

Client: Backyard Birder

Project: Advertorial for local newspaper

Objective: Promote the business to the community

Monique Paajanen and Danielle Audet were stay-at-home moms who loved birds and were looking for a business opportunity.

“We wanted to do something fun,” Monique said. “We enjoyed feeding the birds, we thought, why not?”

They combined their love and knowledge of local birds with their desire to be entrepreneurs and chose the name Backyard Birder.

“A backyard birder doesn’t profess to know everything about birds, he just enjoys having the birds come to his yard,” Paajanen said. “We are offering our customers as many things as we can to attract birds.”

That was 10 years ago.

They started with a small store, 600 square feet, and as the business grew they moved to larger spaces, finally settling at 2041 Long Lake Road.

As the name implies, the business began with selling bird feeders, birdhouses and high-quality birdseed. Two years into the business, Monique and Danielle started making mixtures of birdseed for the birds most commonly found in Greater Sudbury.

“We developed birdseed blends for what our customers were asking for,” Audet said. “They wanted to feed the birds they saw in their backyards.”

Drawing on their experience and doing some research, they have formulated mixes for chickadees, sparrows and blue jays.

Personal service is the hallmark of this family business. Danielle recalls a time early on in the business, when they didn’t have a product that a customer was looking for.

“Someone wanted a specific birdfeeder and we didn’t have it,” Audet said. “My dad said, ‘Hey, I can do that.’”

Jean Paul Audet’s long-time hobby is woodworking and now he builds birdfeeders for the Backyard Birder. When he’s finished, he brings the birdfeeders into the store, where Monique and Danielle paint them.

Backyard Birder is truly a family business. Monique and Danielle are the only two employees. When they can’t be there, Monique’s husband, Tapio, or their father, Jean Paul, step in. Of course, the women’s four children have all helped out in the store during busy times.

Over the years, the store has expanded to include gifts.

"The giftware started out as anything that had to do with birds – anything with birds on it," Paajanen said. "Then it grew from there – gardening pieces and things to do with the yard."

Monique and Danielle read gardening and birding magazines to keep on top of the latest trends and what's new. If they see something they like, they bring it in.

"So far, we've been on, because every time we bring something in, people buy it," Paajanen said.

The Backyard Birder carries focal points for the garden, such as statuary, sundials and fountains, along with decorative elements, such as, stars and lanterns.

"Before we started the business, we used to buy the Garden Shed magazine," Audet said. "We used to see these products that had to be ordered from the States, which is not appealing to a lot of people. Now we read those magazines and many of our products are featured in them."

The sisters are continually looking for the next great product for the backyard and describe their business as a work in progress.

"Every year we think about which direction we can go to complement the business and expand it," Audet said.

This summer's hottest product was patio fountains, for people who want a pond without all of the upkeep.

"We are expanding that line, because it went over so well," Audet said.

Monique and Danielle credit their success to the strong Sudbury economy, but they have used that strength to their advantage by using their business sense to slowly grow their business -- learning as they go and taking each day as it comes.

Over the past decade, they have created a group of loyal customers, which is growing every day.

"We still have a lot of new people come in, almost daily, and compliment us on the store," Paajanen said. "The biggest thrill is to have them say, 'This is a great store.'"

The Backyard Birder will soon be launching its website where customers will be able to order products online.

Ten years in business is a great milestone.

"It's a big accomplishment to be in business 10 years later," Audet said.

"We're proud of what we have accomplished so far," Paajanen said. "And as long as it's still fun, we will keep doing it."

"The bird store concept was beginning throughout the States and southern Ontario," Audet said.

The sisters find working together allows for more flexibility as far as children are concerned.

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The nature gift shop and the bird store have different peak times, so the two work well together.

“There’s no guarantee in retail,” “Years behind you help.

As the business grow, so has the women’s knowledge of birds.

Danielle’s youngest child was in junior kindergarten the first year the store was open. He spent the mornings in the store with the mom and aunt, and went to school in the afternoons.

“The bird store concept is really a specialty and we had to expand

This store is a work in progress. We are always changing things and bringing in new lines.”

They do everything ... they don’t have any part-time help. Monique’s husband and their father steps in as needed. The women’s four children have all helped out at the store.