

Fort Frances General Supply

By Cory McCrindle, Northwest Business Centre



Bill Gushulak can generally supply you with just about anything, especially friendly service

Fort Frances General Supply is the kind of place where you might expect to find everything from soup to nuts. However, owner Bill Gushulak laughingly remarks that simply isn't the case. "Actually, we have no soup and no nuts," grins Bill, "but we have everything in between." Gushulak has operated Fort Frances General Supply since 1984. The business endeavor is a marked departure from his previous line of work. You see, this good humoured fellow used to be in the funeral business. "I wanted to actually own and operate my own funeral home, but that wasn't coming together," recalls Gushulak. "I looked for other opportunities, and this one sort of kept popping up for me," says Bill of the store he now owns, "and I decided that although it was very different from what I was presently doing, and even though I was not familiar with the product line, I knew how to and enjoyed providing good service to people, so I went for it."

One thing that attracted Gushulak to having his own shop was the fact that, unlike his time in the funeral business, he wasn't on call 24 hours a day. Now, his work week generally runs from Monday to Friday. "My wife is a school teacher, so it was sort of nice to be able to have something that was along her schedule", offers Gushulak. However, Bill concedes that there are some exceptions to this time frame. "I do take calls on Saturday or Sunday for emergency purposes for customers if they're in dire need of something," he allows, "if they call me and they need it, I'll go."

The list of items any given customer might need and can find at Fort Frances General Supply is extensive. While browsing through the store you will come across

janitorial and electrical items, hotel and restaurant supplies, paper and safety products, and even an engraving service. You can even have keys cut on site. Gushulak says one of the things that has kept him in business for more than twenty years is paying close attention to customer service. "You must be loyal to your customers," notes Bill, adding "everybody that comes through the door is important to you...you have to make them feel important." Gushulak says a big part of making customers feel important is offering that personal touch. "You greet them when they walk in the door and you bid them farewell when they leave," he emphasizes, "and you show some appreciation, sincere appreciation of the business that they've given you...so to me, that's a big thing."

Loyalty to staff – and for that matter FROM staff - is also a big thing according to Gushulak. "I have four people working at the store with me now, one is over the twenty years of working at Fort Frances General Supply, and one is nearing twenty," marvels Bill, adding "the other one is going on six years, and another one is just starting into their third or so year, so we must be doing something right." Thinking back, Bill says he's thankful that the bonds he's made with his employees have been strong ones. "I guess I've been lucky that I've had people that we've really become almost like a family here," smiles Gushulak.

Despite the wonderful experience Bill says he's had being his own boss, he's also aware that every good business person needs an exit strategy. At 56 years of age, Gushulak is at least pondering the possibility of retirement in the not-too-distant future. However, Bill says he would like to feel comfortable about handing over the reins to a business he's been in for almost 2 ½ decades. "I'd like to work with someone for a few years to see what would work out," relates Gushulak, "and if the opportunity arose to sell the business and retire, my main concern would be to make sure that my staff is both secure and happy."

If personal service and finding a wide variety of items to browse through are things that make you happy, visit Bill Gushulak and his staff at Fort Frances General Supply, located at 617 Mowat Avenue in Fort Frances.