

# Dal students work out pulling rickshaws

by Valerie Edwards

Summer may be over and most of the tourists gone home but three Dalhousie students know their tourist business will survive the long, cold winter.

Those red-and-black clad young men pulling passengers around the downtown Halifax waterfront area this summer in two-seater carts, or 'rickshaws', were physiotherapy students Brian Tomie, John Kalina

and Rob MacDonald.

Tomie said the idea to begin the rickshaw business first developed last Christmas. John Kalina had read about a San Francisco teacher who started such a company there some years ago. They knew Halifax was a tourist-oriented city and began to think an idea like this one might work.

The Atlantic Sulkie Co. of Prince Edward Island constructed

the rickshaws. The students financed the construction with a bank loan of approximately \$4,000 to \$4,500. They also posted advertisements for local businesses on the back and sides of the rickshaws.

Tomie said the idea was almost too progressive at first, as Halifax is a very conservative city.

"People thought we were a theatre group because we were dressed in costumes," said Tomie. "We had

trouble convincing them they were not on display."

The students' working attire consisted of red suspenders, red bandanas, and black pants.

The rides covered four different routes but were centered around the Historic Properties and the waterfront area where they met the daily cruise ships. Prices ranged from \$3.75 to \$8.25 and passengers received an historical commentary on points of interest.

Rob MacDonald added that the rickshaw service was also available for weddings. On September 3, wearing rented tuxedos and white sneakers, the students carried a wedding party from the Greek Orthodox church on Queen Street to the Public Gardens.

According to Tomie the most memorable moments of the past few months were the opportunities to meet so many people in the tourist and business worlds. One of the funniest but most flattering experiences occurred when a woman from Ontario chased them so they could autograph a picture she had cut out from a Toronto newspaper.

Tomie personally had a bad experience when a man grabbed the handles of the rickshaw and began running with it while there was a female passenger inside. The rickshaw rolled over when he turned a corner too sharply. Although the woman only suffered minor cuts and bruises, the incident looked bad because it happened in front of a lot of people. The students always took care after that to remain inside the handles of the

rickshaw when they stopped.

Tomie thinks that from a businessman's point of view the venture was very successful. They broke even financially, paid back the bank loan, and made enough money to cover three months' rent, food bills, and other expenses. However, none of them saved enough money to pay this year's school fees.

But the students now own the rickshaws and are in total control of their own registered company. Since all three must do a physiotherapy internship next summer, they will hire new students to take their places.

"I think we may have started a new industry...a tradition here in Halifax," said Tomie.

The screening of applicants will occur around Christmas and students must pass a physical exam as well as begin a training program.

"We trained for the better part of eight months," said Tomie. Their program consisted of weight lifting, running and a diet high in proteins and carbohydrates. "We couldn't afford to have one guy sick or injured due to poor training on our part."

Tomie advises other students who may be thinking of venturing into the business world to be totally aware of, and accept, the responsibilities. It is imperative that they enjoy what they are doing, he says.

"There were days when we were not able to make our loan payments and we would just have to get up the next morning and put on a big smile and go out to work."



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