

Crafty Corner Tea Room Serves Up Heart-shaped Love in Downtown Woodstock

Anyone who has moved to a new city knows it can be a stressful and worrisome time – and if you’re moving there for the opportunity to start your first-ever business, it can seem especially daunting. For Marnie Cuthbert, one of her biggest concerns was finding employees who would complement the family atmosphere she had envisioned for her downtown tea room.

Marnie had left a 15-year career in hospital administration to do something completely different. She knew it would not be easy, but she was “all in” on chasing her dream. Although she also knew she would need amazing staff for the [Crafty Corner Tea Room](#) to be the charming, family-run establishment she visualized, she wasn’t quite sure where to start the recruitment process. In fact, she needed help in finding answers to many questions.

So, Marnie attended a local [Woodstock Chamber of Commerce](#) event to help promote herself and her budding business. It was at this event that she just happened to mention to someone that she needed to hire two part-time people, and she was quickly ushered over to someone who could help her do just that.

Marnie had been introduced to Michael Szala from an organization called [Job Links](#). They started discussing what she was looking for, and her ideas about the team room. And, it didn’t take long for Michael to say he knew two people off the top of his head who would complement her new business perfectly.

Being very new to Woodstock, Marnie wasn’t even sure what Job Links was exactly. But, she soon realized that it was a free employment service run through [Woodstock and District Developmental Services](#) that specializes in providing support to people with disabilities to secure employment.

Now Marnie employs one person she discovered through Job Links, as well as another employee with a disability.

The tea room also provides volunteer work experience for several more people, including: one person with a visual impairment, one with a physical disability, a senior, a university student, and a few high school students looking for culinary experience before applying for jobs.

While she says she was fully aware of the possibility that hiring people with disabilities would require some accommodations costs, Marnie says, “It turns out that an apron with Velcro on it, some larger printed instructions on the wall and a chair were all that was

required for my employees, and it didn't cost me a cent. Wow. They were simple changes. So simple!"

The resulting benefits have been better than imagined. Not only did she find hard-working, dedicated staff and volunteers who are willing to go the distance and learn whatever is required of them to make the business successful, but she also helped establish something bigger. She created a tight-knit family unit who support and lift each other up no matter what.

While volunteer Daniel and staff member Denise really enjoy meeting and interacting with customers and making them feel welcome, Denise says it's really her coworkers who make the place special, "We all look out for each other and give encouragement when needed. When we're busy or having a rough day."

Head chef Kelsey says she has made wonderful friends working for Crafty Corner. "Marilyn is hilarious, outgoing and a special human being," she says. "[They are all] incredibly special people."

Marilyn is a senior volunteer and she also points to how much fun the camaraderie is between co-workers, "Kelsey has become such a good friend. She makes me heart-shaped sandwiches! Everyone works hard, but we appreciate each other's contributions."

Marnie is the first to echo everyone's words, "My team are hard-working and so valuable to me. They're fantastic, reliable and fun! We have a great time doing so much for our customers. We go all out!"

Marnie never would have guessed how easy it would be to find the right mix of people to make her dream of owning a small, beloved new tea room in the heart of a small city a reality. "I'd like everyone to know that there are so many people out there who are hardworking, and just want one employer to give them a chance to prove themselves, she says. "It's really rewarding for me to see so much happiness and excitement from a person who just wants an opportunity to prove themselves. All our staff and volunteers are such wonderful people and have become lifelong friends. We are like a small family."

At Crafty Corner Team Room, a small family is serving up heart-shaped love and appreciation for each other's unique skills, personalities and dedication – and everyone on the team is seeing the shared dream of an opportunity turn into something much, much more.

MYTHS & FACTS

There are over 1.2 million employer businesses in Canada, and almost 98 per cent of them are small. And these small businesses employ about 5.7 million people – almost half the private sector labor force. Yet, surveys have shown that over half the small businesses in Canada have never hired someone who has a disability.

Tapping into the disability talent pool is a way for businesses to find staff they need when there's a labor shortage, because a lot of small businesses are short staffed. In fact, a 2023 survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that Canadian small businesses missed out on \$38 billion in revenue because they were understaffed and had to turn down contracts.

Moreover, it's actually a common myth that accommodations are costly. Studies have shown that 56 per cent of employers have said accommodations cost them almost nothing.