

BUSINESS

Black Fly grips sales



SUE REEVE The London Free Press

COOL LINE: Rob Kelly and Cathy Siskind-Kelly, owners of the Black Fly Beverage Co., wait on the line as a batch of vodka coolers come off. Their cooler, a combination of cranberry and wild blueberry, contains real juices and more natural ingredients.

Ontario's first microdistillery is taking a bigger bite out of the cooler market less than a year after it opened at Dundas and Talbot streets in downtown London.

BY HANK DANISZEWSKI
Free Press Business Reporter

Less than a year after it opened, the Black Fly Beverage Co. is taking a bigger bite out of the market with a new product, national exposure and more availability.

Cathy Siskind-Kelly and Rob Kelly opened Ontario's first microdistillery in downtown London last May.

Siskind-Kelly said Black Fly will announce a new "speciality spirit" product next month and has struck a deal with the LCBO to carry the product in 200 outlets.

Black Fly's original concoction — a cranberry-blueberry cooler — is selling in 140 Liquor Control Board of

Ontario (LCBO) outlets and many restaurants and bars in the area.

"The LCBO absolutely loved it. They've pre-ordered the entire spring and summer supply of the product," Siskind-Kelly said. She wouldn't reveal more details about the company's next offering, except to say it was a seasonal product and "the first of its kind in Canada."

New production equipment is being ordered and the product will be officially rolled out shortly before it arrives in LCBO warehouses in March.

The company has about eight employees, but Siskind-Kelly expects to hire more for the busy summer season.

She said the company may need more space to accommodate the new product, but will always maintain its original site, a former bank building at Dundas and Talbot streets.

Black Fly will get coast-to-coast exposure Sunday night in a segment on Venture, CBC-TV's business magazine. A CBC crew spent about two weeks recording Black Fly's startup last May as part of a small business profile.

"All of the stores are stocking up product in anticipation of the interest from the public after that story airs," Siskind-Kelly said.

Black Fly will tonight officially open a new lounge

selling the coolers on the third floor of the John Labatt Centre. The product will also be available at JLC concessions.

Although Labatt Breweries has the rights to sell beer in the JLC, Siskind-Kelly said Black Fly was able to strike a deal on the cooler.

"It's a nice partnership because we're a complementary product."

Siskind-Kelly said Black Fly is a good product for venues like the JLC because it comes in a plastic bottle that does not have to be poured and served.

Black Fly Beverage will also be at the London Food and Wine Show at the Western Fair this weekend.