

KV Business All About Community and Patriotism

by Trudy Kelly Forsythe

Denise Dow is taking her sense of community and patriotism coast to coast.

Denise is the energy force behind the rapidly growing business STRONG & FREE, which has built its success around an emblem featuring three maple leaves and the words Strong & Free. She designed it after years of wondering why Canadians didn't have an emblem of their own to express their patriotism the way the United States has the eagle emblem.

The business started out in 2007 with a home decor plaque for homes and cottages. It has grown to include car decals and magnets; pewter lapel pins, key chains, ornaments and belt buckles; and a variety of cedar products. The products are now sold locally at Country Treasures in Rothesay and in stores across the country, including Canadian Tire, Zellers, Sears and Walmart.

"These are all high quality items proudly made in Canada by local Canadians for Canadians coast to coast and around the world," says Denise, who readily attributes her success to community support – support both close to home as well as from afar.

"STRONG & FREE exists today because of the tremendous feedback and support that I get from family, friends, customers and supporters locally, nationally and abroad," she says.

In the Valley, Denise has found a great support network from the various women's business groups in the area and local media coverage has helped get out the message of her mission to provide Canadians with an emblem they can proudly display to show their patriotism.

And people are responding.

"This summer at my product display in Country Treasures I overheard many local folks telling their visitors about STRONG & FREE and there was a sense of pride in their voice as they explained that it comes from here," says Denise. "I feel very fortunate to be sharing pride and passion for our country with the community."

And soon her message could get even bigger coverage. Earlier this year, Denise pitched STRONG & FREE to the Dragon's Den. She is now waiting to see if she makes the cut to go on air during Season 4 of the popular CBC television show, which begins airing Sept. 30.



Just as the community supports her, Denise has long believed in supporting the community. During her 30-year career in IT, she was involved in raising the awareness of women in business nationally and she continues to be involved by participating in local women's networks to mentor, support and encourage others.

She is very proud of the Colour Me Canadian / Colore-moi Canadien book, a colouring book she created with long-time friend and graphic artist Sonya MacAskill. The colouring books teach children about Canada and its provinces and territories in English and French.

The colouring books are available in Zellers, Sears, Country Treasures and through the website www.StrongAndFreeEmblem.com. Denise also gives them away at special events and while touring with the new STRONG & FREE RV.

“The new STRONG & FREE RV has started touring, giving out emblems and books to children and spreading a wave of Canadian patriotism from east to west as we travel to the Vancouver Olympics in 2010,” she says.

Denise truly appreciates living her dream in a community that is vibrant and has such a high concentration of positive, professional and supportive people. She has lived in Montreal and California but 20 years ago returned to the Kennebecasis Valley to raise her children.

“I knew there was nowhere better to bring them up in a safe, nurturing environment than right here,” says Denise. “I look forward to enjoying the quality of life that my partner and I can live now that we both have our own business in the Valley. It's fun. We love our customers and enjoy getting to know them.”

And she finds it very rewarding to be able to do something she loves that at the same time generate a positive message in the community – a message to be proud of Canada by celebrating it every day.

“Anytime I wonder if I made the right the decision to put my heart and soul into STRONG & FREE, it never fails that I see someone in my community who has one on their home or car and I can't help but smile and feel very lucky to be here.”