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by Paolo Guatelli



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ONLINE SHOPS OPEN, ESTABLISHED FIRMS EXPAND: REGION IS ON A ROLL

WWW.SALTBOX OFFERS COUNTRY DECOR

Friends since kindergarten days at Elizabeth Ziegler School in Waterloo, Shana Hayhurst and Melissa Smith just needed a reason to go into business for themselves. Last fall, after Smith was diagnosed with breast cancer, they decided to turn their careers in a new direction.

In November, they launched Saltbox Interiors, an online shop featuring the country cottage look in everything from wall signs to furniture and lamps.

Besides having similar tastes in decor, the pair have the necessary business background. Smith is a graphic artist who worked at the University of Waterloo for 15 years, Hayhurst worked during the same period in marketing at Manulife Financial. Both have young families and the drive to be entrepreneurs.

They chose the name Saltbox Interiors to reflect the primitive, rustic look of the items they sell. They make some things themselves, stripping and refinishing old furniture, hand-painting signs and designing wreaths.

Smith says the pre-Christmas season brought in orders for kitchen- and bath-themed gift baskets. Each includes a decor item, such as a hand-painted sign, and coordinating accessories.

Market research and small-business courses showed them an online shop would be a good start. Customers can shop 24 hours a day, and the owners' overhead is lower. If needed, Smith can update Saltbox's website daily.

The pair will also organize home parties, like one Smith held at her Puslinch Lake house before Christmas.



Shana Hayhurst (left) and Melissa Smith have opened an online store called Saltbox Interiors.

Check out Saltbox Interiors at www.saltboxinteriors.com

RENT-TO-OWN BRIDESMAID DRESSES

When Irina Tuca planned her August 2006 wedding, she chose a reasonably priced bridesmaid dress, but alterations and a rush-order surcharge (the big day was just four months away) boosted the cost to more than \$400 per dress.

That's when she started wondering why women couldn't rent bridesmaid dresses the way men rent tuxedos. The result is YKnot Formalwear, a business she operates from her Kitchener home.

"I never thought it would work out so well," she says. Tuca has about 20 styles for women to try on, and as many as 70 styles can be ordered.

Although her plan was to rent dresses for \$100 to \$125 each, depending on style, most women decide to purchase their dress at \$150 to \$175 each.

The advantage of buying is that the dress is custom-made and alterations aren't necessary. Tuca promises delivery in six to