

BUSINESS OF THE WEEK

The Hitching Post

By Stewart Grant

Our featured business this week is The Hitching Post, located at 480 Queen Street West in St. Marys. The business was founded in 1975, with its roots extending even further back, to the days of the Great Star Flour Mill Feed Store which was located behind the opera house.

When the Great Star Flour Mill Feed Store closed on January 29, 1975, Maurice Robson established the Hitching Post the following week at its present location on Queen Street West. Since then, the locally-owned, family-run business has been operated by the Robson family (Maurice, then son Jim), followed by Steve and Stephanie Hutton for the past 17 years, and presently by new owners Mark and Shannon Ross, who purchased The Hitching Post on January 1, 2019.

"We are excited and grateful to be taking on business ownership at The Hitching Post," said Mark and Shannon in their January announcement. "Both being from the St. Marys area, we are looking forward to serving the community that we are so proud to be a part of. The past decade has provided us with great experiences within the agriculture industry that have prepared us for the shift to becoming business owners of The Hitching Post, a local family business. We are passionate about our rural roots and farming backgrounds, and along with our young children McKenna, Sheamus and Maclean, we are excited for this new venture. We look

forward to servicing both urban and rural customers alike, with our main focus being on dairy nutrition consulting services."

When visiting with Mark and Shannon this week for the story, we reflected on the variety of products that are offered at the Hitching Post that service not only the needs of local farmers, but also those who live right in St. Marys. The Hitching Post offers pool and hot tub chemicals, pet food, bird seed, trees, landscaping supplies, softener salt, farm hardware, and clothing. In addition, the company is a Quality Seeds Dealer supplying a full line of grass and alfalfa seed. They are also a dealer for CRP Plastics, the Stratford-based manufacturer of high-quality, recycled plastic outdoor furniture. Mark and Shannon are also looking at new ideas for the store, while at the same time maintaining traditional items such as Arva Flour that date back to the Great Star Mill.

For Mark, the opportunity to get back out working directly with farmers was of huge appeal. He is a certified Dairy Nutrition Advisor (DNA) who worked at The Hitching Post in that role roughly ten years ago.

"I've always enjoyed being on farm, and that's the core of this business," said Mark. "The majority of our business comes from bulk feed sales. Coming back to that is my focus, and our farm dairy nutrition consulting service is an area that we want to continue to grow. St. Marys is surrounded by such a great dairy



population and we want to support those local producers," added Mark.

"We do all of our own nutrition work ourselves through the support of Shur-Gain. Everything is manufactured locally at their plant while we have a full line of trucks (bulk/bag) to deliver the manufactured feed on farm. We're very fortunate to be situated only minutes away from these services.

The Hitching Post is one of Shur-Gains largest non-manufacturing dealers in Ontario.

Shannon and Mark are truly excited about the opportunity to be working together on this new venture that fits within the rural roots that they are so proud of.

"We've been overwhelmed with the support and the excitement from a

lot of people in the community," said Shannon. "I grew up selling sweet corn with mom at the local Farmers' Market (O'Shea's Farm). St. Marys has always felt like home for both of us, it's kind of been a dream of ours to be doing this here."

"The staff too have been amazing," added Mark. "We've kept all the staff on that Steve and Stephanie had. Plus, we're very grateful that the Huttons agreed to stay on for the year to help with the transition."

The Hitching Post is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 8:00 a.m. to noon on Saturday. For more information, please give them a call at 519-284-2360 or visit their website at www.thehitchingpost.ca or follow them on Twitter at handle @hitchingpost19.



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