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Money – Small Business

Four firms create 100 jobs

By NORMAN DE BONO, The London Free Press



Tony Studer, of Studer's Holdings, Linda Dawson, of Distributel Communications Ltd., and Joe Malec, of London Eco-Roof, toast the announcement of their firms establishing themselves in London following a press conference at the London Convention Centre Thursday. (MORRIS LAMONT, The London Free Press)

A lot of little fish can make for a fine meal.

London has landed four small businesses, but they will combine to bring about 100 jobs and \$7.5 million in investment to the city.

"It is a very diverse group of companies and they also offer great growth opportunities, they will continue to expand in London and open up markets across Ontario and North America," Peter White, chief executive of the London Economic Development Corp., said Thursday.

Mayor Ann Marie DeCicco-Best also cheered the news, saying the four businesses offer jobs in agri-food, manufacturing and information technology areas.

"What makes this even more impressive are the sectors represented. We believe we have to move forward, post-

recession and look at where we have our greatest strengths," she said during a press conference at the London Convention Centre.

"It shows our city there is great confidence here."

The news comes amid mixed economic news for the city. Last month London also landed a new, Norwegian defence manufacturer, Kongsberg, which will create 100 jobs when it begins production next year.

However, this week it was also announced Masco, and its 287 jobs, will leave London for St. Thomas.

The new businesses are:

London Eco-Roof

The business will manufacture metal roofs in London at the end of this month, employing about 15 people in manufacturing and 30 installers to start. The company has had a sales office here for about one year while the product is manufactured in Poland, but this plant will sell the metal roofs in Ontario and the U.S. It will open a 5,500 sq. ft. facility on Neptune Crescent.

"I look out of my window at the homes and see all the shingle roofs, and I think that must stop," said Joe Malec, president.

In Europe, a majority of roofs are metal, as they last the lifetime of the home and do not need to be replaced. Although they cost about 40% more than shingle roofs, they also add to the resale value of a home, he added.

"We are getting a lot of requests, we are seeing the market grow about 3% a year," said Malec.

The roofs are aluminum and steel, galvanized and zinc coated, he added. He will work with local builders, contractors, retailers and homeowners to sell his product, he added.

Studer Holdings

This business will consolidate the holdings it has now in Dorchester, London Quality Dairy, and in Aylmer. Studer Dairy and Wholesale Ltd., is to open an ice manufacturer and sell ice cream products, employing about 25 staff. It will open a 10,000 sq. ft. plant on two acres of land in the Trafalgar Industrial Park.

"London has a good customer base, it is central to our business," said Tony Studer, president, said of why he consolidated here. "We could not expand where we were and we really needed to upgrade our facility."

Studer hopes to double production in the next few years, he added.

Distributel Communications Ltd.

The Toronto-based business is opening a business services office here that will sell services for phone and Internet, adding five jobs now and expanding to about 20 including technical and support staff. It will specialize in offering support to small and medium-sized businesses in Southwestern Ontario.

"We liked London because there was an excellent team available here, there is a lot of talent available," Linda Dawson, director of sales, said of the local skilled workforce.

She also sees London as a regional hub and wants to tap into the business market for computer and phone service, competing with big players such as Rogers and Bell. Now, they have no presence in Southwestern Ontario but are in Ottawa, Montreal, Thunder Bay and Calgary as well as Toronto.

Dawson is now looking for office space in the city.

Innovative Training Solutions

Is opening a digital media centre that will offer online training about digital media to workers in the information technology and call centre industries, as well as schools. It will locate in downtown office space with about eight workers.

"The centre will provide and develop customized online e-learning solutions to meet the needs of London residents including students from university, college and the more than 20 local vocational schools," White said.