

Access Manitoba

Western Economic Diversification Canada

Constant Kraving

How Sweet it is!

By Maria Doerksen

When Chris Emery and Larry Finnsen were sixteen and hanging out together at Oak Park High School in Winnipeg, neither of them ever thought they would someday own a successful candy company.

But that's what the two young men have accomplished for themselves using Emery's secret family recipe to create Clodhoppers.

The concept of the **Krave's Candy Company** was born in a university dorm when Emery's roommates used to steal all of his grandmother's homemade candy.

Finnsen and Emery got together and began dreaming about starting their own business. They created an imaginary family named the Kraves who live in the heart of the Alps where they have been hard at work for 300 years. The family, known for their sweet teeth and sticky fingers have been mixing chocolate, growing cashews and baking graham crackers from generation to generation in a quest to make the perfect candy.

And in 1996 the Kraves created Clodhoppers.

In truth, it took a lot more than an imaginary tale to build the candy company into what it is today.

Out of post-secondary education Finnsen and Emery started on a small scale, mixing their own small five pound batches of the confection, packaging it in plastic peanut butter jars and then selling it at craft shows. But, after limited success, the pair realized that something needed to change.

"We found that our market was the box chocolate market – such as Turtles(tm) and others – and our product wasn't holding up very well in terms of packaging," Emery says. So, in April 1998, Krave's revamped their packaging which has changed the destiny of the company.

Today Clodhoppers are distributed across Canada through major retailers such as Wal-Mart, Zellers, Safeway, Eatons and Shopper's Drug Mart. Company sales have increased from \$59,000 in 1996 to over a million dollars in 1998 making it one of the fastest growing companies in Manitoba.



Chris Emery (left) and Larry Finnsen with their homemade packaging and labeling machine in Krave's shipping area.

Continued on page 3

Freedom for the Physically Challenged

By Maria Doerksen

When Ken Vanstraelen was young he dreamed of going into business and making millions. He wasn't sure how he was going to get there but figured that the sporting industry was a good place to start. So, he sold hockey sticks for a few years until in 1990 a local physiotherapist requested he build her a special needs mobility device.

The bike was such a success that Vanstraelen gave up his other business and devoted his time to his new company, **Freedom Concepts Inc.**, which designs and builds mobility devices for people with disabilities and special needs.

"Here I was asked to build one bike," he says. "The next thing you know I'm in production full time."

Today Vanstraelen is a different man. He's a few years older, more mature, a passionate believer in his product and he has realistically given up his millionaire dreams. He calls Freedom Concepts his labour of love. In fact, he says the best part of his work is seeing an excited young person get onto a bike for the first time and then watching the child's parents who often weep in amazement.



A six year old girl and her friend enjoy the EHD 16, a bike that can be propelled by both legs, using the foot pedals or arms, using a rowing motion.

"I'm proud to say that I am friends with most of the people we've helped," Vanstraelen says. "These families have certainly affected me and my staff, while inspiring us to keep improving and creating new ways to make people mobile."

Freedom Concepts is certainly improving. In nine years, Vanstraelen has created a full line of mobility devices to suit a wide range of needs, as well as many one of a kind, user specific units.

Because of the unique nature of his business Vanstraelen came to Western Economic Diversification (WD) looking for help in writing a comprehensive business plan and acquiring financing.

"A potential investor suggested I contact WD," he recalls. He was put in touch with Karen Hurst, a client services officer at WD who helped him arrange his business plan and then prepared him for meeting with the banks. Just this past spring, Vanstraelen was approved for a Health Industry Loan through WD in partnership with the Royal Bank.

"I really needed WD to expand Freedom," he says. The loan has allowed him to develop and establish his product in the marketplace.

Vanstraelen said, at first he began by marketing his product as a recreational item but soon found that most people could not afford to purchase a bike of this price for casual use. "I've only recently realized that this bike is for more than recreation," he says. "It's really a form of therapy for these physically challenged kids."

That's exactly how the physical and occupational therapists at St. Amant Centre, a home for the physically and mentally challenged, think of the bikes. They have launched an extensive research study to examine the effects of the mobility devices on the residents in therapy programs. Stage one of the study was completed in May and Vanstraelen is waiting for the results to be published.

Susanne McGill is one of the therapists that works at St. Amant Centre. "When a shy and timid wheelchair bound person is fitted into a bike after five minutes, they're riding on their own," she says. "Their posture has changed to upright and there's a smile on their face. Hope, independence, pride and accomplishment shine through."

In June, Freedom Concepts was invited to participate in the Empire State Games, a four day competition event for physically handicapped people held annually in New York City.

Vanstraelen took along a team of three therapists to help demonstrate the mobility devices. The event was such a success for Freedom that the company sold 14 custom bikes and were asked to return next year to coordinate and sponsor a bike obstacle course.

Things are looking up for Vanstraelen who is now hiring a marketing coordinator through a WD program. He has set goals for the next two years and plans to expand the offices and manufacturing space of Freedom. But no matter what he has on paper, Vanstraelen is most interested in helping the special needs children he has fallen in love with to find happiness.



Freedom recently built a custom bike for a young woman whose caregiver purchased the bike by hosting Tupperware parties and selling chocolates. The young lady was so excited to get a bike she asked that the words – **The Bullet** – be painted on the side of it. And, as he often does, Vanstraelen personally delivered the bike. Today, as he looks at the pictures they took of her riding for the first time, he smiles and quietly repeats under his breath, “The Bullet.”



(Above) A boy, with his mother, learns to ride his new DCP 16. He loved his bike so much that when he outgrew this one, his parents purchased a second bike. (Left) This young man had difficulty maintaining an upright position until he got onto the Prone Recumbent device, which therapists describe as “a ticket to freedom”, especially for those with Cerebral Palsy.

Continued from cover

It was their Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) account representative who first suggested Emery and Finnson visit Western Economic Diversification (WD) were they were put in contact with Shirley Stimpson, a client services officer, who educated them on WD’s small business programs.

About the support they receive through WD Emery says, “We are really thankful for WD. The support we get is critical to our growth. When you’re starting out it is very difficult to get information on help for small business. Shirley has gone to bat for us with the banks and has been a facilitator for other contacts in the business community, putting us in touch with businesses that we share something in common with.”

Emery says their goal is to evolve into a “very serious candy company”. Krave’s immediate priority is focusing on raising capital to sustain growth in the next three years. The partners are doing this by purchasing automated machinery, solidifying the brand name and introducing new products.

One new item will be ready in time for Christmas and Emery promises it will be even better than Clodhoppers, involving the original recipe and adding Belgium milk chocolate.

“After taste testing Clodhoppers everyday, we’ve gotten kind of immune,” Emery says. “But these new candies with the Belgium chocolate... they’re unbelievable. Oh yeah!”

Both Finnson and Emery advise young entrepreneurs to start with a comprehensive business plan. “And secondly, learn to be flexible with your partner,” Emery adds. “Find the strengths in each other and support each other.”

He likens their partnership to a family. “You get on each others nerves but you also feel a deep connection to them.”

WD Staff go the Extra Mile...

When the flood devastated Ste. Agathe in the spring of 1997 many businesses were hit hard.

Shannon Campbell was one of WD’s field service officers involved in helping businesses in the region recover. She became aware of an elderly gentleman who owned a small woodworking business which sold crafts by order as well as at markets and craft shows. During the flood, he lost everything including his workshop and all of his business records. At the same time his wife became ill and had to be permanently hospitalized.

Working in the Canada/Manitoba Business Restoration Office, Campbell was able to guide the gentleman through the business



Shannon Campbell receives a bouquet of flowers and a thank you note from a client she has been helping for over six months.

recovery process. Not only did she help him prove he was eligible for the program but she went the extra mile by assisting him in getting duplicate copies of receipts, allowing items to be faxed directly to her and spending time on the telephone explaining what had to be done.

Congratulations Shannon on a job well done!

Aboriginal Television Network Coming to Winnipeg

By Maria Doerksen

Winnipeg is home to the largest urban Aboriginal community in Canada. This has created an explosion of traditional expressions of Aboriginal culture through the visual arts, music, dance and fashion. It has also meant a growing popularity in contemporary expression.

So it would seem appropriate for a national Aboriginal television network to be based in the city. It appears that the **Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN)** were thinking the same thing when they announced their new location in May, 1999.

The network's programming will originate in Winnipeg, complete with an evening newscast, talk shows, sports, and youth shows. APTN will begin broadcasting in September as part of basic cable packages throughout the country.

Jennifer David, communications director for APTN, says they chose Winnipeg for a number of reasons.

- The city's central geographic location,
- its large Aboriginal community and strong cultural presence,
- and the support from the city – in particular from Aboriginal businesses – were all influential factors.

"We analyzed every major city in Canada and eliminated most due to cost or because it was technologically impossible," David says. "In the end it came down to Ottawa and Winnipeg."

During the decision making process in early 1999, APTN sent a delegation to major cities across Canada. In Winnipeg they were greeted with a special Aboriginal business reception, organized by Western Economic Diversification (WD) and hosted by the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.

"The idea behind the reception was to demonstrate what a diverse network of Aboriginal business Winnipeg has," says Sandy Gillies, a WD client services officer. "More than 100 Aboriginal business people came out which indicated to APTN that we have a large infrastructure of Aboriginal businesses for them to rely on."

The reception was only part of the reason that APTN chose Winnipeg according to Gillies. "WD was a small, but significant player in this process," he says. "We greased the wheels so to say."

George Skinner, Director General of Programs at WD, took a special interest in the APTN file, spending many hours of his personal time working on the project.

"This is an opportunity for the Aboriginal community to celebrate its strengths," Skinner says. "It's also a natural addition to the growing mass of positive initiatives, such as Neeginan and the business centre, for Aboriginal people in the city."

WD also funded a \$45,000 transitional plan which allowed APTN to collect their thinking and decide what direction they wanted to go in.

"APTN will provide a true and accurate portrayal of Aboriginals, dispelling stereotypes," David says. "It will be a place where talented young people can explore their options for a career and enable Aboriginals to take pride in their heritage."

More than 30 jobs are expected to come to the city with the start-up of APTN.