

## The Chocolate Rabbit has a sweet Canada Day



By Mike Riley

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It was an even sweeter Canada Day weekend in downtown Bancroft, with the opening of the second location of The Chocolate Rabbit at 16 Bridge Street W. on July 1. Owners Elaine and Scot Webster talk about the new location of their family's chocolate confections and gift shop and how its opening weekend went.

Elaine and Scot Webster say that the Canada Day weekend opening for The Chocolate Rabbit went really well, and Elaine said it was better than they were anticipating.

'We had no idea how busy Bancroft is, what kind of response we'd get from the local community as well as visitors, but it was really good. Summer's pretty good up here I'm seeing,' she says.

The Webster family took over The Chocolate Rabbit in Lakefield from Lois MacEachern after she retired in Aug. 2021 after 16 years. They saw the potential in the Lakefield location for it to grow and their whole family was behind the decision to take on the business. Elaine said they had no idea how busy it would be, but they do now.

'Lois told us when we took over, you need a good year behind you, all the various events and seasons to really know and feel comfortable. And she was right. We had to get through that, especially those busy Christmas and Easter seasons,' she says.

With Easter, Elaine says it was a 10-day window of being busy.

'And I was like, oh my gosh Lois, you are not kidding. I couldn't imagine selling that much chocolate in a single day. And at the end of that 10 days, I was ready to die, so we went away for a week,' she says.

All that hard work and perseverance paid off though, as they were recently voted the Best Chocolate Store in the Peterborough area according to a 2022 poll conducted by Peterborough This Week.

The Websters say that looking for a new fudge supplier for their Lakefield location was what led them up to Bancroft.

'The place we were getting our fudge, the couple was retiring. So, I thought I better be proactive and find a new supplier. Tanya,

who works at my accounting firm, mentioned the Fudge Factory and Emporium

[the former business location that The Chocolate Rabbit now occupies]

and brought in samples, which were great. So, I gave them a call but they too were about to retire. So, I asked them to call me when they did and we'd buy their fudge kettles, she says.

The Websters said that when they saw the building was for sale too, as a family they decided to buy that as well. They needed more space for production than the smaller space they had in Lakefield and the new backroom kitchen area in the Bancroft building really fit the bill.

The Websters say that the most popular items they sell at The Chocolate Rabbit are their truffles and their famous mudbugs, two confections that they say Lois came up with that made The Chocolate Rabbit renowned across the area and beyond. Elaine says they don't put any fillers in the chocolate.

So that alone makes them fresher and better, creamier, and just better all around. They're creamy and just so full of flavour, she says.

Elaine says that mudbugs are something Lois came up with, and they're a piece of caramel and an almond dipped in chocolate and then salted, and they come in packages of ten.

They are so addictive and so good. We can't keep them in stock. It's just that much of a demand for it, she says.

The Websters are also on a learning curve for fudge making, as they get people coming in looking for it.

What we're finding now is that the fudge brings them in but the chocolate sales are better. We're still selling a lot of fudge so I wasn't sure if it would be primarily fudge and a little bit of chocolate but what we're stocking in this store is similar to what we're stocking in Lakefield. We're seeing just as much interest in everything else as we are the fudge, she says.

In addition to the chocolate and the fudge, they also stock specially blended teas, Indigenous themed gift wares, Artisan mugs, maple syrup, gnomes made by Lakefield artist Charlene Larocque, coffee beans sourced from local suppliers and Jellycat Stuffies plush stuffed animals.

We try to source locally as much as we can. The Jellycat brand is out of London England, through California and then Toronto. They are a brand of stuffies that are safe for infants (for most of their products) due to the way they are made. This is unlike other brands that are recommended for children ages 3 years and up due to choking hazards, she says.

The Websters already ran two businesses in Lakefield; Perfect Balance Accounting and Grumpa's Woodworking respectively. In addition to Elaine and Scot, the whole Webster family is helping realize The Chocolate Rabbit's success at both locations. Nicole, who works with her mom at Perfect Balance Accounting, is pitching in as a tea enthusiast by suggesting tea assortments, doing packaging and in-store sales, while her husband Kyle, who is the executive chef at Viamede Resort, is involved with the truffles and chocolate making. Dylan, who owns Lakefield's Computer Garage, is their tech guru. Kristine, who owns Kristine Webster Productions, handles the social media/marketing/photography/videography for The Chocolate Rabbit and Grumpa's Woodworking. The youngest kids, Danika and Eisen, are busy with quality control; taste testing all the chocolate confections that will go out the door.

The Websters invite everyone to come in to their new Bancroft location and say hello. Elaine says they've had a really warm welcome from the business community.

We've met a few and we'd like to meet the rest, but we've been so busy. But we're here, we're open for business and we would love

to meet everybody,? she says. ?Come in and see what we have and take a look at the chocolate being made.?