

In good working order

Kitchener firm fills medical niche providing first aid for equipment

BY ROSE SIMONE
RECORD STAFF

When you need a medical diagnosis or surgery, you put yourself in the hands of doctors, nurses and people who perform laboratory tests.

And while you may not know it, you could also be putting your trust in Tim Hasenpflug, the 51-year-old owner of TRH Services of Kitchener. His hands can be just as important in getting the right diagnosis.

It's Hasenpflug's business to keep the machines in the offices of doctors and dentists and in laboratories, clinics and small hospitals in good working order.

Hasenpflug is certified by the Ontario Association of Certified Engineering Technicians and Technologists (OACETT) in biomedical technology, a field that involves the repair of medical equipment.

He had a 27-year career repairing equipment at Grand River Hospital and in 1996 decided to start a business of his own offering medical and laboratory equipment repair.

At first, Hasenpflug ran the business part time, but by 2003, he was able to leave his hospital job and devote himself full time to the business.

He now works with his son, 22-year-old Tyler, who has finished his Conestoga College degree in electronics engineering technology and is now doing a two-year apprenticeship in order to be able to write the biomedical technology exam through the OACETT certification program.

Father and son are often on the road repairing equipment such as treatment beds and anesthetic gas machines.

They also repair smaller equipment in a 500-square-foot workshop that was built in 2005 at the side of their house in south Kitchener.

Hasenpflug's daughter, Kayla, 20, a nursing program graduate, has been helping to manage the business from the home office.

HOME WORKSHOP

Inside the shop, there is a wide variety of medical equipment that has been shipped to Hasenpflug for repair from all over the country. It ranges from autoclaves, which sterilize medical equipment, to parts for drills used in dental clinics.

The equipment is sensitive and complex. For example, there are electrosurgery units, used to make incisions in the body, plus pulse exhibitors, blood pressure units and electrocardiogram monitors.

"The only thing we don't fix is X-ray machines, because of the cost," Hasenpflug says.



MATHEW MCCARTHY, RECORD STAFF

Tim Hasenpflug operates TRH Services from a workshop beside his home in south Kitchener, helped by his son, Tyler, and daughter, Kayla. The company services and repairs medical equipment, something Hasenpflug did for years as a Grand River Hospital employee.

TRH SERVICES

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Founded: 1996

Employees: 3

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ment involves having test equipment and for X-ray machines the equipment you need is totally different."

Inside the shop, you can also find equipment used by midwives, physiotherapists, home-care providers and veterinarians — even the laboratory equipment used for testing in food-processing plants.

"We probably service about 15 to 20 pieces of equipment every week here in the shop, and the rest we service on the road," Hasenpflug says.

The beauty of the business is that there is very little competition, he says.

There are not that many people in Ontario who are trained to service medical equipment. Many of those who are certified work for major hospitals, or for the companies that make the equipment.

There are some companies that take on this type of repair work without employing certified professionals, but having the certification is what allows Hasenpflug's business to stand

out in the crowd.

Hasenpflug says medical equipment is extremely expensive. Shipping it back to the manufacturer or distributor for servicing can be time-consuming and expensive.

Because there is so much pressure to contain health-care costs, he says, he was certain of TRH's potential as soon as he left his hospital job. And he was right.

"Our business (revenues and customers) grew 21 per cent last year," he says.

"Some manufacturers have opened their door to us and have decided that since we service their product, we can also sell their product."

TIM HASENPFUG
TRH SERVICES

TRH has a website, but Hasenpflug says he has never had to advertise.

"The people in the different clinics know each other, and so they will tell others if you did a good job. That's why we try to do the best job no matter how small the customer is."

Although a lot of his service work is done on older pieces of equipment that are no longer

under warranty, some manufacturers also contract TRH to do warranty work on equipment.

While 95 per cent of the business involves servicing equipment, TRH will occasionally source and sell new equipment.

"Some manufacturers have opened their door to us and have decided that since we service their product, we can also sell their product."

SEARCH FOR PARTS

Over the years, Hasenpflug has developed good relationships with many leading manufacturers and knows how to source parts for the equipment they make. But a lot of medical equipment is now made overseas and finding replacement parts can be a challenge.

Hasenpflug says he sometimes looks at a piece of broken equipment and shakes his head.

"I'll have to say to the customer, 'You should never have bought that. You should have asked for advice. Sure, you saved a couple thousand dollars by buying it over the Internet, but if they don't have the parts, we can't help you.'"

Health Canada reviews medical devices for safety and for effectiveness. Sometimes TRH comes across pieces of equipment that have not been approved.

"We can fix it, but we have to put it to the customer in writing that this is not a Health Canada

approved device," Hasenpflug says.

At the moment, Hasenpflug and his son are barely keeping up with the growing workload.

Hasenpflug says he sometimes hires certified medical technologists on a part-time basis, people who have hospital jobs, but do repair work on the side. But eventually, if TRH continues to grow, he may have to add staff members.

"We never see a below normal week anymore. We have that much volume."

Hasenpflug says he knows there will be "growing pains" ahead as he figures out how to adjust to the increased volume of sales.

But he's glad the business is robust and that his son Tyler is interested in taking over the business when he retires. It is interesting work that really makes a difference in people's lives, he says.

"There is a lot of interaction between the machines and the physicians, so you have to know that the machine is functioning properly," Hasenpflug says.

"The physician is relying on the machine to give him the reading he needs. And if that reading is not correct, he might make a wrong decision."

So although Hasenpflug works on machines and not people, the work he does can still be a matter of life and death.

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