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## Canoe president 'like Mr. Ambassador for Canada'

By Carys Mills

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Since 1940, Langford Canoe has been making canoes. Recently it's been about 1,400 each year

It's not unusual for Steve MacAllister to get a long-distance call from someone asking specifically for a Canadian red canoe.

"Especially all the Europeans, they want a red canoe from Canada," he says.

Mr. MacAllister, president of Langford Canoe [<http://langfordcanoe.com>], didn't fancy himself as a canoe enthusiast when his father purchased the company from its original owner in the late 1980s. He was away serving in the military and only ventured up to the Muskoka head office in Dwight, Ont., when he was going to his cottage. But when he took over the business in 1999 something changed.

"People from all over the world (are) calling you and they associate canoeing and everything in Canada with the company, you're like Mr. Ambassador for Canada," he says.

Langford's original owner began crafting canoes in 1940, making it Canada's oldest canoe company, according to Mr. MacAllister. The assertion has been disputed by other canoe-makers but he says the claims should be dismissed because those makers don't churn out enough to be considered a company.

In recent years Langford has sold about 1,400 canoes. It's a number that remains fairly consistent but it's slowly going up, Mr. MacAllister says.

Mr. MacAllister's father, Keith, is still the first person to arrive at Langford everyday, sometimes as early as 5:30 a.m. Now 67, he stumbled into the canoeing business when he bought the land Langford Canoe sat on. Mr. MacAllister says his father wasn't initially planning on keeping the business going. Within a few months, however, he witnessed the demand for Canadian-made canoes both domestically and internationally. People stopped by the shop in droves just to brag about their canoes.

"They had all these stories about their Langford canoe and what they did in it," Mr. MacAllister says.

Keith MacAllister kept the business and modernized it, adding composite canoes to the brand that traditionally included wooden canoes. Compared to the wooden kind, Kevlar, fibreglass and carbon fibre canoes take less time to make and cost less.

The busiest season at the Muskoka and Toronto stores coincides with cottage season and is typically between Canada Day until Labour Day. To stock the stores 30 employees working at the Quebec composite and wood plants build from mid-January until November.

Years ago the majority of buyers were "hardcore paddlers" who knew almost everything there is to know about canoes but recently that's changed, Mr. MacAllister says. He says more people are now interested in outdoorsy and green activities like boating so his clientele are more diverse.

Mr. MacAllister says more second and third-generation Canadians are also stopping by the stores.

"They're second and third generation now and they're Canadian," he says. "They went to school here, they've done everything here. So for them, they watch hockey and they go canoeing."