

ACCESS Manitoba

An Old-Fashioned Country Adventure

by Lee Gregg

WD Communications, Winnipeg

If you travel 15 minutes south of Winnipeg on Highway 75, you may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of Adam and Eve, the L'Aventure "COUNTRY" Adventure emu couple. And if you stop in for a visit, you may see rabbits Bijou and Tinkerbell, Alex and Annabelle the goats, Miss Dee the Dexter miniature cow, Peeper the rooster, Arnie the hairy sheep, and enough pigs, ducks, hens, turkeys, kittens, peacocks and a miniature horse to engage every child and adult in a day of exploration and country adventure.

L'Aventure Country Adventure is the brainchild of entrepreneur Lynne Robert, a former teacher's aid who saw an opportunity to start a business that would allow her to stay home with her children. Situated on the family farm just north of Sainte-Agathe, Auntie Lynne, as she is affectionately called, offers an interactive farm experience for school groups, pre-schools, daycares, birthday parties and tourists in both English and French.

"When I worked as a teacher's aid, it was always a challenge to find outings that offered services in French," said Robert. "One day our local preschool's outing was cancelled, so I invited them

to my farm. One thing led to another and I was introduced to the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (CDEM). CDEM helped me to start my business. They were incredibly supportive."

"I'm also very grateful for the support I've received from family, friends and the community," added Robert. "In my first year, I had 50 volunteers who helped do everything from erecting the picnic shelter to painting the barn."

Robert's enthusiasm for her business is evident the moment you enter her world of friendship, fun, and laughter. "Working with children and animals is amazing," said Robert. "I love it. It's my passion."

Tours are available from May to September. For more information, visit www.countryvacations.mb.ca/laventurecountry or call (204) 882-2445. For information on CDEM, call 1-800-990-2332 or visit www.cdem.com. ■



With help from husband Gérald, the Roberts have created a country adventure with memories that will last long after the children have hugged the animals goodbye. In centre photo owner Lynne Robert gets a kiss from Alex the goat.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF L'AVENTURE "COUNTRY" ADVENTURE.
PHOTOGRAPHER: JANET SIMONS,
STE. AGATHE.



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From Plant Science to Papermaking

Botanical PaperWorks is not your ordinary paper store. But then co-founder Heidi Reimer-Epp is not your ordinary entrepreneur. A Commerce graduate with international work experience in the pharmaceutical and aerospace sectors, Reimer-Epp has taken her big business know-how and applied it to her small business environment.

"I was looking for new challenges," said Reimer-Epp when asked about her decision to jump from salaried employee to entrepreneur. "My mom knew how to make paper and I had experience in creative design."

The word "botanical" relates to the science of plant biology and producing organic products from plants. This plant science began when Reimer-Epp's mother, a former teacher, used papermaking to enhance the creative writing process in her language arts curriculum. "I asked her to hand-make my wedding

programs," noted Reimer-Epp. "She used the kitchen blender to produce the pulp needed for 150 programs. They were a big hit."

After several years of "what if" discussions, in 1997 Reimer-Epp and her mother, Mary Reimer, took the plunge and designed and produced their own line of handmade paper. They showcased it to five retail stores with the understanding that if two stores bought the product, they were onto something. All five stores made purchases and a business was born.

The first challenge was to transfer the homemade papermaking process into a large manufacturing process and keep it handmade. Reimer was instrumental in refining the papermaking process, and today the company uses cotton, abaca (leaves of a Philippine tobacco plant) and hemp for their papermaking fibre. Petals, ferns, prairie grass and larkspur add the finishing touches to Botanical's exquisite handmade paper and paper products.

While researching and working on the business plan, Reimer-Epp used the services of the Canada-Manitoba Business Service Centre (C/MBSC). "The library was critical for my research," said Reimer-Epp. "I found it very helpful."

Officially launching the business in January 1998, Reimer-Epp began by developing wedding invitations and marketing them through mail-order catalogues.



Botanical's plantable seed favors are often given out at memorial services to plant in memory of the deceased.



Botanical's paper comes in 18 different sizes, all with deckled edges — the hallmark of handmade paper. Shown here: Prairie Grass.

She launched a Web site and advertised in *Martha Stewart Weddings* and *In Style Weddings* catalogues. International sales quickly followed.

Reimer-Epp discovered that the key to running a small business was to leverage technology as much as possible. From using the Internet as a marketing tool to using business software, Reimer-Epp has developed flexible and progressive processes and continues to improve and refine her business by striving for a management style supporting quality management.



“We use a lot of the principles of Total Quality Management,” noted Reimer-Epp. “We also have standard operating procedures for every part of the business, including making pulp, assembling product, administrative processes, preparing layouts and taking orders. This reduces our costs and it’s a faster, more efficient way to train new staff.”

Since 2001, Reimer-Epp has worked hard to grow her client base and look for ways to improve her product development and expand her product line. One new development was the introduction of the trademarked “seed favors.” These handcrafted, seeded paper products have custom-printed text and planting instructions.

There are now hundreds of new seed favor products, including invitations, wedding favors, and plantable cards with butterfly, dragonfly and dove designs. Embedded with Botanical’s exclusive blend of annual and perennial wildflower seeds, businesses send them to their clients with catch phrases such as “Thanks for Growing With Us” and are fast becoming a favourite for baby announcements.

Botanical also expanded into designing and producing a highly successful line of promotional products for other businesses. To make this possible, Reimer-Epp approached the Women’s Enterprise Centre (WEC) for financial assistance. “The support from the Women’s Centre allowed us to produce new designs and do our market research,” said Reimer-Epp. “They were really great to work with. They could see the vision of the company.”

Although Reimer has retired from the day-to-day running of the business, she is still an active member of the company’s board and works closely with her daughter on projects that interest her, especially in the educational field. The mother-daughter team has published three books through a UK publisher. They include the bestseller *300 Papermaking Recipes* ©2000, *The Encyclopedia of Papermaking and Book Binding* ©2002, and *Paper Making* ©2003.

Not your average mother-daughter business, Reimer-Epp has used her business savvy and her mother’s inge-

nuity to successfully launch Botanical PaperWorks, which now produces thousands of sheets of paper a day for their thousands of customers. Never content with the status quo, Reimer-Epp is hard at work on her next project — recruiting Canadian distributors and sales reps to expand her Canadian market.

For information on Botanical PaperWorks, call 1-877-956-7393 or visit www.botanicalpaperworks.com or <http://botanical-heidi.blogspot.com>.

The Women’s Enterprise Centre and the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre are members of a business service network that is supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada. Information on their programs and services can be found at www.wd.gc.ca. ■



Co-founder Heidi Reimer-Epp with a collection of Botanical’s handmade paper.

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No Problem Keeping this Business Afloat

A “For Sale” sign turned the lives of Bob and Gean Hutlet around 180 degrees in 2002. What started as a weekend visit with their daughter in Pinawa, turned them into permanent residents and the owners of the Burger Boat, a floating restaurant on the shores of the scenic Winnipeg River.

“I was driving around with my son-in-law,” recalled Bob with a laugh. “I saw the ‘For Sale’ sign for the Burger Boat and thought why not!”

No strangers to entrepreneurship, the Hutlets owned and operated a convenience store in Portage la Prairie, a family enterprise they sold in 1982. Before making the jump back from retirees to business owners, the Hutlets researched the restaurant business, and after some enterprising purchase negotiations and financing assistance through the Winnipeg River Brokenhead Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC), they purchased the Burger Boat and opened for business in August 2002.

Working closely with Jenny Peterson, business analyst with the CFDC, the Hutlets obtained financing through the CFDC’s Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program. “Jenny is a fantastic girl,” noted Gean. “She worked with us to secure funding, which was needed for our start-up costs.”

“Since purchasing the business we’ve invested heavily in building renovations and improvements,” added Bob. “We’ve installed stabilizers on the boat, added 84 square feet of additional space and purchased three new freezers.”

Along with their friendly hometown welcome, visitors can enjoy a variety of appetizing menu items, such as burgers, chicken, ice cream, deep-fried veggies, mushrooms, perogies and much more. The Hutlets recently expanded their menu to include several locally produced foods, including wild boar burgers and bison burgers. Bob’s famous Triple B Burger, of farmers’ sausage, bacon and beef patty, has become very popular. They also cater to vegetarians by serving veggie burgers.

Customers keep returning because of the quality and originality of the restaurant and the Hutlets have received compliments from visitors as far away as Ireland and Australia. Business has boomed so quickly that they had to add a second deep fryer in 2003.

Situated at the Pinawa Marina, the restaurant is accessible by both water and land. From May to September, customers can enjoy their meal overlooking the panoramic view of the Winnipeg River. ■



Gean and Bob Hutlet enjoy a rare quiet moment on the Burger Boat.