

OWNER OF VERY SUCCESSFUL FREDERICTON FIRM

Betty Lee wants to sell in the United States

BY CATHERINE METCALFE
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Betty Lee believes in taking things one step at a time, even when it comes to building her business.

The owner of the very successful Fredericton-based Betty Lee's Food Service, Lee started out more than 20 years ago making spring rolls at her kitchen table.

When demand for the tasty morsels grew beyond her family and friends, she started selling from a table at the Boyce Farmers' Market. That move created more business and today, Lee oversees a full-fledged food service and catering business from her own building on the edge of downtown Fredericton.

Spring rolls are still the most famous item she offers, but Lee's workers also chop, dice, and sauté fresh vegetables and savory meats into approximately 20 other items, including mouthwatering parmesan cheese spinach balls and pot stickers.

Lee still has a booth at the farmers' market every Saturday, but she also sells thousands of her products annually to supermarkets, hotels and institutions all over Atlantic Canada.

But now, Lee is thinking bigger once again — and she's casting her eyes south.

requirements, she added. It's also designed to educate Canadian women business owners about the export market.

"I always say when you do business, it's not just a one-day kind of business," Lee mused. "It's a long development as far as I can see. So that's why I would like to go and have a first-hand look."

During the mission, Lee plans to attend workshops on the American business culture, developing a successful export plan and strategy and partnering as a market entry strategy.

She isn't expecting to become an exporter overnight. But she said the contacts she makes and information she gathers during the mission will be valuable as she begins planning for the future.

She's interested in tapping into the lucrative American food service market. And later this week she's going to get a chance for the kind of exposure to the American markets that many business owners would love to have.

Lee will join 125 other Canadian women entrepreneurs and business leaders participating in the first Canadian Businesswomen's International Trade Mission to Washington D.C.

In fact, Lee is one of only five New Brunswick business women selected for the mission. Rita Vallières, president of OPTIMUM Translation in Fredericton, Gwen McKay, president of Amulet Consulting in Fredericton, Deirdre Grondin, marketing professor at the University of New Brunswick, and Sharon Geldart-Wry, secretary-treasurer of Geldart's Warehouse and Cartage in Moncton, are also participating.

The mission, led by International Trade Minister Sergio Marchi, is designed to balance the fact that women business owners are under-represented in the export market even though one-third of all Canadian companies are owned by women.

And biding her time on entering the U.S. market doesn't bother this successful woman. Slow-and-sure has always worked for her in the past.

"I know it won't be an immediate kind of result," Lee said. "For some

The three-day mission will introduce potential export companies to the U.S. markets and give women CEOs a chance to explore business opportunities and form partnerships with firms from the mid-Atlantic states.

An astute business owner who holds a master in business administration from McGill University, Lee knows breaking into the American market is going to require a lot of thought and planning. So she was delighted to get the chance to be part of a mission that is focused specifically on helping Canadian companies learn about exporting to the U.S.

"For those consulting companies ... it is much easier," she said in an interview. "But for the food business, we have more hurdles. We have to go through inspections and FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) inspections — that kind of thing."

The trade mission will provide opportunities to make some contacts and gather information about export re-

other business women, they go and they are so-called 'market ready.'

"For me, I don't think I am market ready, because for food we have so many different conditions compared to consulting firms."

The facts

Facts on Canadian women in business:

- one-third of Canadian firms are owned and operated by women.
- the 700,000 women-led firms in Canada are creating jobs at four times the average rate.
- women-owned companies con-

tribute 1.7 million jobs to the Canadian economy.

• self-employed women had the fastest rate of growth, 172 per cent, of all employment sectors from 1975 to 1990.

• projections are that there will be 680,000 self-employed women by the year 2000.