Canadian BBQ Boys make *Dragon's Den* deal

BY JAIME MYSLIK



GUELPH - "There's going to be no stopping these guys," said the Canadian BBQ Boys' mentor Niel Palmer.

"They're ready to take on the world."

University of Guelph students Matt McCoy and Michael Sutton, both 21, are the creators of Canadian BBQ Boys, a barbecue cleaning business that caught the eye of the business moguls on CBC's Dragon's Den this season.

McCoy and Sutton started Canadian BBQ Boys the summer between their first and second years of university.

They are now in the fourth year of a bachelor of commerce degree, taking both business and marketing courses.

"We wanted to start a business and actually ... Mike's parents had had an experience with a general contractor who came out to (clean) the barbecue and he came back several times and it was just very inefficient, very high cost," McCoy said.

"We love barbecuing; we wanted to start a business and the pieces just fell into place."

The friends, who have known each other since they were in Grade 9 and living in Oakville, had been talking about starting a business since they were in a Grade 12 accounting class.

The summer after their first year at U of G they started knocking on doors to offer their barbecue cleaning service.

> "We love barbecuing; we wanted to start a business and the pieces just fell into place."
>
> - MATT MCCOY, CO-OWNER CANADIAN BBQ BOYS

"We finished the exams on the Friday and that Sunday we started knocking on doors," McCoy said. "We got four sales our first day so it filled up our next day.

"Actually our very first door we knocked on we got a sale on that one; our very first door-to-door sales pitch ever. It's a very funny pitch to say the least, but it took us a couple hours to build up the courage to even knock on the door."

McCoy and Sutton spent mornings that summer cleaning barbecues they booked the previous day; afternoons were spent knocking on doors to book appointments.

"It could be 9pm and we wouldn't stop knocking until we had the next day full," McCoy said.

Sutton said the pair hadn't really cleaned barbecues before and some family and friends doubted the business would work.

"They just really doubted us, but we didn't really doubt ourselves; we were like, 'Whatever, we'll just try it, we'll see how it goes,'" Sutton said.

Palmer, of Devad Consulting Inc., met McCoy and Sutton during the school year after their first summer and mentored them through a young entrepreneur program at the U of G. He is still their mentor through Innovation Guelph.

"They're fantastic entrepreneurs," McCoy said. "I can hardly believe that they're still in university; it's absolutely crazy what these guys are capable of.

"They started networking and putting together the structure of their business and they started developing contacts and a full on business model right away and so basically the first summer that they were in operation ... they were already doing a decent amount of business themselves."



The Dragon's Den Deal?

$50,000 for 10% of Canadian BBQ Boys

Now the owners employ regional managers across the province who coordinate cleanings in specific geographic areas.

McCoy and Sutton are still responsible for booking the jobs, but they didn't do much hands-on cleaning last summer.

"They expanded territorially through leveraging ... a territory manager-type structure so they get basically other young entrepreneurs to come into the business and they almost get to manage their own ... geographic area and they carry the Canadian BBQ Boys logo and way of doing business and all that kind of stuff," Palmer said. "So these guys immediately started ... thinking ... about how to spread out.

"So they started in a few different locations and now they're probably going to push out west and they're to the point now where cash injection in their business is going to accelerate them quite rapidly."

Enter *Dragon's Den*.

McCoy and Sutton appeared on the Jan. 10 episode and though they appeared calm and prepared, the journey to get to that point was anything but smooth.

Dragon's Den actually found the Canadian BBQ Boys website and approached McCoy and Sutton to ask if they'd be interested in auditioning for the show. However, they missed the Guelph audition and the show contacted them to find out what happened and why they weren't there.

It was at that point Sutton realized the show was actually interested in their business.

"So we went out to the last audition, which is in Niagara, and we pitched to some of the producers there and we weren't really sure how it went," Sutton said. "But we ended up getting onto the waitlist so we weren't actually into the show."

The episode was to be filmed on a Tuesday in the spring of 2019. The Sunday before, the Canadian BBQ Boys received a call that there was a cancellation and *Dragon's Den* wanted them to fill in. That Monday, the business was set to start up for the summer season.



sample cleaning

However, McCoy and Sutton accepted the slot on *Dragon's Den* and figured the rest out.

"We called one of our customers that we were ... supposed to do that day and we said, 'Hey can we come super early in the morning, clean half your barbecue and then bring it on the CBC set for *Dragon's Den*?' and they were like 'yeah, for sure,'" Sutton said. "So we rented a U-Haul, drove down, cleaned half their barbecue, brought it on the set and then we did the show."

The pair asked to go last on the show because they hadn't had time to prepare their pitch.

"What happened was ... because we were cleaning half (the barbecue) it was supposed to take an hour for two of us and it took four hours," McCoy said. "So we just rushed to the show.

"We got there and we didn't have a pitch or anything and we worked with the producers and we just looked in the mirror a lot, practiced to ourselves."

Sutton credited their sales experience for their success in preparing the pitch.

"All of our experience with door-to-door and we've said the pitch a million times, we know our business inside and out, so it was kind of just intuitive, second nature to us." he said.

They made a deal with Jim Treliving, owner of the Boston Pizza franchise, for $50,000 for 10% of their company - exactly what they were seeking.

"I think we came in with a pretty realistic valuation and a lot of people don't do that, but since we've both watched the show a lot we knew if we go in with a million dollar valuation we're just going to get chewed apart and not get a deal," Sutton said.

"So we came in realistic with something that we actually think we're worth, then it's going to work out for us."

They said they wanted the money for marketing to sustain growth throughout Canada and for recruitment, research and development, process improvement and efficiency strategies.

On the show, after Manjit Minhas, Vincenzo Guzzo and Arlene Dickinson said they would not be making an offer, the

PHOTOS: SUBMITTED



Canadian BBQ Boys jumped on Treliving's offer. He was the dragon they were hoping to work with.

"I'd love to be a part of your business," Treliving told the students.

"You've got all the stuff that's ready to go, just keep pounding, that's what you've got to do.

"I'll make you an offer for what you came for."

In reality, the duo made the deal before most of the dragons even had a chance to make an offer.

"I got a little excited," Sutton said.

"Then all the Dragons were so upset and then they call us back we were just like 'okay we want to hear, we want to hear' and then all of them were just like 'well you clearly just want to work with Jim, so we're going to go out,'" McCoy said.

Now the Canadian BBQ Boys are going through the extensive due diligence process with Treliving's staff.

"We haven't received an investment yet," McCoy said. "We have been reached out (to) by other investors and things like that.

"We've had several contacts with the managers in his office, so there's no deal yet, but we're still open to investment and we're still kind of looking around, seeing what we can do and how we want to take the business forward."

The Canadian BBQ Boys were considering expanding across Canada quickly - right now they provide services from St. Catharines to Ottawa - but after receiving advice from Treliving on Dragon's Den they've slowed the expansion down.

"I'd take a step back," Treliving said. "We were a western Canadian company for a long, long time, thought we could do it. We opened three stores back here (in Ontario); I closed all three after five years, went back home; we weren't ready.

"If you start spreading too soon, too quickly, you'll lose what you have here."

It's this willingness to learn that make McCoy and Sutton such great entrepreneurs.

> "If you start spreading too soon, too quickly, you'll lose what you have here."
>
> - JIM TRELIVING, BOSTON PIZZA OWNER AND "DRAGON" ON *DRAGON'S DEN*

"They absorb pretty much everything that comes their way and they're very good at building on the knowledge that they have and the ability that they've gained," Palmer said.

"They build on that constantly so they're becoming more and more effective as they go along.

"So I imagine you'll see Canadian BBQ Boys in the next two years with a whole host of service ideas and they'll grow the business out."

They also have some advice for young entrepreneurs.

"We always say ... start a service business," Sutton said. "You never know where you can take it and at the very least it's great experience and it will lay the foundations for you as an entrepreneur or in the business world for your future.

"So I really want to push students to just get out and start doing services in their local neighbourhoods, scale it throughout their communities and really see what they can do in building a brand and you can just learn so much."

McCoy said technology and the internet can be a distraction for students who think they need to start a marketing agency or drop-ship products.

"In reality you get the core fundamental business experience when you're actually out doing," he said. "And we think starting a service business, starting door-to-door is a fantastic way to start.

"You network, you meet new people, we learn advice from our customers every time."

He added, "We don't see it as competition even if you want to start a barbecue cleaning business, we just want to see students start service businesses and we really want to move that forward."

The Canadian BBQ Boys will be out in full force this summer and McCoy and Sutton plan to continue with the business once they graduate from their fifth year of university.

The main message they want to share is that every barbecue needs to be cleaned.

"Our biggest goal is to spread awareness about the fact that you need to keep your barbecue clean and once enough people understand the importance of it we feel like it would be a great benefit," McCoy said.

For more information visit https://canadianbbqboys.com.

BL

PHOTO: SUBMITTED