

Searching for safety footwear leads to self-employment

by Stella Shepard

Rouben and **Vicky Edgar** opened **Atlantic Safety Wear Inc.** in Lower Montague in 2017. It's full-time, year-round work for this husband and wife business team.

Atlantic Safety Wear Inc. is North America's first and exclusive distributor of Grisport safety footwear. The brand specializes in Italian handcrafted boots and shoes for trekking, safety and leisure. As well, Atlantic Safety Wear sells a clothing line of Snickers Work Wear products.

The couple's journey to self-employment

Rouben and Vicky left Northern Ireland nine years ago to farm on PEI. Rouben wore Grisport safety footwear while he was employed in the farming and the construction trade in Ireland.

"When we immigrated to PEI, we discovered the boots were not available for sale in Canada," says Rouben. "I recognized a huge opportunity to import this amazing safety footwear line and deliver it into the North American market."

Starting a business

The business plan was put into action about five years ago when they contacted the Italian-based Grisport company seeking distribution rights for the North American market.

It took about three years before the company was successful in achieving the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) certifications for 39 styles from the Grisport safety line.

As well, the couple researched the safety and demand for Grisport footwear in Canada, the competition, what brands of safety footwear were available, and what people were looking for when purchasing safety footwear.

"We were very surprised by the resources available on PEI for starting a business," says Vicky.

"We took advantage of the services and programs through Innovation PEI and SkillsPEI, which have been very helpful in starting the company."

Atlantic Safety Wear was one of the first of eight Island companies to be awarded support through the **Innovation PEI Ignition Fund** in 2014/2015. They were awarded \$25,000, which helped with start-up costs.

Business advice from Rouben and Vicky

- Do the research to know if the product and/or services will be viable.
- Take advantage of business programs and resources that could assist with start-up costs.
- Try not to get discouraged. Stay focussed on why you are starting a business.

Hiring needs

Rouben and Vicky are in the process of applying to SkillsPEI Graduate Membership Program (GMP) in order to hire a full-time office administrator.

For more information about **Atlantic Safety Wear Inc.**, contact **Vicky Edgar** at 902-846-9277 or 902-213-5445 or email info@atlanticsafetywear.com

For more information about **The Ignition Fund**, visit www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/innovation-pe/ignition-fund

For more information about resources to start and maintain small business, visit www.employmentjourney.com/resources-to-start-maintain-a-small-business

Visit www.atlanticsafetywear.com or search **Facebook**.

For more about **SkillsPEI**, visit www.skillspei.com

For the full interview, visit www.employmentjourney.com and search **Atlantic Safety Wear**.



Rouben and Vicky Edgar, Atlantic Safety Wear Inc.

The GMP helps unemployed recent post-secondary graduates develop new skills and gain work experience in their field of study through on-the-job training. The funding in whole or in part is through the Canada/PEI labour market agreements.

"We also plan to hire a part-time bookkeeper to work a day or two a week," says Vicky.

"As we grow the business, we will be hiring a full-time salesperson with experience in export sales and a full-time warehouse manager," says Rouben. "When hiring, we look for people who are reliable and able to multi-task. As we bring on more lines and more distribution, we will be requiring more hires."

Island Coastal Services Ltd. hiring season begins in April

by Stella Shepard



Submitted photo.

The company offers road and highway construction, municipal and residential sewer, water and electrical installation, building site work, golf course construction and management, full service design and build landscaping, and highway and private snow removal.

"At peak season, we have 250 to 300 people," says **Kent Poole**, Operations Manager. "Some positions are filled on an ongoing basis, but our biggest time for hiring is mid-April to May."

"Employees range in age from university students to senior-aged staff from all areas of PEI. A number of employees are employed year-round in construction and snow removal, and many of those positions are permanent seasonal."

"Right now, Heavy Equipment Mechanics, Welders, and skilled Equipment Operators are the hardest positions to staff."

"We encourage all potential employees to have as many certifications as possible when applying for work at Island Coastal Services Ltd., but that is not the only determining factor," says Kent. "We are more than willing to hire and give an opportunity to individuals with a positive attitude who are willing to work hard and learn as they go."

Best way to get your foot in the door

"Submit a resumé by email, regular mail, or through our Facebook page or website," says Kent.

"List your previous work experiences, your skill sets, and the type of job you are applying for. A personalized resumé is a better introduction to the company than a generic resumé."

"Once a resumé is submitted, follow up with a phone call. You may not get an interview right away, but following up will show us that you are interested in joining the Island Coastal Team."

"Even if there are no current vacancies, we constantly review applications looking for people who are a good fit for our company. If we find the right person, we will make sure a position is there for them."

Preparing for the interview

"Research the company before the interview, check our website and know what we do, and what products and services we offer," says Kent.

"Based on the position applied for, some ability will have to be demonstrated. If you say you can run an excavator, you more than likely will have to show us you can run an excavator before you are hired."

"Our big thing during the interview is to determine the personal suitability of the candidate. The ability to work as a team player and get along with coworkers to achieve a common goal is every bit as important to us as technical skills."

"Just be yourself during the interview process. Let us know the skills you have that would make you a valuable member of the team."

The interview usually involves Kent and one or two staff from the area applied for. Prior to the job offer, references are usually required.

"Mentorship is a big part of our corporate culture," says Kent. "Our long-standing employees provide assistance and guidance to new employees to ensure that they are able to carry out their jobs as required."

Advancement opportunities

Kent started with the company after completing a program at Holland College. He started as a Payroll and Accounts Receivable Clerk, and worked his way up to Operations Manager.

"We are always looking at ways to reward employees who prove themselves as reliable, valuable, and conscientious members of our team. Some of our employees who started as summer students cutting grass at our golf courses are now foremen on highway construction crews. The opportunities are endless. The only limiting factor is how much effort an employee wants to put into growing within the company."

For more information about **Island Coastal Services Ltd.**, contact **Kent Poole**, Operations Manager, at 902-892-1062

Visit www.islandcoastal.ca or search **Facebook**.

To read the full interview, visit www.employmentjourney.com and search **Island Coastal Services**.

