

CSSD Client Spotlight – Dwight Thornton



Dwight Thornton



As the co-owner of Fiddlehead Heaven Forest Products, Dwight Thornton of Windsor, New Brunswick, feels very fortunate. His work allows him to do what he loves best—spending plenty of time outdoors.

Dwight worked as an arboriculturalist—or tree doctor—from 1971 until 1996 when he fell 52 feet from a tree in Squamish, BC, and seriously injured his left arm. He knew then that his career as an arborist was over. This “life-altering” incident certainly provided a “moment of revelation,” recalls Dwight, and got him thinking about another career—one that didn’t involve “free falling!”

After a long recovery and a stint working part-time as a landfill attendant, Dwight began longing to work outdoors again. After moving to Britannia Beach, BC, in 1997 he met Betty Shore of Betty’s Best Mushrooms, who introduced him to the world of commercial mushroom harvesting. Dwight, a mushroom enthusiast himself, was so intrigued by the process that in 2000 he decided to go into business for himself. He called his new business Mountain Harvest Wild Botanical Products.

From northern British Columbia and the Queen Charlotte Islands to Alaska and

northern Saskatchewan, Dwight travelled extensively as a mushroom harvester and buying agent for large specialty food distributors. In addition to buying and selling mushrooms, Dwight harvested other wild floral botanicals such as boxwood and salal for the floral industry and even created wreaths and garlands for nurseries during the Christmas season.

After several years in BC, Dwight developed severe arthritis in both knees. In 2006 he returned home to New Brunswick where he underwent knee replacement surgery. In 2008, after recuperating from his surgery, Dwight opened Fiddlehead Heaven Forest Products at www.fiddleheadheaven.com, which is now in its second year of operation.

In order to plan and assess the future direction of his business, Dwight enrolled in the Business Abilities program. Interestingly, it was his experience in Business Abilities that inspired him to begin writing a book, which he plans to call *Hunting and Cooking with Atlantic Canada’s Finest Wild Gourmet Mushrooms*. Once completed, the book will feature information about four species of mushrooms—the Chanterelle, the Lobster, the Hedgehog, and the King Boletus edulis or Porcini—along with recipes from Atlantic Canada’s top chefs.

Recently, while presenting a workshop on harvesting edible plants to the New Brunswick Maliseet First Nation, Dwight found that he really enjoyed teaching. He was struck by the enthusiasm of the group and realized this could be a profitable new direction. As a true entrepreneur, Dwight never misses an opportunity and now has yet another project in the works. Along with his

brother, who owns a New Brunswick hunting lodge, Dwight plans to open a mushroom harvesting and preparation school. Their vision is to convert the lodge into a training centre during the mushroom hunting season. When the school opens it will be the first of its kind in Canada.

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Of his interest in mushrooms, Dwight says, “People’s hobbies are usually what they truly love to do. If you can turn a hobby into a business then you have a foundation for success. Build on it and add value to what you already know.” Dwight’s advice for others is simple. “Stay with what you know,” he says. As someone who really knows mushrooms and fiddleheads, this philosophy seems to be working well for Dwight. The sky really is the limit when you open your mind to the possibilities.

Update – November 2012

Dwight Thornton’s enthusiasm for his business is contagious, and to say he has been busy since we originally published his story in May 2010 would be an understatement. One notable development is Dwight’s impressive new website, designed by another Business Abilities and IBDE graduate, Carol-Ann Larocque: www.fiddleheadheaven.com.

Here site visitors can purchase fiddleheads and a variety of wild mushrooms. They can also sign up for Dwight’s Mushroom Hunting School,

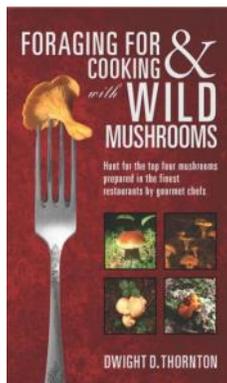
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We like to feature your business ventures whenever we can, and we are always looking for stories from past and present participants, about their business ideas, successes, triumphs, and challenges.

**Anyone can submit an article. Please send them to: newsletter@cssd-web.org
(Please include a photo if you can.)**

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now in its fourth season. This is the first and only school of its kind in North America!



Dwight's goal to publish a book is steadily materializing, and the expected release is slated for the spring or summer of 2013.

This book, entitled *Foraging for & Cooking with Wild Mushrooms*, has

received positive reviews from our own Business Abilities coach, Douglas Tardif, and Chef Michael Smith (host of Chef Abroad, Chef at Home, and others, on the Food Network).

Recently, Dwight purchased Northway Outfitters, a hunting and guiding business, soon to be named Northway Outfitters Adventure Centre with additional service offerings. In the near future, look for Dwight to be offering outdoor pursuits including ATV trail rides, river tubing, and backcountry biking in addition to his mushroom business. It sounds like

an exciting time for Dwight, and we can't wait to see where life takes him next!

Need advice? Dwight always enjoys the opportunity to provide expertise and training to others in the art of buying mushrooms.

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Carol-Ann Larocque's website:

www.calarocque.ca