like Smiths Shoes tell a good news story of Smiths Falls’ commercial history, one that Jennifer Miller, Smiths Falls Manager of Economic Development & Tourism, can appreciate.

“When we hear about businesses like Smiths Shoes that have been part of the Smiths Falls community for so long, it’s an inspiration to us and to other businesses in the community,” Miller said, “Business retention is one of the hardest things for a small community to attain, and we’re pleased to see so many of our business icons achieve these exciting milestones.”

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