

ALL IN THE

FAMILY

MAGAZINE

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The Story Behind Essentials Cremation and Burial Services Inc.

Continuing a Legacy
The Nitsopoulos Cousins
and Their Family Business

**Building Dreams, Walls,
and a Family Legacy**
Board Boss Drywall



A RESOURCE FOR FAMILY BUSINESS



HEART OF NIAGARA
H O T E L S

Celebrating the past, shaping the future

In the fast-paced world of hospitality, the story of the Nitsopoulos family stands out as both heartwarming and inspiring. For more than five decades, they've built a successful business rooted in hard work, dedication, and a deep connection to their community. Today, the next generation—four cousins: Adrian, Tom, Stelly, and Nicholas—lead the way, carrying on the legacy of their parents and grandparents with pride.



Staybridge Suites | Holiday Inn & Suites
327 Ontario Street, St. Catharines
niagaraholidayinn.ca



Best Western
2 North Service Road, St. Catharines
niagarabestwestern.ca



Hampton Inn
89 Meadowvale Drive, St. Catharines
niagarahamptoninn.ca

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Lounge Six
Parkway Social



PARKWAY
CONFERENCE CENTRE

energy
fitness studio

WRIGLEY'S
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Reflexions
REAL • LIFE • FITNESS



In 2024, the Holiday Inn & Suites Parkway Conference Centre completed a multi-million dollar renovation, introducing a fresh new look and enhanced amenities. The addition of Staybridge Suites offers spacious two-room suites with full kitchens, ideal for long-term stays or for guests who want a bit more space. Guests can enjoy complimentary breakfast,

a private courtyard with BBQ area, and a 24/7 fitness center.

The renovation also included updates to public spaces, including the new 327 Bru Café and Bar, a local favourite for coffee, pastries, and refreshing drinks. The conference centre was also revamped, offering modern and flexible space for business meetings and special events.

With upgraded accommodations, 30 lanes of bowling, laser tag, and an arcade, the Holiday Inn & Suites/Staybridge Suites St. Catharines provides an exceptional experience for both short and long-term stays. We look forward to welcoming you to our brand new space where you truly belong.



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RESTAURANT

PARKWAY
SOCIAL
EAT • DRINK • PLAY

Lounge
SIX
Parley Sky Bar

327 BRÜ
Café & Bar

PARKWAY
CONFERENCE CENTRE

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE



Marilyn Tian, MBA

President & Co-Publisher
Business Link Media Group

Dear Readers,

It is with great pride and heartfelt gratitude that we present this edition of All in the Family magazine, a celebration of the enduring legacy of family businesses in the Niagara Region.

Family businesses are the backbone of our community, weaving together generations of hard work, resilience, and innovation. They are more than enterprises; they are stories of dreams turned into reality, of values passed down through time, and of a shared commitment to building a stronger, more vibrant Niagara.

In this issue, we shine a spotlight on the remarkable families who have dedicated themselves to their craft, their customers, and their communities. From the pioneers who laid the foundation decades ago to the next generation now taking the reins, their journeys are a testament to the power of perseverance, collaboration, and vision.

As we honor these legacies, we are reminded of the unique role family businesses play in shaping our region's identity. They create jobs, foster innovation, and, most importantly, nurture a sense of belonging and connection that makes Niagara such a special place to live and work.

We hope these stories inspire you, as they have inspired us, to appreciate the dedication and passion that drive family businesses forward. Let us continue to support and celebrate these pillars of our community, ensuring their legacies thrive for generations to come.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us.



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About Business Link Media Group



BUSINESS LINK
MEDIA GROUP

Established in 2003, Business Link Media Group began as a pioneering B2B publishing firm in Niagara, delivering business insights through traditional newspapers. As the business landscape evolved, so did we—transitioning from print to magazines and now embracing AI-driven digital formats, reflecting the changing ways audiences consume information.

Since 2019, under new ownership, Business Link has transformed into an innovative marketing solutions provider. Our initiatives include publishing magazines as NFTs (non-fungible tokens) on the EOS blockchain, hosting Metaverse events, and developing AI-powered tools like the Made in Niagara chat portal. By embracing advanced technologies, we've shown how a traditional business can adapt and thrive in the digital age.

We are also dedicated to empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with tailored digital solutions to enhance efficiency, automate processes, and improve customer experiences. At Business Link Media Group, we are driven by innovation, growth, and a commitment to helping businesses succeed in a rapidly changing digital world.

Our Journey: From Print to AI

A dark blue poster for the '2025 40 UNDER FORTY NIAGARA ALUMNI SUMMIT'. It features a large '40' and the text 'UNDER FORTY BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS'. The date 'TUESDAY 09/23/2025 12PM TO 5PM' is listed. A contact email '40u40@businesslinkmedia.com' is at the bottom.

BUSINESS LINK
2025 40 UNDER FORTY
NIAGARA ALUMNI SUMMIT
HONORING TWO DECADES OF LEADERSHIP

TUESDAY 09/23/2025 **12PM TO 5PM**

40
UNDER FORTY
BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

For more information, please contact
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A dark blue poster for the '22ND ANNUAL 40 UNDER FORTY NIAGARA BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS'. It features a large '40' and the text 'UNDER FORTY BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS'. The date '29 May, 2025' and location 'Holiday Inn & Suites, 327 Ontario St, St. Catharines' are listed. A call to action 'Reserve Your Seats at businesslinkmedia.com/niagara-40-under-forty' is at the bottom.

Business Link 22nd Annual Niagara
40 Under Forty Business Achievement Awards Ceremony

22ND ANNUAL
40
2025
Niagara
UNDER FORTY
BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Date:
29 May, 2025
Location:
Holiday Inn & Suites,
327 Ontario St, St. Catharines

Reserve Your Seats at
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» Back row (left to right): Caitlyn Sebesta, Carolyn Roy, Cathie Cretney, Elizabeth Williams, Melaina Gava-Barkhouse, Dave Riddell, Albert Gibson, Josee Gibson, Crystal Laurin, Kayleigh Peterson, Wendy Ware. Front row (left to right): Alexander Riddell, Krystal Riddell, William Riddell.

FAMILY HELPING FAMILY

The Story Behind Essentials Cremation and Burial Services Inc.

In June 2024, Krystal and Dave Riddell, alongside their family, sat in the audience at their son William's elementary school graduation. As William proudly walked across the stage, his teachers shared cherished memories of his school years and his aspirations for the future. With pride on his face, it was announced that he wanted to become a funeral director—following in the compassionate footsteps of his mother. This poignant moment resonated deeply with Krystal, a licensed funeral director since 2007, who has dedicated her life to a profession that serves others in their most vulnerable times.

In 2017, Krystal Riddell turned her lifelong dream into reality by founding Essentials Cremation and Burial Services Inc. on Drummond Rd. in Niagara Falls, and opened a second location in 2021 on Division St. in Welland. The grand opening of Essentials was a true family affair, marked by an extended family gathering to celebrate the ribbon-cutting ceremony. From the beginning, Krystal received unwavering support from her mother, Melaina Gava-Barkhouse, and her

husband, Dave Riddell. In 2023, Dave joined Essentials full-time, becoming an incredible teammate in both business and life. Melaina and Dave's contributions, dedication, and support have been crucial for the demanding nature of the business, which operates 24/7. The journey of entrepreneurship requires a strong support system built on encouragement and understanding.

Essentials' foundation was also nurtured by Krystal's extended family. From the outset, her aunts and uncles lent their hands in assembling furniture and advocating for the business by sharing posts on social media. Krystal's Uncle Angelo, a funeral director in British Columbia, has always inspired her, instilling the value of leading with compassion—a character trait deeply rooted in their family. The creation of Essentials was also made possible thanks to the Mowbray family (Dan and Aaron), whose support has been instrumental in realizing the Riddell family's dream of creating a business that truly serves the Niagara community.



Essentials is not just a business; it's a family. Krystal's team, consisting of funeral directors Kayleigh Peterson, Crystal Laurin, Josee Gibson, Wendy Ware, and support staff Cathie Cretney, Carolyn Roy, Caitlyn Sebesta, Rebecca Hagglund, Elizabeth Williams, and David Tyminski, has become an extension of her family. This all-female funeral directing team exemplifies the power of a women-led business, setting an inspiring example for aspiring entrepreneurs. Essentials aims to inspire other women to create their own family-owned businesses. The success of Essentials is a testament to the dedication of this incredible team, who tirelessly works to elevate the service they provide to the families who seek their assistance.

Essentials is built on a foundation of loyalty, commitment, and sacrifice—qualities inherent in any strong family. The business is deeply committed to giving back to the community by actively supporting local families through volunteer work and donations. They have contributed to organizations such as Bethlehem Housing and Support Services, supported Hospice Niagara's expansion into Welland by sponsoring the construction of two patios, and annually supported the Hike for Hospice and Taste. They are also proud sponsors of the newly built Ronald McDonald House at the Niagara Health System - St. Catharines Site. Krystal herself is an active Rotarian, taking pride in being part of the Rotary family.

Essentials' success is driven by its passion for providing valuable services that are caring, affordable, and innovative. This funeral home offers families a safe space where everyone is welcomed, with options ranging from simple cremations to unique and personalized celebrations of life. The team is also committed to promoting environmentally friendly death care options, such as green burials, recognizing their social responsibility towards future generations and sustainability within the funeral profession.

Essentials has proudly served families from diverse backgrounds, providing services that honour a wide range of cultures and faiths. Whether life celebrations, funerals, or memorials are held in the Niagara Falls or Welland locations of Essentials, churches, or more personalized settings like wineries, golf courses, museums, and halls, Krystal and her team support local businesses while providing tailored, meaningful experiences for families.

As a family-owned business, Essentials Cremation and Burial Services is deeply grateful to the families within the Niagara Region who have entrusted their team during their most difficult times. The experiences shared with these families continue to allow Essentials to grow not only as a business but also as an integral part of the community. It is this trust and support that have helped Essentials become a beacon of compassion and service in the Niagara Region, embodying the essence of family helping family.



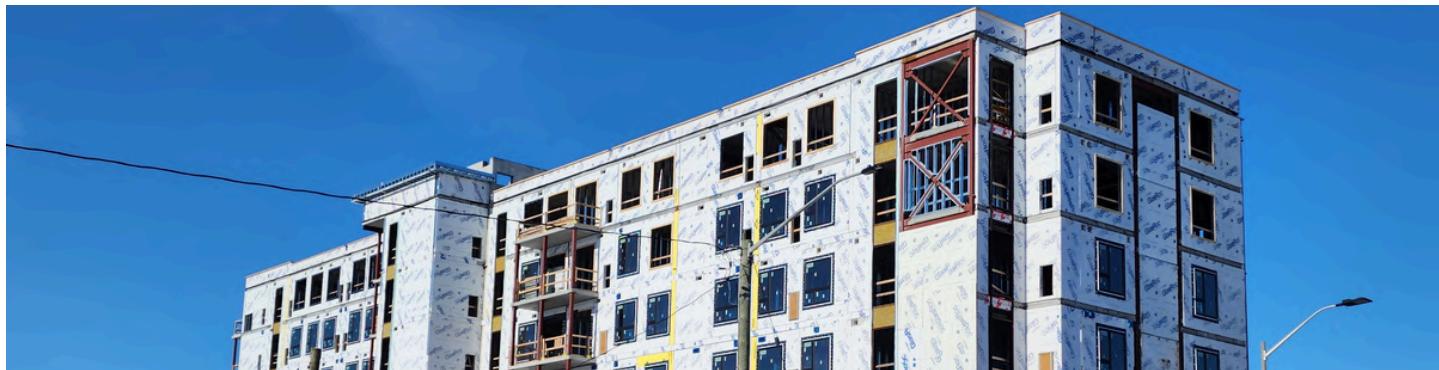
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221 Division Street Welland, ON L3B 4A1
Phone: (905) 734-1031

Website: EssentialsNiagara.com

BOARD BOSS DRYWALL

Building Dreams, Walls, and a Family Legacy



In the heart of Welland, Ontario, two purpose-built apartment buildings at 699 and 695 Niagara Street stand as a testament to affordable housing, community enhancement, and exceptional craftsmanship. Behind these 244 completed units lies the dedication of Board Boss Drywall, a family-run business that blends hard work, passion, and resilience to deliver excellence in drywall installation and finishing.

A Legacy Rooted in Community

Board Boss Drywall's role in this project extends beyond construction—it embodies a commitment to supporting the local community by addressing the need for accessible housing close to essential amenities. Every detail, from drywall installation to finishing, reflects the company's mission to create homes that enhance daily life while upholding the highest standards of quality.

The Couple Behind the Business

The story of Board Boss Drywall began with Steve and Kelly Frechette, whose shared journey from high school sweethearts to business partners has been driven by determination and collaboration. Steve, the eldest of four siblings, honed his skills in construction from a young age, inspired by working alongside his father. After climbing the ranks in the industry, he launched Board Boss Drywall seven years ago, shortly after the birth of their daughter, Raina.

Kelly brought her expertise in marketing, honed through her diploma from Niagara College, complementing

Steve's technical knowledge. Together, they navigated challenges like securing financing and earning the trust of contractors, finding their breakthrough with the Villa Serena project, which propelled them into the multi-unit residential market.

A Family Business at Its Core

At Board Boss Drywall, family is both the foundation and the driving force. Steve's sister, Sabrina, has become one of the company's top drywall tapers, earning recognition with the Excellence in Trades Award at the GNCC Women in Business Awards. Her husband, Jordan, serves as a trusted foreman, overseeing large-scale projects. Kelly's and Steve's siblings contribute to office operations, and even their daughters, Raina and Skyler, lend a hand with small tasks, instilling a sense of family pride in the business.



Kelly Frechette speaking at Aspire Business Event

Overcoming Challenges

Like any entrepreneurial venture, Board Boss Drywall has faced its share of obstacles. From navigating the disruptions of COVID-19 to weathering Canada's economic downturn and rising interest rates, the company has demonstrated remarkable adaptability. Through it all, their reputation for reliability and excellence has been their greatest asset, allowing them to thrive in challenging times.

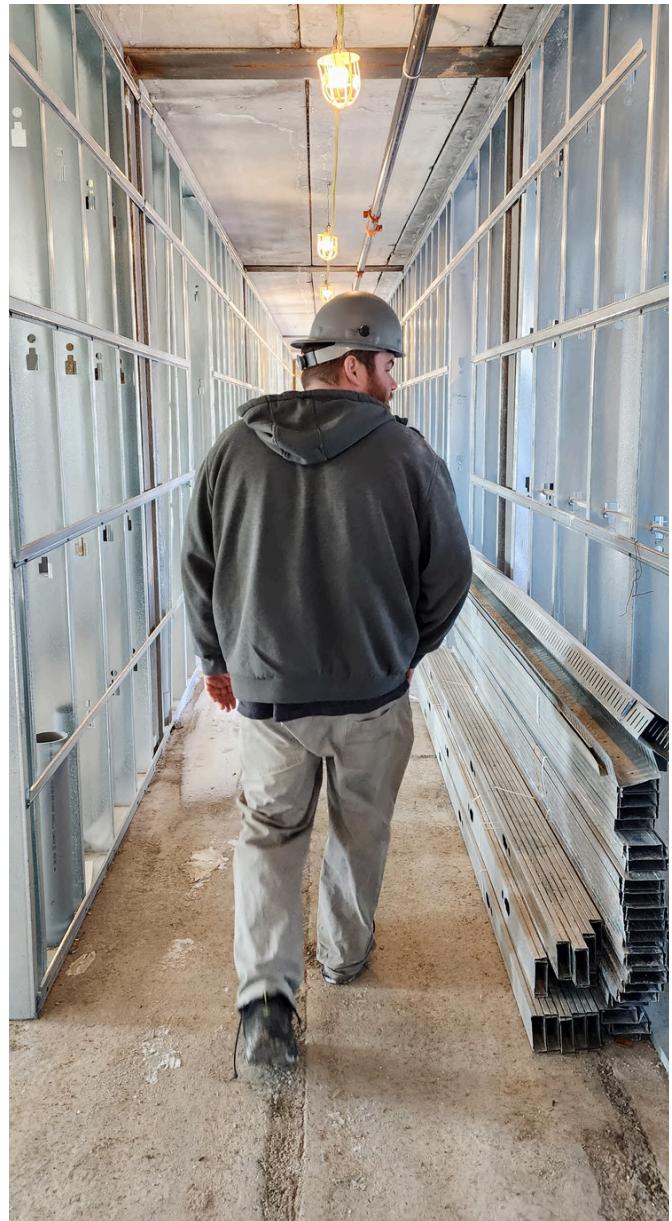
Looking to the Future

Steve and Kelly are focused on growth, seeking to expand their portfolio and explore emerging trends in construction. Their vision extends to building a business with robust systems and a strong reputation—one that can be passed down to their daughters, creating a lasting family legacy.

Beyond the drywall business, their commitment to community and industry development is unwavering. Steve serves on the Niagara Construction Association Board of Directors, while Kelly contributes through roles with the Council of Ontario Construction Associations and the NEXT Niagara Council. Together, they champion careers in trades, inspire future generations, and advocate for the importance of skilled labor in building vibrant communities.



Left to right, Steve Frechette, Kelly Frechette, Sabrina Brown and Jordan Brown



Building Beyond Walls

The story of Board Boss Drywall is one of love, resilience, and a steadfast commitment to quality. As they continue to shape homes and lives, Steve and Kelly's journey reminds us that success is built on the foundation of hard work, innovation, and family. Their legacy stands tall, not just in the walls they construct, but in the communities they uplift and the inspiration they provide for future generations.

CONTINUING A LEGACY

THE NITSOPoulos COUSINS AND THEIR FAMILY BUSINESS

In the bustling world of hospitality, few stories are as heartwarming and inspiring as that of the Nitsopoulos family. For over 50 years, this family has built a thriving business in the hospitality industry, marked by hard work, dedication, and a commitment to community. Today, the second generation—four cousins: Tom, Stelly, Adrian, and Nicholas are at the helm, ensuring that the legacy of their parents and grandparents continues to flourish.

A Journey from Childhood to Leadership

The journey of these four cousins began in childhood, immersed in the family business. Tom Nitsopoulos, General Manager of the Holiday Inn and Staybridge Suites, recalls, “My personal journey started when I was a child working for our family as a dishwasher, busboy, hostess, and server. Eventually, I moved into management.” Since returning to the family business in 2004, Tom has embraced the challenges and rewards of leading in hospitality.

Stelly Nitsopoulos shares a similar story. “I started working at the family restaurant every Saturday, bussing tables and hosting,” she recounts. “I never imagined I would work for the family business, but my dad encouraged me to help, and I discovered my passion for it.” Stelly has since managed various establishments, including Best Western, where she has thrived for nearly seven years.

Adrian Nitsopoulos, who initially sought a corporate career after graduating from Wilfrid Laurier University, felt the pull of family legacy. “I wanted to ensure the business continued after the first generation retired,” he explains. His commitment led him to build the Hampton Inn, a project that took two to three years to complete.



From left to right: Adrian Nitsopoulos, Tom Nitsopoulos, Stelly Nitsopoulos, and Nicholas Nitsopoulos

Nicholas Nitsopoulos offers a different perspective, having spent four years in Korea teaching English before joining the family business. “I’ve learned every aspect of the business, from housekeeping to front desk operations,” he shares, emphasizing the importance of understanding the entire operation.

The Motivation Behind Their Commitment

What drives these cousins to continue the family legacy? Tom reflects, “Our parents’ work ethic motivated us. They built everything with their hands, saving every dollar to create stability.” This foundational principle resonates deeply within the cousins, as they recognize the importance of hard work in achieving success.

Stelly adds, “The hospitality industry is unpredictable and exciting. Every day is different, and I love the challenge it brings.” She emphasizes the need for owners to be present and engaged, stating, “If you’re an owner, you need to be there. Your employees need to know that you’re putting in the effort and treating them with respect.”

Adrian highlights the balance they’ve learned between hands-on work and strategic management. “We’ve learned to appreciate the groundwork while also focusing on higher-level strategies like HR and accounting,” he explains. This balance ensures they respect the legacy while modernizing their approach.

Navigating Challenges Together

Transitioning from the first to the second generation comes with its challenges. Adrian notes, “The first generation had 50 years of success through teamwork and communication. We’ve learned to leave work at work and focus on solutions together.” The cousins emphasize the importance of open communication and collaboration, even when disagreements arise.

Stelly acknowledges, “We’re all different, but our strengths and weaknesses complement each other. We’ve learned to communicate effectively, which is essential for our success.”

Commitment to Community and Innovation

The Nitsopoulos cousins are not only committed to their family business but also to the communities they serve. “We’re quiet philanthropists,” Tom shares. “We support charities, hospitals, and local organizations without seeking recognition. Our focus is on giving back because it’s the right thing to do.” Their dedication to community engagement is reflected in their long-standing relationships with employees, many of whom have been with the family business for decades.

As they embrace modern challenges, the cousins are also keen on adapting to technological advancements. Adrian states, “Technology is changing rapidly, and we need to bring it into our business. We’ve invested in tools that enhance efficiency while ensuring we maintain the personal touch that defines our service.”



Back row: Tom Nitsopoulos, Nicholas Nitsopoulos, Adrian Nitsopoulos,
Front row: Stelly Nitsopoulos



From left to right: Tom Nitsopoulos, Stelly Nitsopoulos, Adrian Nitsopoulos, and Nicholas Nitsopoulos

Values for the Future

For the Nitsopoulos cousins, the essence of a "family-owned business" lies in prioritizing family above all. Nicholas emphasizes, "It is called a 'family-owned business' for a reason. The family part always comes first." This principle ensures that successful generational transitions occur when the family stays united, communicates openly, and collaborates effectively.

While different opinions are inevitable, they understand the importance of sticking together. "We can agree to disagree, but we have to remember we're family," Nicholas notes. Tom adds, "Our employees are essentially an extension of our family."

With several employees who have been with them for over 20 years, Stelly shares, "We rely on the senior staff to pass along family principles and values." This nurturing approach fosters a sense of belonging and pride, strengthening the organization and ensuring that the values of respect, loyalty, and collaboration are upheld as they move forward.

Advice for Future Generations

Reflecting on their journey, the cousins offer advice to other family businesses navigating similar transitions. "Hard work and dedication are non-negotiable," Tom states firmly. "If you're not ready to put in the effort, this isn't the path for you."

Adrian adds, "Patience and listening are critical. The first generation's knowledge is invaluable, and you need to find ways to leverage that wisdom while making your own mark." Stelly concludes, "Build a strong team. You can't do everything alone. Surround yourself with people who share your vision and values to create lasting success."

Conclusion

The Nitsopoulos cousins exemplify the strength of family ties in business. As they continue to build on their family's legacy, they remain committed to hard work, community engagement, and the values that have defined their journey. With a bright future ahead, they embody the spirit of collaboration, resilience, and dedication that will ensure their family business thrives for generations to come.



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MASTERING THE ART OF PRESENTATION

Best Practices for Preparation and Delivery

Delivering a presentation that captivates and influences your audience is both an art and a science. Whether you are presenting a business proposal, leading a strategy meeting, or speaking at a conference, meticulous preparation and engaging delivery are crucial. Here are some proven strategies to help you prepare and deliver impactful presentations, drawn from the principles outlined in Neil Thornton's teachings.

1. Know Your Audience

Understanding your audience is fundamental. Tailor your presentation style, language, and content to meet their expectations and needs. Different groups will have different preferences; for instance, a professional audience expects a different approach than a student audience. Your goal is to connect quickly and powerfully with your audience by addressing their specific interests and objectives.

2. Develop a Clear Structure

A well-organized presentation helps keep your audience engaged. Start with a compelling introduction that outlines the purpose and key points of your talk. Follow with a logically ordered body that expands on each point with supporting evidence, and conclude with a strong summary that reinforces your main messages. Remember to keep your slides clean and uncluttered, using modern graphics and minimal text to support your speaking points.

3. Practice Diaphragmatic Breathing

To manage nerves and maintain a calm, confident demeanor, practice diaphragmatic breathing before taking the stage. This involves breathing deeply through your nose and exhaling slowly through your mouth, which helps relax your diaphragm and prevent the physical symptoms of nervousness, such as a tight chest or rapid speech.

4. Use 3-Dimensional Speaking

Engage your audience with dynamic body language, vocal variety, and movement. Walk around the stage, use hand gestures to emphasize points, and vary your tone and pace to maintain interest. The concept of 3-dimensional speaking involves using your entire body and voice to create a memorable experience for your audience.

5. Incorporate Storytelling

People remember stories more than facts and figures. Weave relevant stories into your presentation to illustrate your points and make your message more relatable and memorable. Storytelling helps convey your passion and can significantly enhance audience engagement.

6. Prepare for Technical Issues

Expect and prepare for potential technical problems. Ensure you have all necessary equipment, such as a modern laptop, projector, wireless presentation tool, and backup copies of your presentation. Arrive early to test the setup and resolve any issues before your audience arrives.

7. Engage with the Audience

Interactive presentations are more impactful. Encourage audience participation through questions, discussions, and interactive activities. This not only keeps the audience engaged but also helps you gauge their understanding and interest in the topic. Use pauses effectively to give the audience time to absorb information and formulate questions.

8. Handle Q&A Sessions with Confidence

The question-and-answer period can significantly impact your presentation's success. Be prepared for questions, including challenging ones. Build rapport with your audience to encourage open and meaningful dialogue. Use silence strategically to give yourself time to think and to let your responses resonate with the audience.

9. Practice, Practice, Practice

Rehearse your presentation multiple times to build confidence and smooth out any rough spots. Practice without notes to ensure you are familiar with the content and can speak naturally. Recording your practice sessions and reviewing them can help identify areas for improvement.

10. Finish Strong

End your presentation on a high note. Summarize the key takeaways, reinforce your main messages, and leave the audience with a call to action or a thought-provoking conclusion. A powerful ending ensures your presentation is memorable and impactful.

By integrating these strategies into your preparation and delivery, you can enhance your presence, impact, and influence as a speaker. Remember, the key to a successful presentation lies in your ability to connect with and engage your audience, conveying your message with confidence and clarity.



Neil Thornton is the President of The Thornton Group and author of his new book '**Presence, Impact and Influence**', Neil brings 20 years of experience to business and management development, strategic planning, executive coaching, and team culture. A hands-on consultant, he's met clients everywhere from job sites to shop floors, boardrooms, remote teams and everywhere in between.

Neil is well known for his highly energetic, dynamic speaking style and in-depth knowledge on topics ranging from strategic execution to the new reality of business development, branding, speaker and leadership development, body language and communications.



>>> Neil Thornton, President of The Thornton Group

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE HOME

Life at Emerald Retirement Residence

Transitioning into retirement living or recovering from surgery can be a challenging experience for seniors and their families. Emerald Retirement Residence, a family-run establishment, is committed to providing a welcoming and supportive environment that fosters comfort, health, and connection. With a thoughtful balance of professional care and community spirit, Emerald stands out as a trusted choice for retirement living.

Living Accommodations and Thoughtful Design

Emerald Retirement Residence offers both independent and assisted living options, catering to a variety of lifestyles and needs. Each living space is carefully designed to ensure comfort and a sense of home. From personalized rooms to on-site amenities like gourmet dining, fitness facilities, and landscaped recreational areas, every detail reflects Emerald's dedication to enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

Fostering Community and Engagement

A strong sense of community lies at the heart of Emerald's philosophy. The residence offers a vibrant social calendar, including group fitness classes, movie nights, and holiday celebrations. Residents can also join clubs and interest groups, such as book clubs and gardening groups, providing opportunities to pursue hobbies and form lasting friendships.



Prioritizing Health and Safety

Emerald Retirement Residence places great emphasis on the well-being of its residents. With 24/7 on-site healthcare services, access to rehabilitation therapies, and state-of-the-art emergency response systems, families can feel reassured that their loved ones are in good hands. These measures ensure that health and safety remain a constant priority.

Specialized Care for Recovery

For those recovering from orthopedic surgery or other medical procedures, Emerald offers specialized respite care. This program provides a nurturing environment to aid recovery, featuring rehabilitation support, tailored therapy plans, and assistance with mobility. Residents enjoy chef-prepared meals designed to meet dietary needs and stress-free living through housekeeping and laundry services.

Discover Emerald Retirement Residence

Emerald Retirement Residence exemplifies the care and connection that family-run businesses can provide. Whether you're seeking a dynamic retirement community or a safe, supportive space for recovery, Emerald is ready to meet your needs.



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SERVING GENERATIONS

HOW FAR EAST RESTAURANT BECAME A FAMILY TRADITION IN NIAGARA FALLS

For over 50 years, the Far East Restaurant has been a beloved cornerstone of the Niagara Falls community. Established in 1972 by Henry, Kam, and their son Paul Fong, the restaurant stands as a proud testament to the enduring values of hard work, dedication, and the spirit of family.

From Hong Kong to Niagara Falls

Henry, Kam, and their son Paul Fong's story began in Hong Kong, where they laid the foundation for a life built on resilience and ambition. In 1966, the family immigrated to Canada in search of new opportunities. Thanks to a recommendation from Paul's uncle, they were fortunate to establish the Far East Restaurant in Niagara Falls. Drawn by the region's small-town charm and promising opportunities, the Fongs made Niagara Falls their home, where their restaurant would become a cherished community staple.

"We didn't have much choice except to work hard," Paul explains. "At that time, it was difficult to compete with others in different trades, so we focused on running a restaurant."

Paul's wife, Leonor, joined the business after their marriage in 1974. Originally from the United States, Leonor had plans to pursue higher education, but the needs of the family business took priority. "They needed help right away," she recalls. "I came in, and I'm still here after 53 years."

Challenges and Milestones

The restaurant faced its share of challenges, from labor shortages to evolving customer preferences. One of its biggest milestones came in 1988 when the family expanded the restaurant, doubling its size to meet growing demand.

"At that time, Chinese food was very popular," Paul says. "We expanded the building and added a dining room, which allowed us to serve more customers and grow the business."



Over the years, the restaurant has become a place of nostalgia for many. Leonor shares the story of a customer who has been visiting since he was a child with his parents and grandparents. “It’s incredible to see families spanning three or four generations still coming to us,” she says.

Adapting While Staying True to Tradition

Originally offering a mix of Chinese and Canadian dishes, the Far East Restaurant later embraced authentic Cantonese cuisine, featuring classics like Chow Mein, Chicken Balls, and Fried Rice.

Despite the growing popularity of other Asian cuisines, the restaurant has stayed true to its roots. The pandemic brought new challenges, forcing the business to transition from full-service dining to takeout-only, but the Far East Restaurant remains committed to serving the community with the same dedication and tradition.

A Lasting Legacy

The success of the Far East Restaurant is deeply rooted in the family’s sacrifices. For decades, Paul and Leonor worked long hours, often at the expense of family time. “We’ve sacrificed a lot,” Paul admits. “For the first 40 years, we never went anywhere together as a family.”

The restaurant has also been recognized as the #1 Chinese restaurant in Niagara Falls for over 20 consecutive years by the Reader’s Choice Awards. “We are very grateful for the support from our customers,” Leonor says.

As Paul and Leonor approach retirement, they are considering the future of the restaurant. While their children have chosen different career paths, the couple remains proud of the legacy they’ve built.

“Running a successful business is about being honest, kind, and committed—not just to your work, but to your community and the people around you,” Paul says. “We were fortunate to have a long-standing staff for many years,” Leonor added.

Despite facing new challenges, the Fong family has successfully run their business for over 50 years through dedication and hard work.



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**遠東 FAR EAST
CHINESE RESTAURANT**



THRIVING THROUGH CHANGE

How Niagara's Family Businesses Can Adapt to Tech Disruption

The Niagara region boasts a vibrant array of family-run businesses, from world-renowned wineries to boutique shops and hospitality ventures. While steeped in tradition, these enterprises are increasingly embracing technological advancements to thrive in today's rapidly changing economy.

➡ ENHANCING OPERATIONS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Family businesses in Niagara are leveraging digital tools to streamline processes and boost efficiency. From automated inventory management to cloud-based financial systems, these solutions reduce manual labor and provide real-time insights into operations. For wineries and breweries, digital logistics platforms optimize the supply chain, ensuring products reach customers with greater efficiency and precision.

In the tourism and hospitality sectors, local businesses are integrating booking platforms and customer relationship management (CRM) tools, enabling them to offer personalized experiences that attract repeat customers. These tools also provide actionable insights into consumer preferences, empowering business owners to adapt their offerings effectively.

➡ ADAPTING LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

Niagara's status as both a local hub and an international tourist destination presents unique opportunities for family businesses. Embracing e-commerce platforms allows these enterprises to connect with global audiences while preserving their local roots. For example, wineries can ship their products worldwide, leveraging digital marketing to showcase their brand stories to international wine enthusiasts.

Mobile-friendly platforms and remote work tools also offer flexibility for managing operations, particularly for businesses that serve both local and global markets. This adaptability ensures they can respond effectively to changing consumer behaviors and market demands.

SECURING LEGACY THROUGH INNOVATION

Generational family businesses face unique challenges, particularly in succession planning and information management. By adopting digital systems, families can centralize documentation, streamline communication, and maintain continuity during transitions. Cybersecurity measures, too, are becoming a priority to protect sensitive business data in an increasingly digital world.

Niagara businesses also benefit from tools that enhance workforce management, enabling owners to attract and retain talent while maintaining the familial culture that defines their identity.



BALANCING INNOVATION AND TRADITION

Niagara's family businesses excel in blending modern tools with their core values. By incorporating technology into their operations, they can stay competitive without losing sight of the personal touch and customer relationships that have been their hallmark for generations. For instance, adopting digital point-of-sale systems improves customer experiences while maintaining the charm of a family-owned establishment.



EMBRACING THE FUTURE

As technology continues to evolve, Niagara's family businesses have the opportunity to transform disruption into growth. By investing in innovation while staying true to their heritage, they can ensure their legacies remain strong for generations to come. The Niagara region, with its entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to excellence, is well-positioned to lead the way in adapting to this new era.

50 YEARS OF UNDERWATER EXCELLENCE

In May of 2024 Dan's Dive Shop celebrated its 50th anniversary. Starting their journey in 1974 Dan and Karen Mandziuk were excited to write their first bestseller in a relatively eventful chapter to their story.

Dan had always loved the water and scuba diving was the one thing that occupied his mind, as he dreamed of the next trip and underwater adventure that would happen upon him.

As the shop started to grow and succeed, the dive life became a wonderful way to see the world and explore above and below this beautiful planet.

In the 1990's, their son Matt started working in the company and took the helm officially in 2012 and has elevated the status of the shop from a small regional store in Niagara to one of the largest dive stores in North America.

Teaching scuba diving and introducing new students to the underwater world was the most gratifying thing that they'd ever experienced, so Dan's marched forward into the future of introducing the magical world of scuba diving to a wide audience of people from all walks of life.



From left to right, Karen, Matt, and Dan Mandziuk.

As the years started to mount up, they've certified several generations of scuba divers, bringing the most modern diving practices and equipment configurations for recreational, cave and technical diving activities.

When asked about the biggest changes in the sport, the biggest things that they've seen change are the technologies, as dive computers are now common practice instead of plastic dive tables that had to manually be calculated to determine safe dive times, underwater lighting as the LED lights have revolutionized the underwater world with their compact sizes and battery technologies versus diving with old lead acid batteries and halogen lamps, how the sport has become more accessible to the masses instead of a select few people fit enough to learn to scuba dive, how expedition diving on deeper walls, shipwrecks and inside caves has now a lot more acceptable than in decades past and the personal choices in the equipment versus back in the day when all the equipment was just basic black.

Scuba Diving has become safer, as the equipment has improved and the increased focus on safety and comfort have really made scuba diving one of the safest sports in the world and Dan's prides themselves on helping lead the way for over 50 years.

CONNECTING BUSINESSES, DRIVING INNOVATION

Discover a suite of solutions designed to elevate your brand, engage your audience, and drive growth.

AI Solutions



Enhance customer experiences with our AI tools. The AI Chat Portal offers seamless 24/7 interactions, while AI Food Ordering Systems transform dining experiences. Discover custom solutions like business directories and automation tools tailored to your needs.

Digital Marketing



Expand your reach with tailored solutions. Our Digital Marketing services include social media management, targeted ad campaigns, SEO, content marketing, publication strategies, and website/data management—boosting your online presence and delivering measurable results.



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