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**A 'Carefree' way of doing business; How to brew up long-term success in business world**

Family values drive this successful coffee company

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Jim Muldoon Jr. and his brother Shaun think people love them for their coffee. The truth is, it's likely the pair's clever Scottish wit, old-fashioned handshake-style customer service and refreshing passion for quality has office managers across southern Ontario coming back for more.

While their beans may be top of the line, causing heads to pop out of cubicles by the dozen when a pot is brewed, it seems the Muldoon family's old-world approach to business is really what's helped Mississauga's Carefree Coffee make its mark on the office coffee business map.

"Jim and me are a touch psychotic when it comes to the quality of coffee," said 34-year-old Shaun, with his still-strong Scottish brogue.

The company serves offices from 30 to 1,200 employees, providing everything from the coffee pots, their premium beans and stir sticks, to a service person to make sure everything runs smoothly.

Customers include Daimler Chrysler headquarters, Mercedes Benz and many other Fortune 500 companies.

Carefree Coffee has never really advertised, with the pair instead opting to simply approach the clients they want in person.

"We always go for the customers we want," said Shaun. "We're not always the cheapest, but we're the best quality."

To ensure their product's quality, the company buys its coffee beans directly from Montreal in large burlap bags, then roasts them on their premises on Timberlea Boulevard.

The roots of the company go back to a town just outside Glasgow, Scotland where Jim Muldoon Sr. started a vending company in 1974. The family relocated to Toronto during the tumultuous economic times of the late 1980s. The company continued as a mainly vending firm until 1991, when they decided to focus on coffee.

"My brother and I were in a Yorkville coffee club called the Coffee Chemist one day when we got the inspiration to make better coffee," said Shaun, who runs the day-to-day operations of



Clockwise: Jim Muldoon Jr., brother Shaun and father Jim Sr. only import the best product for their customers' coffee needs.

Photo by Stephen Uhraney



Photo by

Rick Drennan

Something political was brewing at Carefree Coffee in Mississauga recently when Nova Scotia MP, and candidate for the Federal Progressive Conservative leadership, Peter MacKay (back left) dropped into town to speak to a group of Brampton and Mississauga business leaders. Joining in the celebrations were (from left), Shaun Muldoon, Jim Sr., and MacKay. (From right) Maureen Muldoon, former Ontario premier Bill Davis and Jim Muldoon Jr.

the business. "We began researching it and slowly built up a roastery."

Carefree Coffee actually started in Jim's basement with six plastic coffee machines, Shaun said.

Today, the company employs 24 full-time workers, including the pair's mother, sister and wives. It has enjoyed double-digit growth every year.

To make sure the family knew what they were doing, Jim Jr., 37, who heads up the company's sales, went to the United States to train in the art of coffee roasting. "Most companies buy their office coffee the same way they buy the paper clips," said Jim Jr. "That's why when you go into many offices, the coffee just tastes abominable. But when I go in there, the whole office of people will go about saying, 'what's that great smell?'"

Most office coffee companies buy their beans from companies that roast tons of beans a day, which affects the quality, Jim Jr. said. But by cutting out the middle man and roasting themselves, the Muldoons save their customers money while controlling the quality of their product. "We're a small batch roaster," he said. "We're roasting 50 pounds of coffee at a time. We're like a micro brewery."

Jim Jr. uses a boat analogy to describe how their size is their advantage. "Our blood, sweat and tears go into this company," he said. "While the bigger companies are like the Queen Mary, we're the wee tug boat, so we can spin in circles around them."

Carefree Coffee's competition can blame the increase in popularity of coffee houses like Timothy's and Second Cup for this new demand in quality office coffee, Jim Jr. said. "People now know what good coffee is," he said.

Since the company began 12 years ago it has been growing "very, very" quickly, he said. "And we've done all this without any help," he said. "We've literally gone door to door to get one customer at a time."

Another key to the company's success has been their passion for making their customers happy, at whatever cost. "We rarely, rarely lose a customer," Jim Jr. said. "We just plain refuse to have it. Where would you go?"

The wave of the future in office coffee is the one-cup machine. "My nickname is Jimmy One-cup," said the eldest son. "That's the future, the one-cup machine. There is a major problem with people leaving a pot on the machine. The one-cup machine is a way to protect the coffee from people abusing it."

The company doesn't limit itself to just coffee and coffee supplies either. They also offer their clients everything from bottled water to water filtration machines to snacks. "It seemed like the logical thing to do," said Jim Jr. "It's one-stop shopping."

Jim Muldoon Sr., 63, remains an advisor to his sons in the business, but spends most of his time these days in the back rooms of the political world in Brampton, most recently heading up fundraising efforts for PC leadership hopeful Peter MacKay.

Recently, MacKay was invited to the Mississauga offices to meet and greet some of the top business leaders from Brampton and Mississauga. That group included former Ontario premier William Davis, a good friend of Jim Sr.

The Muldoons are longtime residents of Brampton.

Looking back on his move to Canada, Muldoon said with Britain's economy grinding to a halt under the worker strikes in the 1980s, he felt his family and his company needed a new start.

Originally, the Muldoons headed for the United States, but Jim Sr. soon found it wasn't the right fit for his family. "But travelling back through Toronto, I just fell in love with the country," he said.



He and his sons now credit Canada with offering them the opportunities needed to build such a successful company.

"I think you actually have to be from somewhere else to really appreciate it," said Shaun. "When you come here it's like a breath of fresh air."

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