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Red Deer Advocate



To two local entrepreneurs who recognized the sound that others missed when opportunity came knocking.

James Dibben got into the business of making exercise equipment after an oilfield accident in 1990 left him a paraplegic. He understood the importance of exercise but was frustrated by equipment on the market that was not accessible to people, like him, who are confined to wheelchairs.

He found some, manufactured in Montana by a disabled Vietnam war veteran, and began selling it in Canada. Then he bought the rights to manufacture the exercise machines in Canada.

His refined products were so good that his Montana mentor was soon buying them. Upon retirement, he sold worldwide distribution rights to Dibben.

Dibben is not yet selling around the globe, but at the rate he's going, that may happen yet. He has sold in Britain, Ireland, Central and South America as well as almost all 50 American states.

He saw an opportunity and persevered until he turned it into a successful business.

That's precisely the path that Bob Mastin is also following. Mastin operates a seed business near Sundre and is now poised to distribute a new strain of barley that he believes may be the best in the world.

It was developed at Alberta Agriculture's

Crop Development Centre in Lacombe.

Mastin has seen one field that produced 160 bushels per acre.

He first saw the test patches growing in Lacombe — as did many others — and thought it was the most beautiful barley he had ever seen.

Mastin urged his seed supplier to bid for distribution rights, but when nothing happened, Mastin jumped in himself.

All this was happening at the time of the BSE crisis, when the fate of Canadian cattle, and the barley they eat was highly uncertain.

Mastin won the rights to distribute the barley — which he named Sundre after his home town — by promising to charge buyers a low price, and satisfying the crop development centre's desire to get it into as many farmers' hands as possible.

He won distribution rights on that premise, even though a large seed company offered more money. Now he has developed a network of seed growers across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Mastin believes Sundre barley will be the No. 1 variety produced in Western Canada within five years, and he is getting inquiries from universities in Minnesota and Maine.

There's an amazing amount of creativity, fortitude and business moxie in Central Alberta. Dibben and Mastin are two shining examples.

— Joe McLaughlin