

PROJECT
PEOPLE & PLACES



Didsbury

A project by the Town of Didsbury

KIDSBURY DAYCARE LTD.
MJ PAUL

DEE'S TREASURE CHEST
DEE & WAYNE MIDDLEBROOK

COWTOWN BREWING CO.
BHUPINDER GILL

TOP NOTE MUSIC
TEENA WILKS

VIYASIT THAI KITCHEN
NOK KHAJONMOTE

FRONT PORCH REALTY
ALLEN REED & ROD NEUFELD

Example Posts and Stories

Project 52 Businesses—example posts & stories

Facebook post:

The Town of Didsbury's **Project 52—People and Places** Facebook posts are distinct and easily recognized. They include a stylized photo, with a P52 frame, of the highlighted business's owners and, sometimes, staff. In the text, an excerpt from the story invites readers to click the link to the Town of Didsbury website, to learn more about the local business and the people behind its success.

Business stories are added to the website each Wednesday, and the Facebook posts go up the same day.

Town of Didsbury
Published by John Bastarache · July 27 at 4:34 PM · 🌐

"It's a big undertaking, and I really hope that it benefits our town and all the people of Didsbury and surrounding areas—we thank everyone for their support."

To learn more about Didsbury Home Hardware, visit: <https://engage.didsbury.ca/didsbury-home-hardware>

#Project52 #PeopleandPlaces #TownofDidsbury #Didsbury



Town of Didsbury
Published by John Bastarache · July 20 at 12:05 PM · 🌐

"When I see the customers going out, and saying 'thank you, that was a great meal'. It doesn't matter what you spent or what you ate, and I don't ever have people complain about the service."

To read more about Yianni Lygouriatis and his local business, Maria's Restaurant, visit <https://engage.didsbury.ca/maria-s-restaurant>

#Project52 #PeopleandPlaces #TownofDidsbury #DidsburyAlberta #whyDidsbury



Town of Didsbury
Published by John Bastarache · July 13 at 3:06 PM · 🌐

"I think we are successful for a few reasons," Robert surmised. "Our \$30 per hour wait times are really popular, and we have a no-conflict policy and are always respectful to our customers."

Robert Robinson saw a need in Didsbury, and he set out to fill the gap. That was three years ago and, what started out as a retirement gig to keep himself in town, has turned into a full-time (plus) taxi business.

To read more about Didsbury Taxi, visit the Town of Didsbury website: <https://engage.didsbury.ca/didsbury-taxi>



Town of Didsbury
Published by John Bastarache · July 6 · 🌐

"We know just about everyone who comes into the store," says Craig. "They aren't just our customers; they are our friends."

"And our staff are all local, too" adds Brad, "so they know the customers too. It's more than just a business. We all work together to make sure we are serving the needs of the community."

To read more about Checker Auto Parts, visit: <https://engage.didsbury.ca/checker-auto-parts>



Project 52 Businesses—*example posts & stories*

Business Stories:

Each Wednesday, a new story is added to the ***Project 52—People and Places*** section of the Town of Didsbury’s website. The story includes a top photo, and a brief overview of the business, what makes it unique, and who the people are, behind the storefront. The business owners are all asked *what they like best about doing business in Didsbury*, and the answers are included in each article.

The project began in January and is scheduled to run until the end of December. At completion, there will be 52 stories of local businesses. All stories remain on the site, easily accessed by month, on the main P52 page, so viewers are able to keep up and go back and re-read articles as they wish.



Each tile is linked to the business’s story, on its own page. The photos are either taken by the communications coordinator at the time of the interview, or is provided by the business.

Checker Auto Parts

Brad and Craig Anderson

Checker Auto Parts has been the place to go in Didsbury for all your automotive, agricultural and industrial parts needs for more than 30 years. And...it is more than a parts store; it has become a bit of a gathering place as people come in to not only buy parts, but also to visit and connect with their neighbours.



It began as Lawrence's Automotive, a small parts store located at the front of Franz's Welding shop. At that time, Al Anderson was part owner of Allied Distributors, the warehouse which supplied the store with all its parts. In 1986, Al's son, Craig, came on board and, in 1990, he and his brother, Brad, bought the store from the warehouse and changed its name to Checker Auto Parts. There were a few other Checkers throughout Alberta then, but the Didsbury store is the only one remaining.

Shortly after purchasing the store, the brothers moved it across the tracks to the building that now houses Martinson & Harder Law Office, and Farm & Trade was in the location Checker now sits. As their business and inventory grew, they realized they needed more space. At the same time, Farm & Trade was ramping down their business, so they traded spots. "That was about 15 years ago," recalls Craig. "It was a big move. The Ag Society helped with it, as a fundraiser for them. Rather than us pay someone else, it went back into the community."

Over the years, the business has grown and evolved in response to community need. It expanded from an automotive parts store, to one that also carries agricultural and industrial parts. "We carry ammunition now, too," says Craig, "because our customers were asking for it, and didn't want to have to travel too far. It's something we could do to help make it easier for them."

"That is really why we have expanded all of our selection," adds Brad. "When the agricultural parts dealership, Farm & Trade, closed here in town, we added that to our inventory so, again, those customers didn't have to go to another town. We could be the one-stop-shop, and we're close enough to our warehouse that we get a truck in everyday, so our customers don't have to wait."

Being that one-stop-shop has served them well. Brad and Craig grew up in Chestermere, but Didsbury is their home. Their brother, Steve, followed them to Didsbury and lived here for many years, until he fell in love and moved to Arizona. After their dad passed away in 2002, their mom made the move to our community as well, and has become a full-fledged Didsburian. "It is a quiet, safe place to live," notes Brad, "and there is a real sense of community."

What do you like about owning a business in Didsbury?

"We know just about everyone who comes into the store," says Craig. "They aren't just our customers; they are our friends."

"And our staff are all local, too" adds Brad, "so they know the customers too. It's more than just a business. We all work together to make sure we are serving the needs of the community."

Didsbury Taxi

Robert Robinson

Robert Robinson saw a need in Didsbury, and he set out to fill the gap. That was three years ago and, what started out as *a retirement gig to keep himself in town*, has turned into a full-time (plus) taxi business.

Robert was born and raised in Cape Breton, then moved West where he worked as a pressure welder in the oil and gas industry for more than 35 years. He lived in both Airdrie and Carstairs before he, his wife, Dianna, and their daughter chose Didsbury as home.

On December 19, 2019, he was laid off from his job. In the month that followed, he, “went to the bar a few times”, he said, and realized that Didsbury was missing a taxi service. “I didn’t really know until then that there was no taxi in town, but I saw then that it was needed—for people who had been drinking and didn’t want to drive, and for others as well.” Recognizing an opportunity, Robert started researching and creating a business plan. On February 20, 2020, Didsbury Taxi opened *its doors*. That was two weeks before the first round of Covid restrictions were put in place in Alberta.

“I never intended to do deliveries,” explained Robert, “but because of Covid, that started right away.” The biggest demand in delivery was for restaurant food and alcohol, from the liquor stores here in town. To be permitted to make the delivery aspect of the taxi service possible, he was required to get a liquor licence, which he applied for and received right away. “Doing deliveries wasn’t a very good money maker, but that is where the need was and it helped me get my name out there, so I was happy to do it.”

Since then, his name is certainly out there. In fact, his business has grown from one car to four, and he estimates that 50-60% of delivery customers are now riding customers as well. On New Year’s Eve, he had 129 calls, and has averaged about 120, 000 kms/year on the car he started with. Currently, Didsbury Taxi is number one on Yelp for taxi companies in Southern Alberta, ahead of much larger fleets; he has a five-star rating, and more than 800 followers.

“I think we are successful for a few reasons,” Robert surmised. “Our \$30 per hour wait times are really popular, and we have a no-conflict policy and are always respectful to our customers.”

The wait time refers to a \$30 per hour fee charged for the taxi to wait while riders are at appointments. “Technically, we probably lose money doing this,” he explained, “but we use less fuel, there is less wear and tear on the vehicles, and we put fewer kilometers on when we wait, rather than drive back to Didsbury (from Calgary) and then go back to pick them up. And then they don’t have to wait around for us either, so our customers are happier. It’s better for everyone, and typically saves people \$40-\$50 per trip.”

Many of Robert’s fares involve driving Didsbury and area residents to Calgary for doctor’s appointments, often at one of the hospitals. Robert also has agreements with AHS, FCSS, and AISH to direct bill them for their clients’ appointments, which he recognizes is another value-added service he can offer his riders. “We are always looking for more ways to meet needs and be more efficient for people.” That kind of initiative is, in part, why Didsbury Taxi has been so successful.

What is the best part of doing business in Didsbury?

“The conversations. People I drive are great, and they have really interesting stories to tell, especially on the longer trips. I really enjoy getting to know them,” and Robert is getting to know a lot of people. “Before I started this, I was kind of a ghost in town. I went out of town to work everyday, and really didn’t know too many people here.” Today, when he and his wife go out shopping or to eat in Didsbury, there is always someone who recognizes them and makes a point of saying hello. “It’s really nice.” He also enjoys being able to stay closer to home, and spending time in his community of choice.



Maria's Restaurant

Yianni & Mayeth Lygouriatis

Yianni Lygouriatis's love of cooking began at home, in Greece, where he learned from his mother, Maria. "I received a lot of slaps from her," he joked.

When he was 22 years old, Yianni moved from Greece to California, where he knew some people, and began his career, working in a restaurant. "I started at the bottom, and did everything there is to do in a restaurant," he said.

"You need to understand the business, everything from A to Z." Then, when the opportunity to purchase his own restaurant came up, "I took it," he said. "It was a fast food restaurant, but not like a franchise one. It was still homemade food, but we had a drive through too. It combined a family restaurant with fast food style."

After 25 years, and with experience owning and running a successful business, Yianni moved to Canada in 2012 and settled near Regina, where he had family. He worked with his brothers and uncles at their restaurant until, "another opportunity came up, and I just went for it again." He laughed. He bought his first Saskatchewan restaurant, and then bought another—operating both at the same time.

During their time off from the businesses, he and his wife, Mayeth, whom he met in Saskatchewan, often travelled to Alberta to spend time in nature, enjoying the lakes, mountains and green spaces. During one such trip, they visited Didsbury and noticed that there was a restaurant for sale. "The town seemed very open and welcoming, and we decided to go for it." They moved west and opened their new restaurant in Didsbury on January 10, 2022. They called it Maria's, after his mother.

"Mom had it," he explained, referring to her skill in the kitchen and her love of cooking, "and I have it too. There are no recipes for it—you are just going by the taste. It's a passion."

Yianni describes Maria's menu as simple. "There is nothing special on the menu. The food is very simple. It is about family, and comfort-type food. Almost everything is homemade—we have homemade gravy, homemade meat sauce, and generous portions. I would rather have the customers say it is too much, and take some home, rather than not have enough," he explained. Some days there are traditional Greek dishes available as well, but only a select number. "Greek food is heavier than most Canadians are used to eating, and is only good when it is fresh. I wouldn't eat it if it isn't fresh and, if I won't eat it, I won't serve it." He also noted that there are other restaurants in town with fancier food, for when people want that, and they can then come to Maria's when they want what he serves. "You can't have everything on one menu."

Yianni doesn't mind sharing business and customers, and he is very clear that he doesn't compete with other restaurants in town. "We aren't here to compete, we're here to make business. There is always room for improvement, but if I am doing okay, then everyone else is too," he said. "There's a saying we have in Greece," he added, "If you see your neighbour's house on fire, expect yours to be too. I don't want to see my neighbour's house on fire."

What's the best part about doing business in Didsbury?

"When I see the customers going out, and saying 'thank you, that was a great meal'. It doesn't matter what you spent or what you ate, and I don't ever have people complain about the service." He credits the good people who come in to eat, and the good people working for him in making it a welcoming, family-like atmosphere.

"I have some really good people working here," said Yianni. "They are very polite and respectful to our customers, and they have respect for themselves, which is even more important. And, they live here. I can't expect people to support me if I don't give back to the community. That is why I am always open to helping people."

That sense of community is what he likes best about doing business in Didsbury, along with his love for the business of feeding people good food. "You have to love what you are doing, or don't do it."



Didsbury Home Hardware

Didsbury Home Hardware is a true family business, in every sense. Dennis and Mary Van Dyck have been serving the community for almost 30 years, with the help of their children and grandchildren. Their son, Kurt, is the current manager of the store, with his mom and dad still very much involved in the day-to-day operations.



Prior to buying the Didsbury Home Hardware, Dennis and Mary were in Grand Forks, BC, managing another Home Hardware store in partnership with Mary's brother and sister in law. When the store in Didsbury became available for purchase, they took a chance and made the move.

"I came from Calgary a couple weeks ahead of time, just to work with the couple who owned the store then, and get a feel for how it was run here," explained Kurt, "then Mom and Dad arrived." That was in 1995 and, since then, all of Dennis and Mary's children have moved to Didsbury and worked with their parents, at one time or another. Dennis Jr. is now living in Edson, where he and his siblings spent much of their childhoods, but their other three children (Kurt, Corrina, and Carla) remain in the Didsbury area. "Our grandkids and now great grandkids are being raised in Didsbury," said Mary. "It's so nice to have them close, and it is such a great place for them to grow up."

Kurt's wife, Melinda, moved to Didsbury from Drayton Valley about ten years ago when her son, Justin, was ten. Melinda began working at the store and, "Justin came in and asked me for a job every day," laughed Mary. "He was too young then, but he was persistent, and we hired him when he turned 13. He'll be 20 next month and still works here," she said, proudly. Another grandson, Hayden, also works at the store, in receiving, and, "many of our grandkids have worked with us here," she added.

Working together, the store became well known over the years for plumbing, electrical, and paint supplies and, every spring, the garden centre. "We get people from all over the place, for our plants," Mary said. "and we have really knowledgeable staff, and people come for that as well."

Over the years, the Van Dycks added on to the original Home Hardware building as the store expanded its inventory and customer base. In October of 2021, they moved the entire store to the other end of Main Street, and took over the former AG Foods building, which was larger.

"It was a pretty big stretch to make that move," claimed Kurt, "and probably will be for some time. But...we were already planning on it (before business slowed a bit during the Covid restrictions), so we were going for it."

Mary agreed with her son, "It's a big undertaking, and I really hope that it benefits our town and all the people of Didsbury and surrounding areas—we thank everyone for their support."

What's the best part about doing business in Didsbury?

Mary, Kurt and Melinda all agree: the best part about doing business in Didsbury is the people. "If we didn't love people, we wouldn't do retail," claimed Kurt. "You have to have a real affinity for helping people, sincerely, or you wouldn't last here."

He understands that, as a business owner in a small town, you are, "in the public eye 24/7. So are our staff, and we all represent the store, so we try hard, and we're sincere," he said. "We give back to the community, but we don't like to say that, because that's not why we do it—not for the recognition. We do it because those groups are doing good things for the town and the people who live here, and they all support us too."

Mary added that, "when I had an accident last month, everyone was just so great. Our customers are also our friends and our neighbours. It's all about the community—they're awesome people."