

Independent Shorts

Registration is now open at www.stmaryscurling.ca for the upcoming season at the St. Marys Curling Club. As well, open houses will be held on September 28th and October 4th from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Lind Sportsplex.

The St. Marys DCVI graduating class of 1975-76 is having a reunion at Stone Willow Inn this Saturday, September 9th from 4 p.m. to midnight. For more information, please contact Shirley (Harkes) Mitchell at samitch@sympatico.ca.

The St. Marys Lincolns begin their 2017-18 season this Saturday and Sunday during the GOJHL Showcase Weekend held at the Wayne Gretzky Sports Centre. The Lincolns play Welland at 4:45 p.m. on Saturday and then take on Guelph at 10:30 a.m. Sunday. The first home game at the PRC for St. Marys will be Friday, September 15th when they host London.

Many people have contacted us at the Independent about purchasing Dan Rankin's book, "Fire From the Flowers: A Literary Fantasy". The book was originally slated to be available for us to purchase from Amazon on August 31st however there is some kind of delay with the publisher so we have not yet been able to order books to have available at the Independent. We are continuing to check Amazon on a daily basis and will make an announcement once we have them in stock.

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Business of the Week

MacPherson Arts & Crafts

By Stewart Grant

Our Business of the Week is MacPherson Arts & Crafts, a local company that began as a crafts supply store but has now evolved into a worldwide leader in the growing Reborn Doll industry. Yes, this seemingly quiet craft store at the northwest corner of Queen & Water is doing remarkable business across the world through its thriving online store, found at www.macphersoncrafts.com.

The long and winding path to where MacPherson Crafts is today began in 1972, when Dick and Joan MacPherson bought M&M Variety from Bruce Murray in 1972. It wasn't long before Joan, a painter herself, developed an idea to open a shop with finished art. This shop, known as "The Common Place", was located on Wellington Street where the Journal-Argus currently resides. People frequenting The Common Place soon started asking Joan if different craft supplies could be made available. Eventually, the craft supplies ended up at M&M, and that side of the business grew so much over time that they decided to move M&M Variety across the street (to its present location) and focus on crafts in the original building. In fact, during the late 1980s or early 1990s, MacPherson Crafts was the largest independent craft store in Canada, with 10,000 square feet of retail space including both floors of the current location plus the area currently occupied by Little Falls Artisan Crafters Market and Jennie's

Restaurant.

Dick and Joan's daughter Brenda Neufeld began working full-time running the business in 1999 after a successful career with Regional Country News. With the internet boom underway, Brenda decided to build a website to market MacPherson's popular decorative arts online, downsize the retail space, push additional arts classes hosted at the store, and increase exposure by attending more trades shows.

The booming tole and decorative painting industry came to an abrupt halt in 2004. Not only that, but MacPherson's crafts supplies business faced intense competition due to the arrival of Michael's Stores in Canada and the increasing number of dollar stores which also now sold craft supplies. MacPherson Arts & Crafts was at a crossroads, needing to adjust and evolve in order to survive.

For years, the business had transformed itself by listening to customer demands and being perceptive, and the answer to where they should go next was discovered in this same fashion. Brenda and longtime employee Shelley Doupe began to notice that a notoriously slow-selling brand of paint was suddenly ringing up high levels of online sales and couldn't understand why. So they began reaching out to these online customers and asked them what they were doing with this particular color of skin-colored paint. This was when they first heard the term "reborn dolls", which was the description first coined



for dolls who had been stripped of their artificial-looking paint and "reborn" through the skill of artists applying new paint and shading to the doll's exterior to make them appear more lifelike and genuine.

The industry has changed over time, and today the term "reborn dolls" refers to dolls specifically created by sculptors to be transformed and painted by talented artists. The doll heads, arms and legs are made from vinyl and the body is made from fabric with various stuffing for just the right weight and feel.

MacPherson Crafts began selling doll parts in 2005, and grew and grew as they listened to growing market demands. In 2017, well over 99% of their business is mail order, generated through www.macphersoncrafts.com. While artists in the United States represent the largest customer base, the company has shipped to all corners of the world.

To meet the current demand, MacPherson Crafts now has 10 employees and as of July 2017 moved the warehouse and shipping department across Water Street into the old L.A. Ball building. Most people in town would have

no idea that this location is actually the busiest FedEx pickup spot in all of St. Marys, with an average of 45 boxes leaving per day.

While one might think that the reborn doll industry is a fad, Brenda and Shelley noted that the wide variety of uses for these lifelike dolls gives them confidence that the business is here to stay. Reborn dolls are sold to artists, to collectors, to nursing homes with Alzheimer's patients, to health units to assist with expectant moms, and dolls from MacPherson Crafts have even been used to fill in for real babies in popular TV shows and movies. "Another trend that we are starting to see is that 8-to-12-year-old girls are becoming interested in the dolls", said Brenda. "As a result, we are putting more of the finished dolls in the windows to encourage walk-in traffic, and will soon have kids classes on how to make reborn dolls."

Although we've focused mainly on MacPherson's interesting evolution into reborn dolls in this article, the business is also true to its name by continuing to have an inventory of yarn, wool, art supplies, canvases, brushes, and drawing supplies on-hand for local customers.