

For love and money, business immigrants find success in Canada...

ALLISON BARR

What do designer perspiration, family crests and engravings, and delicious meals taken in an atmosphere redolent of peat fires and the tartan auld country have in common?

They're clues to the unlimited business opportunities Britons have found in Canada.

Garry Oliver transforming a sports club into a thriving enterprise, Ron and Angie Hamilton succeeding with a family crest and engraving business, and Jim and Cleo O'Carroll revitalising a 100-plus seat restaurant are just some of the British families who have found business fulfilment and an enriched lifestyle as business immigrants to Canada.

Large numbers are seeking the opportunities and prosperity promised by following the old adage, 'Go West'. In 1989, nearly 200 business immigrants immigrated to Canada bringing with them approximately \$187 million dollars to invest or start-up business ventures

All know there are no free rides in life or in business but with inspiration, initiative, dedication and hard work, Canada meets the expectations of entrepreneurial immigrants and investors.

Sixty potential immigrants from all over the United Kingdom attended an inaugural seminar, 'Canada, Business and You', organised by the newspaper, Canada News, recently. They were drawn from a broad range of regions and professions - from Gwent to Guernsey, from financial investor to fast food entrepreneur.

Canada News editor, Gayle Herchak, said: 'Although they came from many different backgrounds, most were united in the belief that Canada offers greater business and lifestyle prospects than their present situations in Britain.'

Garry Oliver agrees that Canada rewards individual enterprise.

Garry Oliver

Garry Oliver, in partnership with other U.K. and Canadian investors, injected a substantial amount of capital to renovate a fairly new but defunct health and racquet club in the Metro Toronto area. The new facility, Curzons Sporting Club, has been renovated from primarily a racquet sports facility to a more broadly based sports and fitness facility.

The new facility currently employs 20 full-time and 26 part-time employees. The British partners have opened a second facility in May 1990 which, like its predecessor was a take-over of an existing sports centre. Success continues. 'We anticipate opening two more similar facilities within the next six months in the Metro Toronto area', says Garry, who originates from London.

Garry had previous experience in the fitness field, as manager of the Cannons Sports Club in London. 'In England we specialised in taking facilities that had not reached their full potential and maximising their opportunities. I had done that at Cannons Sports Club.' After hearing about a club in Canada that had great potential but was doing poorly, Garry travelled to Canada on a preliminary trip to study the market. 'I thought Canada was about four years behind what we had done in the U.K. and therefore we had a head-

start. The difference is that we brought a European style to a North American way of life. Everything we do is about quality.'

Garry and his partner had an initial tough two years. 'Everybody here looked upon us with a wait and see attitude - to see if we could deliver. We were very bullish, but in the end we won their respect. You have to remember that we had renovated a previous business that had failed.'

In the initial stages they could not get financing from Canadian banks. Oliver states that 'most of our financing came from Switzerland. Canadian banks only lend on past performance which would have meant that we would have had to be in operation for two years.'

Garry advises prospective British immigrants to 'come to Canada with a positive attitude and financing. He says that in comparison to Britain, Canada is a "big pond and there are less fish".'

The Hamiltons

Ron and Angie Hamilton arrived in Vancouver, British Columbia as business immigrants in April 1986. They immediately replicated the small business they had operated in Yorkshire which researched and produced family crests for customers referred through retail outlets and stands they operated at agricultural shows. They became interested in Canada after a visit in 1984. 'Canada was clean and the people were so friendly.' In addition, they had many contacts with Canadians who bought their products while on holiday in the U.K.

In 1988, they established Angel Etchings Ltd to expand their operation to service a demand for quality engraving on stone and glass. 'On arrival we set up our family crest business and did some shows. Then we discovered that our product was a seasonal gift, with most of our sales occurring between July and Christmas. We wanted something that was viable for twelve months of the year so we moved into glass engraving.' They built up a strong client-base including large department stores and other gift retailers, as well as contracts for awards, wedding gifts, and hotel utensils.

The Hamiltons (Ron is from Northern Ireland and Angie originated from Newcastle-upon-Tyne) use special equipment invented in Britain which recycles dust and sand particles that are the by-products of the engraving process. Since the equipment is relatively rare, Ron is able to get many large glass engraving contracts that are unavailable to his competitors, particularly in buildings with alarm systems that are sensitive to sand and dust.

From 1988 to mid-1990 the Hamiltons operated a retail store for their engraving business, but have had to move to a larger industrial workshop location to meet increased demand. They employ three other full-time employees.

'In Canada they have a very positive and upbeat attitude in business', says Ron. He also states that new business immigrants must have enough initial funds. 'Canadian banks won't readily take a chance on a new business unless you