

A multi-generation business experiencing change, The Sarnia Lambton Business Development Corporation can provide both options and assistance.

By: SLBDC STAFF



Thompson Hardwoods of Thedford Limited has been operated by the Thompson family since 1967. With a rich history steeped in family tradition, they have managed to literally, rise from the ashes while other traditional sawmills are closing down. In 2001, Thompson Hardwood changed hands, but it didn't go far. Doug Thompson and his wife Sheila took the official steps to purchase the business and this second generation has been at the reigns ever since. The story of Thompson Hardwoods is ever changing as they adapt to keep up with changing demands and global markets. Product diversity has made it possible for them to thrive in the changing marketplace. Lumber for flooring is still their most important product, but locals also depend on byproducts like mulch, sawdust and firewood. Additionally, they offer custom cuts to locals for the production of wagons and trailers. They have taken the usual negatives (such as the impact of the Emerald Ash Borer) and turned them into profit – making the abundance of Ash wood work in their favour.

In 2004, the legacy built by Doug's parents and purchased only 3 years prior faced the one challenge that no sawmill ever wants to encounter: a fire. The original Thompson

Hardwoods was destroyed and a new plan had to be made, quickly. The new Thompson Hardwoods of Thedford Ltd. rose from its own ashes in 2007. The Thompson's were glad to find they had options where the traditional banks and lenders were hesitant to help. They accessed the services of the Sarnia-Lambton Business Development Corporation – a process they found “could not have been easier”, quickly adding that they “would deal with SLBDC over a bank anyday!” With financing in place and a new plan, they set their course, and they succeeded.

Thompson Hardwood now employs a team of 16 hardworking staff, including the third generation of Thompsons. When asked what her biggest motivator is, Sheila doesn't hesitate. “It's the kids”. There is no question for this family, sawmill culture is in the blood. Thompson's original founder was known to be a man who believed in the power of a handshake, and although contracts have become a big part of every business, the sentiment is still evident in the fabric of what he has built for future generations.

Sheila Thompson offers some candid advice for aspiring entrepreneurs “make sure you are willing to commit the time, and be ready for the responsibility of running a business”. She cites the importance of having services available to startups to support them through the rough spots. The Thompsons understand the power of reputation and have carried the tradition of Thompson Hardwood beautifully into the future. They still know the value of a handshake and “always following through with what you say will do for your customers”.

Thompson Hardwoods of Thedford Limited is located at 9017 Widder Road in Thedford, Ontario. They can be reached by phone at (519) 296-4760.

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