

Small Business Spotlight:
Lisa Milne | Owner
Royal Theatre, Est. 1927/2009

Life Story

Lisa moved to Trail 15 years ago. Her husband, Jason, grew up there and often went to the Royal Theatre, established in 1927. Lisa fell in love with the community and the lifestyle in the Kootenays. After a dinner date in 2009, Jason took Lisa to the old one-screen theatre and proposed they buy it and bring it back to vitality. It seemed crazy at first, but she quickly fell in love with “the old girl” as they call it.

What motivated you to become an entrepreneur?

We bought the theatre as an investment originally, but I fell in love with the community and the patrons. I retired from my secure union job, started running the theatre full-time and have never looked back. This is 100% a community theatre and I love being able to bring the best quality cinematic experience to my community, serving popcorn with real butter.

What are some of the challenges of operating a business in a rural part of the province and how did you overcome them?

I have had to convince my industry and production studios that even though we are a small town, we want the blockbuster movies. As a result, over the last 11 years, I have been able to get a lot more content than we did before. Technical support and shipping are other challenges, but with an excellent staff and good connections, I have been able to navigate those problems innovatively. With a small business and a small staff, I have really had to diversify my skillset and learn all the aspects of running the business.

How has networking or community played a role in the growth of your business?

It is so important to network within your community! The Royal partners with all types of businesses for events and activities. Ours is a small community and we work with the spirit of ensuring that it thrives. Our small businesses are a vital part of that.

What has been your greatest reward to date as a small business in your industry?

As an independent movie theatre, we have had to work hard to convince big companies and studios to give us access to movies at the same time as larger theatres. My biggest reward has been that studios now recognize the Royal as one of the theatres that they will give top movies to on opening day.

How has COVID-19 impacted or shaped your business?

We had to close our doors, and it broke my heart. However, we quickly realized that this was a perfect opportunity to do the renovations we had been planning. We had the business plan in place, so we gutted the building down to the bricks. We have redesigned the theatre with a larger screen, socially

distanced vinyl reclining seating, an enlarged lobby space and a brand-new HVAC system. We are now able to do online bookings as well, so patrons don't have to wait in line.

What supports have you used during COVID-19 that you have found helpful?

I was fortunate to qualify for multiple government supports. With the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, I am able to keep my staff, and the Canada Emergency Business Account loan supported us through the pandemic. Our community is our largest support and we really focus on listening to them and providing the experience that they want. I can't wait to welcome them back into our newly renovated space.

The Bottom Line:

- The Royal has one full-time employee and five part-time employees.
- The Royal will open with its new look in October 2020.
- The Royal is adding showtimes to allow for social distancing and still meet the bottom line.