

Vegan café serves up success

by Heidi Riley

Located in on University Avenue in Charlottetown, **My Plum, My Duck** offers eat-in service, take-out, delivery, and grab-and-go lunches. Dishes are prepared from scratch, with local, organic ingredients.

The café, owned and operated by Chef **Sarah Forrester Wendt**, caters to vegans, vegetarians, and diners with allergies and other special dietary needs. There is a special prep area in the kitchen for chefs to safely prepare dishes for celiacs and other allergy sufferers. Whole grains, locally-grown seasonal vegetables, and legumes are key ingredients, and there is also a locally-sourced fish-based option.

The unusual name of the restaurant comes from a pet name Sara's father calls her mother. Sarah's interest in nutrition and cooking started when her family adopted a macrobiotic diet as a way for her father to fight a cancer diagnosis.

"I come from a big family, and of all the chores we had to do, cooking was my favourite," says Sarah. "I've been cooking since I was 11 years old."

When she was home with her three young children, she held after-school cooking programs, and also ran a catering company called Macro Mom. Before opening her own restaurant, she was a full-time chef at Inn at St. Peters and then at Kettle Black.

Program support

When Sarah decided to start her own restaurant, she was able to take advantage of the **Self Employ PEI** program through SkillsPEI, which supplies business guidance and EI funding for a negotiated period of time.

"The program was extremely helpful," says Sarah. "I learned all about paperwork, finances, fund raising, paying bills and writing pay cheques. There is so much involved in running a restaurant. I was already a chef, but now I'm also the boss and owner, waitress, dishwasher, and errand boy. If I am not here, I'm thinking about being here. I take it home with me every day, but I love this restaurant."

Vegan/vegetarian options take off

When it opened two years ago, My Plum My Duck was the first vegetarian/vegan restaurant in Charlottetown. Since then, two more vegan cafés have appeared in Charlottetown. Sarah has noticed that other competing restaurants have also taken note. "Since I opened, almost all the restaurants in town have begun to offer at least one vegetarian menu item."

Education

Sarah's culinary education did not follow the typical route. She attended the Kushi Institute in Becket, Massachusetts, where she studied macrobiotic theory, cooking, and shiatsu massage. She also studied cooking in Italy and Mexico. She has judged black box culinary competitions, taught classes at the Farm Centre, hosted interns in her restaurant, and mentored students.

Other ventures

Sarah sells her home-made pickled vegetables at the Farmers Market and through the store. Her veggie burgers, seitan "steak" and wingless wings are sold at the **Riverview Market** in Charlottetown and at **Farmed Market** in Summerside. Egg-free dairy-free mayonnaise is available, and she also offers catering and special orders.

"We are very sensitive to allergies. If someone on a soy-free, dairy-free, egg-free, wheat-free diet and wants a birthday cake, we can do that." She also offers a program where customers can get ten 16-ounce portions of gluten-free vegan soups a month.

A room off the restaurant has been re-purposed to offer Island-made yarn, specialty coffees, and local art.



Sarah Forrester Wendt, Owner of My Plum My Duck Restaurant in Charlottetown.

Hiring needs

There is a staff of five, including a server, catering service, and two to three in the kitchen. "We would like to hire one full-time person for the kitchen and one for front of house for the summer.

"When hiring, previous experience is less important than a good attitude and a willingness to learn. I can teach the skills and knowledge you need to work here."

To apply, visit the restaurant in person and bring your resumé.

For more information, visit www.myplummyduck.com or www.facebook.com/MyPlumMyDuck

For more about SkillsPEI programs, visit www.skillspei.ca



The Self Employ PEI program is funded in whole or in part by the Canada-PEI labour market agreements.

Property service business gears up for busy season

by Heidi Riley

"The decision to start my own business has turned out to be one of the best decisions I could have made," says **Chris Geldert**, owner of **Sunseeker Property Service**. "My only regret is not starting a business sooner. Every day is a learning experience. I have a great sense of accomplishment, and I love the freedom of making my own decisions."

In 2015, the business idea started when Chris decided to earn extra money shovelling snow for people around his neighbourhood. That spring, he printed business cards and delivered them to his customers, which generated a few lawn care contracts.

Now his business is taking off. Chris offers landscaping services such as grass cutting, lawn and flowerbed maintenance, hedge trimming, and snow removal. He also manages and maintains rental properties and offers a property checking service for vacant cottages and summer homes throughout the winter. He is based in Charlottetown, and has clients in Stratford, Cornwall, and as far east as St. Peters.

Hiring needs

Chris is looking to hire two employees to work 40 to 50 hours a week from May to the end of October. He may hire a student as well.

"The grass cutting position is ideal for someone who enjoys working outdoors in all kinds of weather and has some mechanical aptitude."

Responsibilities include organizing daily work routes, operating company vehicles and equipment, general routine equipment maintenance, and customer support. The ideal candidate should have a valid class 5 driver's licence, be comfortable hauling a trailer, and have experience operating commercial lawn mowing equipment.

Chris also plans to hire a Landscape Labourer. Responsibilities include flowerbed and lawn maintenance, spreading seed, fertilizer, and lime, raking leaves, and other landscaping duties as required. Experience is preferred but training will be provided to the right individual.

Deciding on self-employment

In 2006, he took the Environmental Technology program at Holland College, and then moved to Alberta to work as an environmental consultant. Years later when he returned to PEI, he worked on the production line of a manufacturing company, but wanted to start his own business.

"A family member who has an accounting background was my mentor. He was a great help with the financial side of my business plan, and continues to be a great help whenever I have a business-related question."

Program support when starting up

In January 2016, Chris was accepted into the SkillsPEI **Self Employ PEI** program, which allows participants to draw Employment Insurance for a negotiated period of time while starting their business.



Chris Geldert, Owner of Sunseeker Property Service. "Before you start a business, make sure it is the right choice for you," says Chris. "You need to be adaptable to change and willing to acquire a lot of new skills. You will also be putting in long hours, but the payoff is worth it."

"That first year, I invested my profits back into the company, which greatly helped the business progress. I now have a couple of trucks and mowers, along with all the necessary equipment and tools required to fully operate a landscaping business."

Jobs are posted on kijiji and www.indeed.ca and the company website. To apply, email your resumé to **Chris Geldert** at chris@sunseekerpropertyservice.com

For more information about **Sunseeker Property Service**, visit www.sunseekerpropertyservice.com or www.facebook.com/sunseekerpropertyservice

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