

When she's not minding her Aroma Borealis Herb Shop, Bev Gray can be found hunting and gathering herbs.



are traditionally popular in this part of the country, so the availability of meticulous stitchers is probably higher than normal," says Annette. "Good stitchers are like jewels, and maybe one person out of 20 who has the interest in being trained will have the required stitch to sew our gloves."

Annette plans to augment the fledgling business by tapping into another industry that's promising to revitalize Newfoundland: tourism. "We'd like to add a tearoom or a B&B to help draw more people to the neighbourhood," she says. "From our property, you have a wonderful view of the icebergs and the minke and killer whales in the bay. It's heaven here, especially in the summertime."

Aroma Borealis Herb Shop

Whitehorse, Yukon

When Bev Gray left Ontario in 1989 to work as a newspaper reporter in Yellowknife, she quickly fell in love – first with the North, and then with typesetter Mike Bailie.

Today the 37-year-old lives at Rat Lake in an eight-sided geodesic dome with Mike and their two daughters and owns the Aroma Borealis Herb Shop in nearby Whitehorse (population: 19,000).

Perhaps it's not surprising that there are more small businesses per capita in the North than in any other region of Canada. "People feel blessed to live here, but it definitely helps to make your own opportunities," laughs Bev. Her storefront herbal business, which produces balms, creams and teas from wild-harvested local ingredients, evolved organically. "I always had an interest in the herbal lifestyle; my great-great-grandfather was a herbalist who sold a popular balm in the United States," she says. "I was always making salves and giving them away to friends and family, and then people started wanting to order more."

Bev tested the demand for her homemade products by selling small runs at local craft fairs. In 1998 she opened her Main Street shop, which now employs three full-time staffers; she buys locally harvested rose petals, balsam poplar buds, fireweed, yarrow and dandelion roots (to name just a few ingredients) that go into her aromatic teas, tinctures and creams.

Although the local population has dropped by 10 per cent over the past three years, Bev's business is up by 40 per cent: her annual sales now top \$375,000. She attributes her steady growth to a strong Web presence and solid customer support, both wholesale and retail. There is a dearth of quality skin products in the North, she says, and her rich Arctic Woman creams are a perfect antidote to the drying effects of the climate. "It sometimes seems that all good stuff comes to the North last, so it feels really good to serve the North, to give something to northerners first," she says.

Still, Bev is looking to grow beyond the local market: "The Internet opened up a whole new customer base for us. We now have customers buying our products online from as far away as Japan." It's easy to linger on the well-designed site; it's as friendly and appealing as the shop itself.

Bev helped create the Yukon Holistic Health Network, which has drawn thousands to an alternative-health fair featuring midwives, Chinese herbalists and reiki practitioners, among others. Still, nothing will replace her greatest pleasure: "Roaming the hillside, breathing the fresh air and looking for healing plants."

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