



This is the way to the past using a New-Age business

All career-planning consultants tell their clients, “Find a way to make your hobby work for you.” That’s not so easy if you are a wooden toymaker, boredom sets in after making the umpteenth set of wooden wheels, however for some of the more enterprising

hobbyists it does work out.

Sharon Murphy who runs “Timelines” has found a way not only to make her hobby pay but one she makes a pretty good living at and also employs up to four permanent ‘associates’, and more when she has large projects on the go. “Timelines” is a Cobourg based genealogy business with more than seven years of a successful full-time business history. But she started this as a hobby and followed it to its conclusion - making it pay. How does she do this? Sharon told Business Times, “Because I run the business as a business, I follow my Business Plans and revise them constantly, adjusting for current trends and conditions. For instance when I first started I thought I would be swamped with business - wrong approach in my plan. I adjusted my advertising strategy and business started to come in.”



Sharon Murphy

The business evolved from Sharon’s early days, she volunteered at the Bruce/Grey County Historical Society answering and filling out information requests. She specialised so much in Land records that she later wrote a book, “Researching Canadian Land Records” and followed by another one “Researching Canadian Vital Statistic Records”. But because requests for genealogical information were coming in she branched out, “The requests piqued my interest.” As a person working in the Insurance industry as a trainer, she methodically set about building the business. Working from her home and she learned all about databases, lineages, document repositories and all the resources needed to engage in comprehensive research for her clients.

As part of her professional approach to her hobby she became involved in the National Institute for Genealogical Studies. This organisation, she held various positions in it and is currently the Canadian Director, was established to “professionalize” the business. Setting standards of conduct,

ethics and education this organisation is the world-wide recognised Institute in the field of Genealogy . Affiliated with the University of Toronto, it offers University approved courses of study, for instance to gain a certificate in Genealogical Studies students must complete 29 Compulsory credits and 11 Elective credits. A time-consuming achievement.

In 1998 she moved to Port hope, as a result of a work-related transfer for her husband, and started to work out of her home and becoming involved in Archival work for the Ganaraska Region Archives as well as taking on private clients. In 2003 Sharon decided to set a precedent for the profession - she would leave her home office and set up an office downtown. "We needed to run the business as a business and professionalise and most of all - hire help. Most clients prefer to come to an office rather than to a home." Sharon explained. Sharon also proudly points out that she is the only Professional Genealogist that she know of, that works from an office not the home.

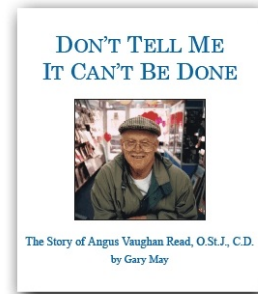
So what does she do in her office? Everything genealogical, which include, family trees, research on lost members of the family, places they might have lived and just about any fact that can be traced. "Timelines" has access to all of the known valuable databases that provide online information so there's not much that doesn't get pass the online search. However following leads has taken Sharon to the largest collection of family information, the Latter Day Saints family centre in Salt Lake City as well the archives in the UK. Asked why the interest in genealogy these days she says that most people just want to find their place in the big picture of life. "Not all family members do but there will always be one person in the usual three generations who is the family historian, it doesn't appeal to everyone, but it does appeal to a certain type of person, and they come to us for help or to setup a project. Genealogy is addictive and some people want to do it themselves but don't know how."



A collection of a soldiers war

As the business of helping people grew Sharon found that she had to establish another division of the business to keep organised as she followed her business plan. "Your Lasting Legacy" is the company that takes care of organising all of the family heirlooms and papers and documents that clients have in their possessions and want organised into a book or a physical collection or a framebox that contains such collections. Of course "Your Lasting legacy" is more than just collecting medals and filing old land documents and birth certificates in well organised containers. It also

publishes family histories and stories in full-sized and classical “coffee-table” books. “Clients want to leave a family history for their children as well as a legacy gift to all interested. One such local book was the recently announced published book by Major Angus Read, “Don’t tell me it can’t be done”. “We work with the clients from interview to publishing.” Sharon explains.



Angus Read's book

However this experience with publishing has led Sharon, ever the entrepreneur into another variation on the same theme. She sees potential in the “print on demand” industry. This technology has revolutionised the printing industry and made it cheaper to print small runs of books. As a result she will soon be signing a contract with Amazon for a wider distribution of her small stable of books.

With all of her business drawing on modern technology, Sharon admits she was helped by the Internet. “The Internet transformed the business, as well as using online databases, non computer-literate people started to come in I realising the wealth of information online.” Sharon says when discussing where her business comes from. As part of the ‘new economy’ sixty percent of our business comes from online, they see our website and take it from there. And the other forty percent are walk-ins. These folks come in because of the sign outside and some are from out of Town.



Sign outside the office

Talking about the packages she offers it is apparent that the services are not cheap. “I run the business as a business but it costs money to run.” citing the use of a research staff as well the cost of subscriptions to all of the databases available. The lowest priced package is a five consultation package which could lead to other package depending how deep you want to go into your past - there are four packages in all. All the packages have a conclusion and estimate of just how much the scope of future work costs. This is where the experience of “Timelines” comes in, “We know where the holes are in your present research and also we will know if records can be found.” Sharon says defending her fee schedule.”Most people have no idea what the research costs and how much they need, after meeting with us they will!”

Asked about her work she describes a newly finished project as the longest. It resulted in a published book and took two and a half years, “But of course that time-line included the time we were waiting for information to come back from search requests. This is the most comprehensive



Loyalist Ties the latest book

project to date, not only does the book publish the family tree but is defines the known history in a narrative supported by the known history of the day, This an example of all of our personnel working together, the researcher, the writer, the layout people and the publisher.” Sharon says as she hold up the book - “Loyalist Ties”. The cost of this project included the authentication of the family as having Empire Loyalist links - not an easy title to obtain.

As to the most interesting, Sharon remembers a client walking in with only the name of his grandfather, who was a “homechild” from Scotland. Working on the “instalment plan” - where the client was only paying as he received information, the client and Sharon were rewarded with a family tree that went back to the 1700s. “He would say OK we know this much, now how about we go back one more?” Sharon said. “And it was all done online using the available databases.”

In discussing her future for the business Sharon Murphy is not resting. Estimating a ten per cent growth in each of the coming years she is using yet another business to educate other genealogists. This business is a training business - “General Business Advisor”. “Although we have a successful core business pitched to people who can afford to pay for it, we still have to train others to do the work. Certified Genealogists can teach others to do the work.” Sharon Murphy explains at the conclusion of the interview.

To contact Sharon Murphy at Timelines call 905-377-0880 or checkout the website at www.timelinesresearch.com

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