

## WITH A VIEW TO GROWTH



BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

John Hennessey, chief executive of Crystal Clear Window Works, estimates up to 10 million thermal pane windows are replaced in Canada annually.

# Thermal window repairers offer a clear solution

The path to startup success is often shrouded in uncertainty, but for a company that specializes in defogging defective windows, it's clear as crystal, **ANDREW MAYEDA** writes.

If you've ever had a thermal-pane window fog up from moisture caught between the panes, you've probably also gone through the costly process of replacing it.

Crystal Clear Window Works has an answer that doesn't require a new window and, the company claims, costs about half as much as replacement.

The process sounds deceptively simple. Technicians drill a small hole in a corner of the window, drain the space between the panes, and then install a "defog valve" that releases any further moisture. The company says fog or leaking should clear up in days.

Entrepreneurs Derek Blackburn and Chris Balland bought the licensing rights and patent from the inventor Stephen Collins, who still advises the company.

Armed with the defogging technology, the two secured financing from an angel investor, furniture storeowner Bill Robinson, and venture capital fund, OFG EuroPacific Limited.

Fourteen months ago, Mr. Blackburn and Mr. Ball founded Crystal Clear. It now has 20 dealerships across Canada, including four in Ottawa and two in the Outaouais. Chief

executive officer John Hennessey, a startup veteran who came on board a few months ago after running a dealership in Quebec, estimates Crystal Clear technicians have repaired 1,500 to 2,000 windows in Ottawa since September.

The company pulled in revenue in the "mid-six-figure" range last year and said it's starting to roll for a second round of financing.

Mr. Hennessey should know the difference between venture hype and a genuine business opportunity. In the last eight years he's been involved in the Ottawa startup scene as a consultant, employee and founder. He's convinced Crystal Clear won't share the unfortunate fate of so many local startups.

"The big difference is we're not creating a market, there is a market today", he said. There's a very significant problem in the industry. We've got an elegant solution which is cost effective, it works, and it's new.

Mr. Hennessey estimates there are 140 million thermal pane windows in Canada alone, 10 million of which need to be replaced each year.

That market ended up being too big for Crystal Clear to

handle and, in October, the company shifted its business model from trying to directly service clients nationwide to licensing, training and supplying dealerships working under the Crystal Clear brand.

Dealers pay \$50,000 for that package, while Crystal Clear collects 15 per cent in royalties on the repair services.

Customers, meanwhile, appreciate not having to replace their thermal pane windows, which form droplets when heat from the sun increases the pressure between the panes.

Scott Wilson hired a Crystal Clear dealer to repair six to eight damaged windows at the buildings he manages for Axia Property Management. He said that cost him about one-third as much as replacing the panes.

John Chilvers used Crystal Clear to fix the leaky, foggy windows in his Manotick house, which doubles as a bed and breakfast. He paid \$1,500 for the repairs, which he declared satisfactory, compared with an estimated \$3,000-\$4,000 for replacement.

#### About Crystal Clear Window Works

*Crystal Clear Window Works (Ottawa, Canada) has revolutionized the manner in which homeowners and property managers handle failed windows. Since 1989, the company's proven process for restoring thermal functionality and the aesthetic qualities of residential and commercial windows, has also provided a cost effective, environmental alternative to replacement. The company established a dealer network in 2003, and now serves over 150 markets across Canada and in the United States.*

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