



MORRIS LAMONT The London Free Press

PROVINCIAL FIRST: Rob Kelly and Cathy Siskind-Kelly toast the success of their fledgling business producing Black Fly coolers. It's Ontario's first microdistillery producing cranberry wild blueberry coolers, which are available at area LCBO outlets.

Black Fly cooler business taking off for local couple

BY HANK DANISZEWSKI
Free Press Business Reporter

Two weeks after the first bottle of Black Fly cooler rolled off the line, the founders of Ontario's first microdistillery are exhausted and elated.

"We are experiencing just the kind of start-up challenges we had hoped to face (and) struggling to meet demand," says Cathy Siskind-Kelly, who opened the Black Fly Beverage Co. with her husband Rob Kelly.

So far the London plant at Dundas and Talbot Streets

has shipped out about 20,000 bottles of cranberry wild blueberry cooler.

The product is now available on the shelves of six larger LCBO outlets in the city and such downtown bars as Joe Kool's and Robinson Hall.

But Rob Kelly is expecting demand to shoot up as more LCBO managers order the cooler and word of mouth spreads among consumers.

"The LCBO is encouraging us to go full out because they've had so much interest," he said.

That will put even more

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Blackfly co-founder Rob Kelly

pressure on the new production plant at the corner of Dundas and Talbot.

Kelly says he and his wife have been working on adrenalin to meet the demands of their new business and the needs of their three young children.

"You got to make hay while the sun shines. We worked very hard to get our brand in production and recognized this summer."

Production hit a major snag when their labelling machine, imported from Italy, proved to be a dud, missing four out of five labels.

The couple recruited friends and family to help label and package the bottles by hand until a new labelling machine arrives in a couple of weeks.

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COOLER: Muskoka contract proves coup for new business

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"We put on some music and ordered pizzas and worked to the wee hours of the morning three nights in a row," Siskind-Kelly said.

Black Fly has scored a coup by signing a deal to be the exclusive cooler supplier for The Kee in Bala, a legendary dance hall and concert venue in Muskoka's cottage region that seats more than 1,000 people.

Kelly said his boyhood summers in

Muskoka were the inspiration for Black Fly cooler.

"Everything from the name on down was based on my experiences in cottage country. It's satisfying to know it will be enjoyed in that area."

And Black Fly will be getting some national exposure through an upcoming television profile on Venture, a CBC business program. A video crew recently followed the couple around for 10 days for a show that will air this fall.

Siskind-Kelly said the cooler is

rapidly finding a market because it is less sweet than other available brands. The plastic bottle is popular with bars and restaurants because it won't shatter.

The company still hasn't received permission from the province's Alcohol and Gaming Commission to open a retail counter at the front of their downtown outlet.

Siskind-Kelly said that issue has been on hold until production issues are resolved.