

House of Cork built on solid foundation

By Dominik Kurek
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Oakville's Jelinek family has much to be thankful for, but times were not always so good throughout the 155-year history of the family's cork business.

Henry Jelinek IV, who headed the Jelinek Cork Group family business until seven years ago, recently chronicled his family's history, including a flight from communism, in a book titled *House of Cork*.

The author was the fourth generation Jelinek, and fourth with the name Henry, to head the company. Now, his three children are running the company that re-established itself in Oakville in 1949 after the family fled communism in Czechoslovakia.

"One of the main reasons for writing the book is because there's quite a history behind it and I felt it would be good to preserve that history for future generations," Henry IV said.

Of course, everyone knows that cork is used for blocking the neck of wine and champagne bottles. But, not everyone is aware that the cork oak tree (*Quercus suber*) bark can be used for making flooring, furniture, instruments, clothing and much more without having to cut down a single tree.

So Henry IV has not only chronicled his family's past and present, but illustrated the many uses of cork and its advantages in his book.

"It's a five generational business," he said. There are very few companies that last five generations. The family business started in 1855 and it has existed ever since. The history includes all the difficulties that the company went through, being in various wars, being nationalized by communists in 1948, also surviving during the Nazi occupation. Before that, even surviving the Great Depression and so on."

The family business was founded by Jindrich (Henry) I, then was passed on to his son, Henry Jelinek II, and then to his son, Henry Jelinek III, after him. The third generation Jelinek, was running the family



SUBMITTED PHOTO

SUSTAINABLE FAMILY BUSINESS: Author and business owner Henry Jelinek IV is pictured at the cork harvest of June 2009 in Portugal.

business when the communists confiscated it in 1948. He, his wife and children, fled the country — when Henry IV was five years old. The family arrived in Canada when Henry IV was six years old.

"My father re-started the business because it was confiscated by the communists in Czechoslovakia. We have been in business in Oakville since the end of 1949," Henry IV said.

Henry IV was one of five children when the family was making its new beginning in Oakville.

"It was a very difficult time. We didn't speak any English, of course, and my parents didn't have very much money," he said.

The re-established business was run out

of the family's Bronte home.

"We, as kids, when we came back from school, we would be asked to help out," Henry IV said. "What we did, we would sort corks and pack them and so on in our living room. My dad was then busy, in those days, trying to sell them to distilleries. It was hard but we survived it, moved on and over the years it established itself more and more and here we are."

When the communist regime collapsed in Czechoslovakia in 1989, Henry IV saw an opportunity to re-establish the family business there, which he did. He still has relatives in the Czech Republic.

Now the business is based in Oakville, but has branches and facilities in the United

"We, as kids, when we came back from school, we would be asked to help out. What we did, we would sort corks and pack them and so on in our living room."

Henry Jelinek IV

Kingdom, Czech and Slovak republics and Portugal.

Henry IV said the idea for the book had been in his mind for many years, but he started working on it two years ago. The photography in the book is also done by him, most of it taken in recent years.

He stepped down from running the family-owned company seven years ago. Now the cork business is headed by his children Henry (who goes by Sonny) Jelinek V, Karina Jelinek Drummond and Jonathan Jelinek.

Henry IV said cork is an unusual product, which is another reason why he's written the book.

"For all those years we have been committed to the cork industry and the survival of the cork forests in Portugal and Spain and to make sure they're sustainable, which they are," he said.

"The trees only grow around the Mediterranean Sea. The cork comes from a cork oak tree. When you peel the cork bark off the tree it re-grows. You never cut any tree down and it takes nine years to re-grow. So it's a totally environmental tree."

Furthermore, Henry IV said the trees are critical to the health of the ecosystems where they grow.

Used cork caps can also be recycled, which Henry IV said his company makes into bulletin boards and floor tiles. Whole Foods Market stores across North America, including in Oakville collect the corks and then send them to Jelinek Cork Group for recycling.

House of Cork is listed at \$49.95. For more information or to buy the book, visit www.everettpublishing.com.



If you know a young person aged 6 to 17 who is involved in worthwhile community service; a special person who is contributing while living with a limitation; a youth who has performed an act of heroism; or a 'good kid' who shows a commitment to making life better for others, doing more than is normally expected of someone their age -

HELP US RECOGNIZE THEIR CONTRIBUTION - **NOMINATE THEM TODAY!**

ONTARIO JUNIOR CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Contact this newspaper or the
Ontario Community Newspapers Association at

www.ocna.org or 905.639.8720

Nominations will be accepted until November 30th

Sponsored by



Coordinated by

