

OLS celebrates opening of Pembroke 2 facility in true fashion

By Gerald Tracey
News Editor

Pembroke -- It's often been said Renfrew County and Atlantic Canada have a lot in common and these similarities played a key role in attracting a PEI-based company to locate in Pembroke and become the county's largest private employer.

OLS (On Line Support) celebrated the official opening of its second Pembroke location last Thursday with a variety of events ranging from children's activities and games, to a dunk tank featuring political and business personalities to a lobster-eating contest.

All of the events took place in the large parking lot at the former Eddy Match plant on Pembroke Street West. OLS is occupying 30,000 square feet in the 100,000 square-foot plus plant which is owned by Pembroke businessmen Dan Beaud and Pat Sandreli. OLS company officials refer to the facility as Pembroke II. Pembroke I, the first operation established in the city three years ago, is located in space in the nearby West End Mall.

"Both of them are beautiful facilities but at the end of the day we can all build beautiful facilities, but what really makes the facility are the people who work within it," said OLS president Ross Beattie. "That's what gives it a personality and a character."

Mr. Beattie said he is very positive about the Pembroke locations.

"Every time I come to visit, it reminds me of home," he continued. "It reminds me of the east coast."

When he and company executive vice-president and personnel officer Kent MacPhee made their first trip to Pembroke almost three years ago, he eventually asked Mr. MacPhee just where it was they were going, he told those gathered.

"We come from Atlantic Canada and I know there are some long trips, but tell me when we are going to get there," he recalls thinking then. "Anyway, when we got here and as soon as we started driving into the community I just looked at Kent and I said, 'Kent, I don't know, we haven't even met anybody, but I have a feel and I think this is it.'"

At that time OLS was looking at six other locations across Canada to expand its operations. Mr. Beattie said when he and Mr. MacPhee met with Mayor Ed Jacyno and his team and representatives from Petawawa, they all represented the community with dignity, grace and honour.

"And at the end of the day, that's why we chose to come here," he said. "We'd rather say we didn't choose to come to Pembroke, we both chose to get together and we'd like to believe that the community of Pembroke and OLS decided together that we could make something of this to make a go of it."

"And I'll tell you, today it is a win-win and anything you have a business venture, the most important thing is to try and strike a win-win."

Seeking An Additional 230 Employees -- Immediately
There are currently in excess of 500 people working in the two OLS locations in Pembroke. Mr. Beattie announced Thursday night the company is seeking to hire an additional 230 people immediately.

A native of a small Atlantic Canada community of 200 people and raised on a farm, Mr. Beattie told guests he moved to Halifax many years ago.

"And every time I come up here, I love the community feel and that's where we get the best employees."

"Some of the values that we still hold true to are still held true in smaller communities that we typically don't find in urban centres," he said. "I come from Halifax and I can

speak to that. It's where we live but it's not always a great place to raise a family with all of the hustle and bustle of the things that go in the larger centres."

"You have something very magical here. There is something very special and I am glad that no one else found it before us, in our particular industry. We look at it like we are the winners here."

Mr. Beattie said his firm is delighted with the calibre of people working for OLS in Pembroke.

He said a lot of people worked to organize Thursday's festivities, but said the person behind the whole effort was Kent MacPhee.

"He is our ambassador. He's our chief personnel officer in the company and rightfully so he is all of those people. And that's what we do. We don't manufacture equipment, we don't manufacture widgets. We manufacture people and we build skill sets so that those people can help other people."

"And our businesses really boils down to this, it's people helping people," he said.

Mr. Beattie said OLS started in Charlottetown about 10 years ago with 20 people. Today, OLS has the biggest brand name corporations in North America as clients.

"It's not about the buildings we put up, it's not about us and our management teams, it's about the people who come to work for us who make the difference each and every day."

And that's where the buck stops. Right there. Mr. Beattie said Thursday was a day for OLS employees and visitors to see the operation, who they are and what they do.

"And to also show you that who we are is you. Every person you met here today, excluding a few of us, are all from here."

He said many local people have escalated into management roles over a year period.

"Today, we have an open order for an additional 230 people that if they showed up tomorrow we'd be able to hire tomorrow between these two facilities."

Mr. Beattie said OLS will get as big in the Pembroke community as the community allows it to.

"We are not going to try to push the limit on what the local area can support, but we have taken on this facility here and this was very strategic why we did," he explained. "Today we have 30,000 square feet in here. We have access to over 100,000 square feet."

Mr. Beattie said the landlords have been very co-operative to work with saying OLS would continue to expand in the facility, but that the community would dictate how large the company would grow here.

"We will respond to that accordingly," he said. Mr. Beattie also praised the leadership of elected officials saying they represent the community very well.

"We do this across Canada so we have experience of being able to speak to that in working with other regions. You have some very excellent leaders in this community."

"So this is a partnership between On Line Support and the Ottawa Valley, Pembroke area, Petawawa." Fred Blackstein of Pembroke was master of ceremonies for the day's activities and official opening. As a member of a local transition team that worked to help OLS set up in the city, he said the company has brought good jobs to the community and has fulfilled all of the hopes and expectations of being great corporate employers.

He said he was proud to be part of the new operation and proud to call OLS the community's friends.

A year ago, Mr. Blackstein said the building sat empty and it sat empty for several years before that after the closing of operations by the Eddy Match Company.

"And then with the entrepreneurial spirit and a certain amount of risk taking, a couple of people in our community (Mr. Beaud and Mr. Sandreli) took the gamble and worked with all concerned, primarily On Line Support to have this building turned into what it is today," he said.

Pembroke Mayor Ed Jacyno, dressed in typical Atlantic fisherman attire, said that thanks to OLS and the building's owners, all who had faith in the community, there are many people working.

"The important part is that people have to make a living so that they can support their families and contribute to society," Mayor Jacyno said. "If it wasn't for the wonderful folks of On Line Support, we wouldn't have this wonderful facility in our community."

He said that many communities surrounding the city were benefiting from OLS's decision to locate there.

Renfrew County Warden and Petawawa Mayor Bob Sweet said it was marvellous to see the large vacant plant put to use again and see all of the employees that are earning good money at OLS. He also praised the efforts of the local transition team in working with OLS during the period it was establishing its Pembroke facilities.

Lt. Colonel Dave Rundle of CFB Petawawa said the changes to the former Eddy Match plant were quite impressive.

"I congratulate you on everything you have done to make this facility what it is," he said. "I also would like to

acknowledge which has been alluded to the employment opportunities that have been presented by OLS operating in Pembroke, and certainly creating job opportunities for the spouses on the base."

Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MPP John Yakabuski said the word "community" was right, front and centre with the way the company operates. Lamenting at the success of the events held in conjunction with the official opening of Pembroke 2, Mr. Yakabuski said such an opening could be only be done with employees who are co-operative, enjoying the work they do for the company and recognizing that the company they are working for values them.

"The City of Pembroke values OLS, OLS values their employees and the county values OLS," he said. Mr. Yakabuski thanked Mr. Beattie and Mr. MacPhee for making Pembroke their choice for its expansion.

"We all know how important the jobs are," he said. "I want to congratulate Mayor Ed Jacyno and the City of Pembroke. I know how hard they worked. I know how hard they worked to ensure that they put forth the best possible case they could to attract OLS."

Mr. Yakabuski said OLS was a great benefit to the city, county, and the families earning their living at OLS.

"I am looking forward to more growth from this company," he said. "They are a wonderful company that espouses all the best that we can think of in Canadian corporations."