



# Caster-Rack celebrates 20th anniversary

Systems Ltd.

By Stephen Patrick Clare

Ask Tony Matthews what it's like to work alongside members of his immediate family and he is careful to choose his words.

"It has its moments," smiles the 38 year-old sales manager for Caster Rack Systems Ltd. in the Burnside Business Park.

"Actually, we all get along really well," he is quick to add. "Sometimes we talk shop at home or at family get-togethers, but for the most part each of us is able to leave our work at the door at the end of the day."

Ask anyone who works alongside a brother, sister, mother or father and they will tell you that running a family business can be tricky, often requiring a well-honed sense of tact and balance.

"With lots of practice, we've managed to do that pretty successfully for the last 20 years," Matthews notes. "Thankfully we have all been on the same page since day one."

When Tony's brother Mike and his wife Valerie started the company in 1989, the hope was to service the crop of new businesses sprouting up in and around the Burnside area. As a stocking distributor of casters, wheels, shelving units, bins and material handling products for industrial, institutional and commercial applications, the firm soon found a marketplace right across the region.

"Everyone needs shelving, right?" muses Matthews. "What we have seen is that companies or institutions that are really serious about their growth are willing to learn to use their space properly."

Today Caster Rack Systems serves as a one-stop shop for its clients, not only as a provider of quality end-products, but also consulting and advising customers, designing spacing systems to order and then assembling and servicing those systems on site.

"There is always something to do," Matthews says. "I think a big reason why we have done so well is because we're all committed to superior customer service. It's a matter of personal pride that we give our clients the proper attention they deserve all of the time. The company was founded on the idea of developing and nurturing long-term relationships with our partners and it has remained that way to this very day."

Mark Martell agrees. As Caster Rack Systems' general manager, he has overseen the company's connections to clients in both the public and private sectors.

"We have always serviced each of our customers in the same manner," he points out. "Whether we're walking through a needs assessment with one of our many large, high-profile customers such as the Nova Scotia Community College, Michelin Tire and the Canadian Military or working through spacing solutions and installation issues for a smaller businesses, they all get the same treatment from start to finish."

Martell – who is also family by way of his marriage to Matthews' sister – points out that it's the company's hands-on approach that has allowed it to keep moving forward.

"It's called trust," he says. "Our clients know they are always going to get quality products and service from us."

That confidence has served them well, especially during difficult economic times.

"We've been feeling the impact of the recession a little bit," Matthews confides, "though not nearly as much as we first anticipated."

He takes the thought a step further. "Although I don't think many businesses either here in this region – or anywhere in Canada really – have shown themselves to be immune to what is happening down south or in other parts of the world, I do think we have adapted quite well to all of the changes. And there's something to be said about having an even-keel economy, like the one we seem to

have here in Nova Scotia. It's possible that because Atlantic Canadians have always been more insular and self-contained, we don't seem to go up and down like other places across the country."

In spite of the current issues facing the local, regional and national economies, Matthews believes the future is full of possibilities.

"When I first designed our website five years ago, I had no idea what kind of potential it would eventually have in terms of creating visibility in the marketplace or driving sales. I don't think many of us knew how big it was going to get."

"Right now we're using it primarily as a way for people to get in touch with us and as a tool to educate them about our products and services," he continues. "However, I'm now exploring new ways at capitalizing on these social and business networking sites – Facebook, Twitter and so forth – as a way of expanding our presence and developing new clients. Really, this kind of thing is full of potential that we need to tap into and stay on top of to keep growing as a business."

Still, Matthews concedes that even with the exciting opportunities presented by new technologies, at the end of the day nothing can compare with the power of meeting with people face to face.

"When I first started with the company 15 years ago, I was out pounding the pavement, making cold calls wherever I could and whenever someone would let me get my foot in the door," he laughs. "That's how we developed our initial client base and it's still the most effective means of driving the bottom line. We're very proud of the long-term relationships we've built and many of our customers have since become good friends, with some even like extended family."

For more information on Caster Rack Systems Ltd., please visit the company's website at [www.caster-rack.com](http://www.caster-rack.com).

