



# Holland College Applied Research: A Resource for Growth in Atlantic Canada

By Tom Mason

IN MANY WAYS, UPSTREET CRAFT BREWING is typical of the young, innovative companies that have been changing the face of downtown Charlottetown in recent years. The microbrewery has established itself over the last four years by producing a number of brews with names such as Do-Gooder APA, and White Noise. It also operates a popular downtown brewpub in the heart of Charlottetown. But when Upstreet CEO Mitch Cobb decided to branch out into a new line of soft drinks a couple of years ago, he was admittedly out of his comfort zone.

“My wife was pregnant at the time and she was drinking a lot of flavoured waters, sodas and juices,” Cobb recalls. “I saw the potential for local, all-natural fruit juices and craft sodas, but our expertise is in beer. I wasn’t exactly sure where to start.”

Cobb turned to a resource that might once have seemed unusual: Holland College. In its 50-year history, the Prince Edward Island community college has built a national reputation for producing everything from top chefs and law enforcement officers to performing artists and practical nurses. Lately the college has been stepping into another role as an economic development engine for PEI.

The food product development arm of Holland College’s The Culinary Institute of Canada, known as Canada’s Smartest Kitchen, quickly set to work developing a new product line for Upstreet. They created several soda recipes, conducted taste and shelf life testing and experimented with ways to keep ingredient and production costs low enough to make the products economical. The sodas they developed feature local takes on traditional flavours including strawberry rhubarb, apple ginger ale and, in a tip of the hat to Upstreet’s brewery roots, a tonic made from hops and flavoured with lavender and orange zest. Canada’s Smartest Kitchen even helped the company find funding to help offset research and development costs. “We came up with the original idea, but Canada’s Smartest Kitchen was able to turn that idea into something concrete,” says Cobb.

Upstreet Craft Brewing was one of about 75 companies that worked with Canada’s Smartest Kitchen last year – companies that range from medium-sized agribusinesses to micro-ventures – developing everything from offbeat uses for seafood to new products made with maple syrup. The program is part of Holland College’s efforts to become a key applied research and development resource for businesses in PEI. “Canada’s Smartest Kitchen is one of the ways that Holland College works with the private sector, developing products that will help grow the economy in Atlantic Canada and across the country,” says Dr. Sandy MacDonald, Vice President, Academic & Applied Research at Holland College.

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sector revenue every year and is responsible for more than 1,500 well-paying jobs in the province. Attracting new talent to the island requires a stable of qualified lab technicians and other workers – a need that Holland College is filling through a two-year Bioscience Technology program that teaches students the fundamentals of working in bioscience laboratories. The program plays another critical role in regional development as well, working with industry on short-term research collaborations, supplying program staff, students and laboratory resources to help companies develop and test new products.

“We’ve been able to partner with industry, particularly the smaller companies in the industry, to give them access to equipment that they wouldn’t otherwise have,” says Michael Gibson, the creator and head of the Bioscience Technology program. “We’re seeing quite a bit of growth in the bioscience industry here, and I’m sure we’re playing a part in that growth.”

Sandy MacDonald says it’s important that industries in Atlantic Canada recognize that Holland College is a powerful resource for research and development. “We’re open for business and we’re looking to work with industry,” he says. “We’re here to help develop the next generation of businesses in the region through applied research.”

