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## the **WASH-word**

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www.canadiancarwash.ca



Car wash owner/operator *Candy Motkoski* and her husband, *Rod*, recently added a Shell cardlock commercial refueling operation to their three-bay *Motco Truck Wash*, which they built 10 years ago in Edson, Alberta.

## Female car wash owners find rewards

### Four Canadians talk about the joys of running their businesses

by Karen Dalton

**C**andy Motkoski has been a car wash owner/operator for the past 10 years and a member of the CCA for 18 months. She opened Motco Truck Wash in Edson, AB, in 1995. "There was no truck wash in Edson at that time," said Motkoski, "so we built a self-serve tractor trailer truck and RV wash with two 100-foot bays and expanded to three bays the next year." Three years later, her husband, Rod, became involved in the business full-time, and in 2001 they added a c-store.

Expanding and diversifying the family

business has both Candy and Rod very busy, not to mention raising two small children. In addition to the car wash operations, the Motkoskis opened a three-island commercial refueling Shell cardlock facility in November 2004, which had been in the works for the past five years. "We put together a strong business plan. We stuck to it and we're very proud of our accomplishment," said Motkoski.

"My biggest challenge in the beginning was learning the car wash business, the trucking business and bookkeeping all at once," Motkoski added. Today the challenge is keeping staff. "No one wants to work, and it's not related to age or wages." Candy learned about the insurance discount available to CCA members and joined in September 2003. "The savings in insurance premiums is amazing. We're paying less than half of what we used to pay."

"In this business, you have to work hard, be fully committed and willing to sacrifice. However, it's rewarding and the hard work pays off."

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### **CINDY TURCHANSKI**

In 1999, Cindy Turchanski was between positions when family friend and future business partner, Daryll Hosker, called with the idea of investigating a local car wash operation. With experience as a travel franchise owner, she and husband Dave, along with Daryll, purchased Mic Suds Car & Truck Wash in Fort St. John, BC, located five hours north of Prince George on the Alaskan highway. The 10-bay, self-serve wash is located in a building that can handle vehicles up to the size of cube vans, but not large trailers or RVs. The time ticket wash includes wash, wax, high pressure rinse, pre-soak, foam brush, spot-free rinse, vacuums and blow dryers. "When it's 30 below in the winter, it's very helpful to be able to dry the door locks so they don't freeze the minute you leave the car wash," noted Turchanski.

"Our busiest times are spring and fall when it's extremely muddy. The one-tonne trucks working in the oil patch can stay in for an hour to clean off the mud. Our staff clean each bay after every customer."

Operating seven days a week, 13 hours per day creates a staffing challenge for Cindy. "Getting the right people to work with us is often difficult. We employ high school students, and it's usually their first or second job. I rely on Evelyn Peterson along with a staff of 10 to operate the business with me."

At first the challenge was learning the business, equipment breakdowns and repairs, but after five years in the business Cindy has gained experience. "I feel good that if something goes wrong or breaks we can fix it quickly and keep the customers happy. If a quick fix isn't possible, I have a handyman on call.

"We pride ourselves in having the

cleanest car wash in town, so the customers keep coming back. We have a lot of repeat clientele and our focus is on customer service."

Cindy joined the CCA in January 2002 to establish a network of contacts with other car wash owners and equipment suppliers. "As independent operators we can learn from each other, and we rely on our suppliers to help us offer our customers the best service and products we can."

### **NADIA BATTISTA**

Twelve years ago, Nadia Battista bought Eglinton Car Wash in Toronto, ON as an investment property and joined the CCA the year after. Nadia oversees the business, which includes a tire shop, a True Value full-service gas station and car wash. The drive-through tunnel car wash operates seven days a week with a staff of six to 10 to handle detailing and drying. She employs a manager who is responsible for the day-to-day operation.

A challenge for Nadia is maintaining a good return on her investment. "The weather is always a challenge for our business," noted Battista, "however keeping the customers satisfied and maintaining the equipment are also important aspects of managing the operation."

Marketing is important to success, and Nadia is always trying to increase her car wash business. She offers specials, discounts and incentives for off-peak hours and cross-promotion with the gas station.

Future plans for Battista include adding three or four self-serve bays to the existing detailing car wash. While Battista admits that the car wash business can be difficult at times with variables such as weather, staffing and equipment breakdowns, but she concedes that it can be lucrative as well.

Joining the association allowed Nadia to take advantage of the insurance program and to keep updated on the car wash industry.

### **DIANNE BACIK**

In 2002, Dianne Bacik and her husband, Ed, formed a partnership with her employer, Hill Radford, and his wife, Dawn, to invest in and operate Regina Car Wash Inc., a self-serve eight-bay car wash in Regina, SK. The enclosed, heated time-based car wash is run by Ed, a journeyman plumber and pipe fitter, along with a small staff. Dianne, who works part-time in a financial services office, is the accounting manager for the car wash.

Growing the business is the biggest challenge right now, admits Bacik. "We are developing marketing plans to increase our customer base. We approach people personally and invite them to come to the car wash, and we offer complementary wash tickets and advertise in a local newsletter. We also get referrals from our customers, and you can't get any better than that."

Customer service is very important to Bacik. "We provide an ultra-clean facility, proper working equipment, discount cards, terry towels to dry the cars, complementary coffee, and it's not unusual to see us helping a customer wash and dry their car. It's a very social business, and we've formed relationships with people, which is an aspect of the business we didn't expect.

"Right now, we're focusing on setting a solid foundation to grow the business, and we hope to run it into our retirement," said Bacik. Keep a positive attitude and take one day at a time is Dianne's advice. Treat your staff the way you want to be treated are also words of wisdom.

**OCTANE**