

# Four businessmen to keep MacKenzie Milne alive

by BRIAN BOLT  
of The Observer

The oldest business name in Sarnia is being kept alive by four city businessmen.

MacKenzie Milne Hardware, founded in 1848 and reputed to be the oldest established business in Sarnia, has been purchased by Sarnia Propane owner Ross McEachran, Ted Crombeen of Sarnia Welding, and Brad Blake and Alan Primmer, of the Sarnia area.

The industrial hardware and equipment business was going to be closed by former owner Ed Shabsove at the end of August.

The new owners plan to move the business from its present quarters at 1275 Plank Rd. to a brand new building adjacent to Sarnia Propane at 1494 Plank Rd., just east of the intersection of Plank and Churchill roads.

The business has seen a few changes of ownership and location since it was founded in 1848 by John MacKenzie. He was joined by Charles MacKenzie Sr.

and the business was known as C. MacKenzie and Co. Later in the century Scotsman Donald Milne joined the firm, bringing about the name of MacKenzie, Milne and Co. Ltd. The ownership was later joined by Peter Paton, whose son Peter Jr. today runs Paton's Hardware on Russell Street.

MacKenzie Milne was an established retail hardware business on Front Street, in the vicinity of CHOK Broadcast House, until 1964 when it was sold to Hugh Shabsove.

He moved it to 526 Vidal St. S. and changed it from a retail business to an industrial hardware supplier geared to the Chemical Valley industries.

A major fire severely damaged the business in 1979. At that time Ed Shabsove took it over from his father and moved it to 1275 Plank Rd. adjacent to his Sarnia Iron and Metal Co. scrap business.

Due to declining business fortunes Mr. Shabsove was going to close out the long-standing company, until Mr.

McEachran and partners decided it was worth saving.

Mr. McEachran said they heard it was going to close and met with Mr. Shabsove the first week of August to discuss a purchase. The whole deal came about in a week or so, and the new owners took over operation of the business Aug. 11.

Mr. McEachran said the contract has been signed with he and his partners paying "in the six-figure range" for the business and inventory. The deal officially closes Aug. 26.

Mr. McEachran said he and Mr. Crombeen had discussed getting into the industrial hardware supply business before.

"We feel it's a good business to be in."

They also believe the three businesses — Sarnia Propane, Sarnia Welding and MacKenzie Milne — will all complement each other.

While the firm hasn't made money the last couple of years, Mr. McEachran feels it can be successful. It has a good established clientele and supplier source.

"We want to run it with improved service and expanded inventory," he said.

The business has all types of supplies and light equipment for industries, including plumbing, heating and electrical sup-

plies and small tools of all types. A couple of other local businesses carry some of the same lines, but no other firm is exactly the same, said Mr. McEachran. MacKenzie Milne carries many items that can't be obtained anywhere else in Sarnia.

The new owners have inherited \$150,000 to \$200,000 worth of inventory (they are still taking stock), but intend to fill the lines out more in areas compatible to local industry, particularly the small tool and equipment lines.

They have the use of the present premises for only three months, making immediate action on a new building necessary. It will be located just to the west of Sarnia Propane, on the same property.

Mr. McEachran said a site plan has been approved by Sarnia Township and they are in the process of getting the building permit. They hope to start construction in three weeks and be in the new building in three months.

MacKenzie Milne's new home will be a modern style cement block building with stucco front and brick around the windows, similar to Sarnia Propane next door.

But Mr. McEachran hopes to retain some of the history of the old business inside. He is interested in

the historical aspects of the business and happy to find some of the old records are still with it.

He said he has inventory books from 1869 and 1870 that are beautifully hand written, like calligraphy. And he has the minute books of the company from 1900 to 1940, with signatures of the owners in them. Mr. McEachran hopes to put the old record books on display as an added item of interest to customers.

He has also inherited some old oaken counters with hand carving on them

that he hopes to restore and use for display counters.

Mr. McEachran said the decision to purchase MacKenzie Milne Hardware was based on business grounds. But he is also happy to keep the long-established business going.

"You hate to see an old business of that age go down."

He said he and his partners are glad to salvage it, to keep an old and reputable business name alive in the Sarnia community.

## 1st Hussars to take part in training exercises

Over 1,400 reservists from across Ontario will be gathering at CFB Borden this weekend to participate in a 10 day training exercise.

Among the major units

The second group from Sarnia will be taking armor training using the Canadian Forces armed six-wheel support vehicle the Cougar. The armor

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