

## Goodbye suit and tie

Former executive runs successful river rafting, cottage business

By MARY ELLEN MacINTYRE Truro Bureau



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URBANIA — Jack Robinson seems to have created his own Utopia in Urbania, Hants County.

Workers at his 73-hectare site on the Shubenacadie River are busy putting up log cabins in tree-sheltered niches along the river's banks. The birds twitter, his dogs gambol through the dense foliage, his 23 workers seem happy and business couldn't be better.

"I'm a lucky man and this is a great place to be," said Mr. Robinson, owner of Tidal Bore Rafting Park and Rafters Ridge Cottages on Highway 215.

Owners of tourism-based businesses have been decrying the low visitor numbers across the province this year, but Mr. Robinson says the operation he bought just last year has had a 33 per cent increase in business.

"Tourists are really looking for the healthy, outdoorsy kind of vacations — whale watching and hiking — those kinds of things and river rafting seems to be quite popular," said Mr. Robinson.

"People come from all over — from the Maritimes, the United States and across Canada."

A former executive with Coca-Cola in Russia and a former Halifax lawyer, Mr. Robinson knows his way around the business world, and he knows how to make things happen.

A case in point is the log buildings going up on his property. He already has 10 cottages and a meeting-conference lodge. Two more lodges and a spa building are under construction.

"Well, we did our marketing surveys and we checked out all the Nova Scotia builders of log buildings it they are a pricey item — there's no doubt," he said.

"I called some people in Russia and started to investigate what was available in Russia."

Mr. Robinson purchased the designs and notched logs in Russia and had them shipped over to Canada and put together on site by Russian carpenters he paid to fly over — all for 40 per cent less than what he would have paid here.

What's his secret?

No one who met the man would doubt his business acumen or his ability to put together a deal and operate a company.

But during a recent interview on a deck overlooking the Shubenacadie River, Mr. Robinson looked for all the world like a man of leisure.

"I don't wear a shirt and tie anymore," he laughed, taking a sip from his coffee. His eyes rested on the perfectly calm river through the trees. He seemed an enormously contented man.

He gestured toward the green fields. As if on cue, an eagle swooped down to eye level and gracefully soared over the white birch railings of the steps leading toward the river.

"You would think I planned that," he said with a laugh, sinking into a deck chair.

Mr. Robinson said after years in the business world, he opted to live full time in his summer home in South Maitland with his family.

"I have a small beef farm there, but when this opportunity came up I couldn't resist," he said, his eyes lighting up.

"There are three river-rafting businesses in this area and business is up for all of us this year — it's become a very popular adventure vacation idea," he said.

When the famous tidal bore pushes water up the Shubenacadie river, the fun really begins for those who love a wild ride. Rafting trips send zodiac boats coursing over rapids churned up by the tide rushing over sandbars where, moments before, the water had been calm.

"It's invigorating — like a roller-coaster, only wetter," he said.

After two or four hours on the river, rafters are treated to a beef barbecue.

"We'll have about 5,500 rafters in a year and they'll all see eagles and the wonderful tides — that's what it's all about," Mr. Robinson said.

( mmacintyre@herald.ca)

**Well his secret might be the fact, he is well connected and knows all the ins and out of sourcing funding from the tax funded ACOA , We wish to thank ACOA for the information <http://www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca/e/media/press/press.shtml?1353>.**

**Off The ACOA site:**

**Shubenacadie Tidal Bore Rafting Park Limited in Shubenacadie, Mid-Valley Motel Limited in Middleton, Mountain Gap Inns Ltd. in Digby, Port Royal Inn Limited in Annapolis Royal, Celtic Grove Cottages in Chester Basin, and Driftwood Park Retreat in Cumberland County have received a total of \$1,166,500 (see note below) in interest- free loans from ACOA. The loans are from ACOA's Business Development Program for new cottage establishments and modernizations to help meet the growing demand for quality accommodations in Nova Scotia.**

**So do we have another Freeloader ?**

