

Feasibility Studies - The Origins and Early years (1982-1986)

Bonnie Baker was a member of the original collective of women who gathered to develop a manufacturing initiative that would employ chronically employed women in the West Kootenays, a project sponsored by the West Kootenay Women's Association.

Memories of Emma's Jambrosia by Bonnie Baker January, 2010

Once upon a time in Canada, we had a federal government who gave money to young people to start businesses. The Grant program was called LEAP, Local Employment Assistance Program, and I think the women's centre was the sponsor, but I'm not sure of that. The project got funded so that 3 ideas could be investigated, and I was one of the women who were hired to write a feasibility study on one possible business which could succeed and provide jobs for as many women as possible. Each of us researched our pet projects: I wanted to set up a business that produced ethanol to run our cars. Another project was to create a children's furniture factory using local wood. The third was an organic jam factory, using locally produced fruit. (I can't remember if there was a fourth project or if the fourth woman was the project manager. Joanne Hetherington might remember.)

We four women worked on our projects in a house on Bedford Avenue in Blewett, (I can't remember the name of the woman who's house it was, but I could probably find it) and each submitted her feasibility study to a board who chose the jam factory idea as the most likely to succeed. The furniture factory faced what was seen at the time to be huge shipping costs which would make the furniture too expensive. And the ethanol idea faced the need for a \$200,000 bond to insure we would not be making booze, plus the fact that operating the still wouldn't need very many people, once it got going. So the jam factory seemed the best bet, I guess.

Since I didn't work on that project, and I didn't go any further with the jam factory process, I don't have any inside information on what happened after that. I do know that Ray Kosiancic built that building in Crescent Valley for the Emma's Jambrosia, that all the women who worked there got the same pay, and that they faced several hurdles

not anticipated in the original feasibility study. Also, because "jam" as defined by the government's food inspectors, must have 70% sugar, the women called their product "jambrosia", since it was to be an organic, no sugar (honey) product. And locally grown fruit was much more expensive than pre-frozen "seconds" from the Okanogan. I don't know if they had the freezer built when they moved in or after they knew they decided to buy the pre-frozen seconds.

So, Ray built the building and you'll have to ask someone else for the rest of the story.

In retrospect, I believe the furniture factory could have succeeded, especially in today's high-end markets. And I believe that the ethanol I was proposing came from Jerusalem artichokes, not corn, it could have kept millions of dollars of Kootenay money here. But, who knows.

Bye,
Bonnie B.

Editor's Note: Ray built the building with Ken Lins and his son, Bob, from Castlegar, and Marcia Braundy, a carpenter who was also a member of the EMMA Collective. EMMA: Everywoman's Moneymaking and Manufacturing Association.