

Profile: Via Trailers Bolton

From modest beginnings almost 30 years ago, Tyler and Jacqui Viaene have built Via Trailers Bolton into a thriving supplier of new and custom trailers. But even as they diversified and grew the business to meet the demands of the market, they didn't sacrifice family time and they stayed active in the community.

Tell us how you got started and why you located in Bolton? Tyler: I grew up on a farm outside of London. As with most farmers there is some sort of side business, whether it's a vegetable stand, which I did, or something else. We had bought a livestock trailer and then sold it and from that we realized there was a demand for them ? and very few dealers. So we became one.

The business grew rapidly.

I was going to college at the time for music but I always knew I needed to have something else. I played a gig in Bolton which is the first time I had been to this community and where I met Jacqui.

It was coming up to my graduation and had to get something figured out.

Head office for the family business was still in London on the farm. But we wanted to expand. I ended up in Bolton because it was close to where I lived, the rent was cheaper and there was a place available with the appropriate zoning. So I took it.

At that time we were strictly a dealer, our inventory went from 3 to 80. Things were flying through the late 90s. We grew as the industry grew.

We incorporated as a separate entity from the head office in 2005.

Leasing wasn't working for us, we needed to buy something. North of here didn't make sense to us and south of Hwy 7 was too expensive.

We got lucky with this location.

We were leasing units and then the property was sold. The owners decided to make it a condominium. We purchased three units and have since purchased two more.

How have you changed your business along the way? Tyler: After a few years there was a lot more competition. We knew we had to diversify. We started doing experiential marketing.

McDonalds was our first client: we customized a cargo trailer for them, then grew to a fleet of larger trailers doing promotions across the country.

Then they had us convert a trailer into a full change room for the Ronald McDonald character. It was fun to see the trailer come in for maintenance and see the costume, huge shoes and clown make up in there, although we never tried any of it on [laughs].

From there we started relationships with marketing agencies that would be working with many large national brands such as Adidas, Jack Daniels, Pepsi, Coke, etc. They'd come to us, we'd design a trailer to meet their objectives, they'd tour around for a year or whenever.

Often we get the trailer back and re purpose it.

Around six years ago when the food truck craze started we started getting requests for food trailers.

Jacqui: We do a lot of those for Franchisers ? our first big one was for Pita Pit.

We also do emergency response ? command post trailers. We have been fortunate to win the bids for a lot of government contracts.

Tyler: We are quite diverse now. It's quite a niche market.

Do you both work the business? Tyler: [laughing] Sure, because working with your spouse wouldn't cause any conflict!

Jacqui: I used to work in the office a lot, which is great because I can fill in any time I'm needed, but once we had children I stayed home more, and I have other interests.

I do some design work and recently started selling real estate, but I've always handled all the procurement for Via Trailers.

You have eight full-time staff, plus a couple seasonal staff. Have you found it challenging to find or keep staff? How do you show your appreciation for your staff?

Tyler: It is so difficult to find good people ? I think it's a common issue for any business now that involves physical labour or trades. When you find good people, you have to be good to them. You have to be flexible. Family comes first.

Jacqui: We've been very fortunate to have great students through the programs at Jobs Caledon (Caledon Community Services) and the Youth for Life Program.

Tyler: One of our main guys in the service department was hired through the employment program at Jobs Caledon. That was a year ago. He's great.

Jacqui: Our hours are 9:00 to 6:00, Saturdays 10:00 to 2:00. Family time is important, so we limit the time we are open.

We have get togethers, celebrate birthdays and if we sponsor an event we encourage everyone to come out.

Are you hoping your children will take over the business one day?

Tyler: That would be great, but they'd really have to want to do it. It wouldn't be good for anyone if they were forced into it.

Jacqui: They already seem to have their interests and seem to know what their path may be. But that's okay.

So what about retirement?

Tyler: Not sure about that! You always have to have something to do, I enjoy this business, people are nice, there's a creative aspect.

Most times we are selling them a trailer which is adding to their business so there's always positive feelings around that.

We have a great work/life balance and we live in Caledon so it's a great commute.

Having a small business, and a family is so time-consuming yet both of you are involved in the community. Why?

Tyler: I'm in Rotary, I really enjoy it ? good relationships, good people, and a way to work on projects in the community that benefit everyone.

And you can see the results, it has a real immediate effect.

A lot of what we do is local, not money being tossed into a big charity when you're not sure where the money is going.

Jacqui: I work with CCS and other groups. We strongly believe in putting back into the community and supporting local businesses and people.

Everything you need is here, there's no reason to go outside the community.

Even if it's a little more expensive it's worth it. We all support each other ? small business grows everything.

It's a win-win.

Via Trailers Bolton is located at 12621 Hwy 50, Bolton offering repair and maintenance work and an abundant new and used vehicle inventory.

www.viatrailer.com | (905) 857-9920