

ACCESS

SASKATCHEWAN

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A Divinely Inspired Business

by Cameron Zimmer

After farming for 19 years and finding themselves in the middle of a drought, the Branger family was looking for a change. They found an innovative way to deal with a mid-life crisis.

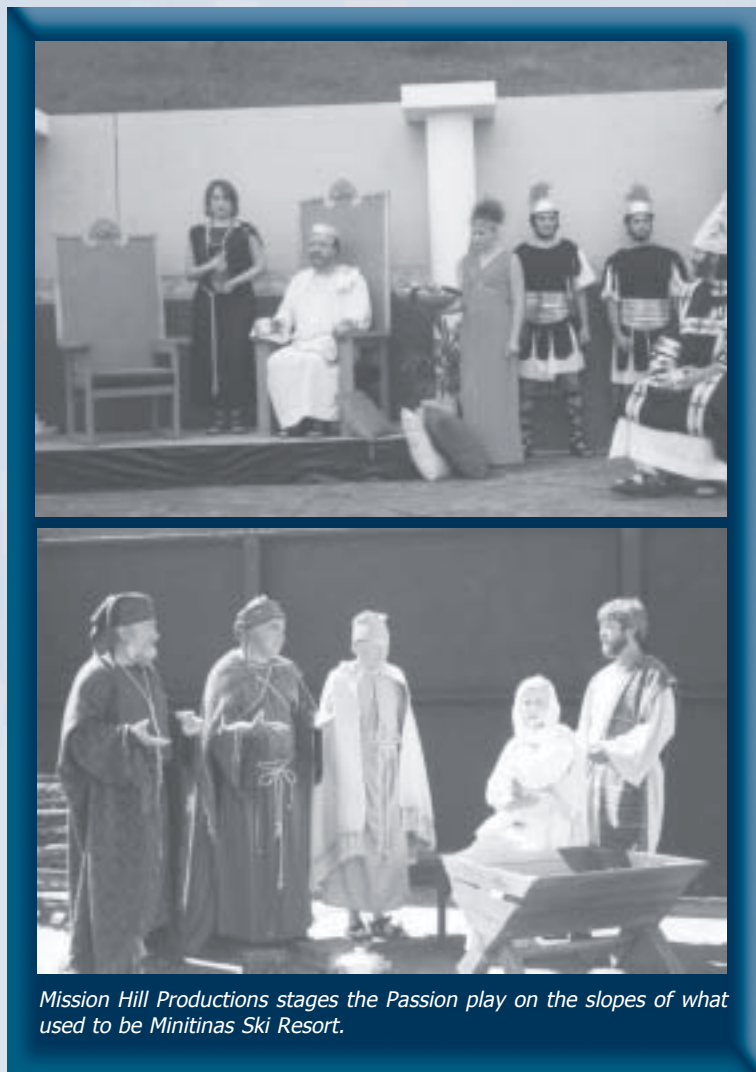
Louise Branger had dabbled in theatre for 15 years and dreamed of producing a play for six of those, so starting a theatre company called **Mission Hill Productions** with her husband Maurice seemed like the logical next step.

“We were farmers, and with the drought happening, we had to do something,” says Louise. “I grew up in Bellevue — that’s where Mission Hill is. It hadn’t been used for 18 years, and I thought something had to be done with that hill.”

After renting out most of their 500 acres of farmland and selling off their 40 head of cattle, the Brangers worked full-throttle for four months to set the stage for their first production. They quickly transformed Mission Hill, which used to be a ski resort, into a huge outdoor theatre.

When the work was nearly complete, Mission Hill called in 32 actors from across Saskatchewan to perform its first play, “Jesus Lives.” The Passion play, written and directed by Louise, included live sheep, a pool and crosses strewn across the hillside.

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Mission Hill Productions stages the Passion play on the slopes of what used to be Minitinas Ski Resort.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

A Divinely Inspired Business

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More than 3,500 visitors treaded the grassy slopes over 10 days last year to take in the play. They enjoyed refreshments from a renovated ski lodge that now doubles as a dining hall and office space.

Louise was overwhelmed by the positive reception the play received, but says it came after a difficult life change.

“For me it was really hard because I was a mother of four and a farmer’s wife for the last 19 years. I’ve worked hard, but not at starting a business.”

She credits the **Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc. (W.E.)** with helping her make the journey from farmer to businesswoman. After being turned down by other lending institutions, Louise went to W.E., which provided her with business advice and a loan to get started.

“I couldn’t even prove that this was a legit business, because I didn’t know myself, but they were willing to give me a chance and that encouraged me,” she remembers. “They were the only ones who believed in my business who would give me money.”

Louise isn’t taking her early success for granted. In the year since the first production, Mission Hill has hosted game show nights and dinner theatre productions to keep visitors coming. The company is also working to open a small restaurant on site and is producing the Passion play again this summer.

Like a true producer, Louise continues to look beyond the circumstances and see potential. Passion and perseverance have carried her this far and she says the same combination can help others who want to become entrepreneurs.

“Starting a business isn’t easy, but anyone that knows what they want in life can do what they want,” she says. “Don’t give up after going to the first bank because there’s somebody out there that believes in you.”

If you want to find out more about Mission Hill Productions, visit www.missionhillproductions.homestead.com, e-mail Louise at missionhillprod@yahoo.ca or call her toll-free at 1-866-449-7444.

To learn more about Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc. and how they can help your business, visit www.womenentrepreneurs.sk.ca, e-mail info@womenentrepreneurs.sk.ca or call 1-800-879-6331. ♣

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Questions? We've Got Answers.

by Jean Collins

Do you need to know what the implications are for leasing versus purchasing space? Should you incorporate your business or set it up as a sole proprietorship? What information are financial institutions looking for in a business plan?

If you don't know the answer to these questions, then a professional "guest advisor" at the **Canada-Saskatchewan Business Service Centre (CSBSC)** can help. The **Guest Advisor Program** is just one of many services the CSBSC offers to entrepreneurs starting or expanding their business.

The Guest Advisor Program links entrepreneurs with the knowledge and expertise of accountants, bankers and lawyers. In a 20-minute session, entrepreneurs can obtain free advice on legal, financial or other business matters.

All guest advisors are volunteers who visit on a rotating schedule. Appointments are set up one day a week with a different professional service offered every week. For entrepreneurs who can't visit the Saskatoon office in person, telephone interviews can be arranged.

Launched in November 2003, the service has surpassed expectations. Already 75 entrepreneurs have accessed the service. The CSBSC is planning to expand the service to Regina later this year.

Nolin Veillard, an independent business consultant and accountant, has volunteered as a guest advisor. He enjoys meeting the entrepreneurs who are so committed to pursuing their goals. "You have to admire their tenacity," says Veillard. "Some of them have spent years bringing their dream to reality."



Legal guest advisor Bob Kallio meets with client.

Through the program, Kevin I. Okafor met with a lawyer and a banker. He noted they provided practical, useful advice and he appreciated that there was no cost to him. "When I took it [lease-purchase agreement] back to the owner, he removed the conditions the lawyer questioned," explained Okafor.

The Canada-Saskatchewan Business Service Centre is a joint initiative of Western Economic Diversification Canada and Saskatchewan Industry and Resources. It offers entrepreneurs information on starting a business, developing a business plan, marketing strategies, financing and regulatory matters.

For more information about the Guest Advisor Program, call 1-800-667-4374 or visit www.cbbsc.org/sask. ♦

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Collaboration Boosts Oilfield Technology Development

by Heather Waldern Hinds

The Regina-based **Petroleum Technology Research Centre (PTRC)** that helps Saskatchewan's \$798 million oil industry got a \$10 million funding boost in March to continue its research into improving oilfield development and recovery technology. The Government of Canada, through Western Economic Diversification Canada and Natural Resources Canada, and the Province of Saskatchewan each invested \$5 million.

PTRC was founded in 1998 as an initiative of Natural Resources Canada, Saskatchewan Industry and Resources, the University of Regina and the Saskatchewan Research Council (SRC). About 50 scientists and graduate students from the university and SRC work on projects with industry groups.

The centre is an example of how continuing collaboration between academia and the private sector — along with strong partnerships involving governments, universities and industry — will allow Saskatchewan, and Canada, to achieve its climate change goals.

As Canada's second largest oil producer, and representing almost 12 per cent of provincial revenues, the industry is important to Saskatchewan's economy. However, many of



the largest reservoirs are reaching their economic limits, but still contain more than half of their original oil.

PTRC continues to develop and improve enhanced oil recovery methods (EOR) so that producers can get more oil out of the province's reserves. On average, only 15 per cent is recoverable using today's technology.

For example, the centre has gained a reputation among oil and gas researchers in Canada, the United States and Europe for coordinating the \$42 million Weyburn CO₂ Monitoring and Storage Project. Researchers estimate that by injecting about 1.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year into the oil reservoir, industry partner EnCana will extend its reservoir's life by 25 years. In turn, the project will confirm if an oil reserve can capture and store CO₂ — a major greenhouse gas.

Other projects include improving the common recovery technique of enhanced chemical waterflooding — where water is injected into a reservoir to recover more oil. According to an article in *Saskatchewan Business Magazine*, one improvement on this technique involves adding a small amount of a soap-like chemical to the water, which frees the oil attached to reservoir rocks.

For more information, contact the Petroleum Technology Research Centre at (306) 787-8290. ♦