

A greener coffee roasted in Lunenburg

By BRUCE ERSKINE Business Reporter

Lunenburg, famous as the home port of the Bluenose, is also home to Canada's first eco-friendly coffee roaster.

"I've always been concerned about the environment," Steve Zubalik, owner of Laughing Whale Coffee Roasters on Lincoln Street, said in an interview Thursday.

He made the comment while explaining his recent purchase of a US Roaster Corp. Revelation Roaster, the first he knows of in Canada.

The \$60,000 roaster, which features a 3.5-metre-tall catalytic tower, recycles hot air from the bean roasting process back through the system. This saves fuel and reduces the amount of smoke the roaster generates.

"I needed to upgrade and it killed two birds with one stone," said the 57-year-old Seattle native.

Mr. Zubalik worked in the geographic information systems field before moving to Nova Scotia seven years ago with his Halifax-born wife and opening the Laughing Whale Cafe in a former IGA grocery store in Lunenburg.

"I wanted to try something different," said the self-professed coffee fanatic, who lived two blocks away from the world's first Starbucks outlet in Seattle.

He developed a taste for good coffee while travelling in Europe.

"It's been a transition but it's working out."

Mr. Zubalik began roasting his fair-trade, organic coffee beans in the back of his seasonal cafe in 2003 for his customers.

Laughing Whale Coffee is now available at the Lunenburg and Hubbards Farmer's Markets and the QE II Farmer's Market.

It is also sold at a number of retail outlets, including Planet Organic, Coastal Coffee, European Pantry and Mountain Equipment Co-op in Halifax, Chester Organics in Chester, Fulton's Pharmacy in Lunenburg; LaHave Bakery in Mahone Bay, Mariposa Village Market in Upper Tantallon and Train Station Bike & Bean in Tantallon.

The coffee is also sold through Ellora Natural and Organic Foods, a virtual co-op store in

LaHave which highlights Laughing Whale's environmentally sensitive roasting method in green on its website.

"It's great coffee," said Ellora owner Susan Bone in an interview on Thursday. "They roast in a European style, which I like."

Beans include medium and dark roasts from Peru, Mexico, East Timor, Sumatra, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Colombia and Guatemala that are marketed under whimsical brand names like Rock Your Boat, a dark Mexican-Sumatran blend, and Ohh La La, a Peruvian french roast.

Decaffeinated coffee is also available, whole or ground.

Laughing Whale, which advertises that it has the lowest carbon footprint per cup, backs up its commitment to the environment by contributing 25 cents from every pound of coffee it sells in Nova Scotia to the Ecology Action Centre.

It is also testing a new blend that will donate five cents per pound sold to the Cafe Femenino Foundation. The foundation, established in Peru in 2004, provides grants and programs to support female coffee growers around the world.

Laughing Whale roasted about 3,629 kilograms of coffee last year, which is relatively small compared to larger, local, fair-trade organic operations like Wolfville-based Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-op.

But Mr. Zubalik, who also recycles coffee grounds to farmers as organic compost, said the new roaster will allow him to increase his production capacity by five times and he is looking for new outlets to market his products.

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