

# Silver Cross is dedicated to empowering the physically challenged

By Peter West  
Journal Staff

Bob Harvey's market research tells him there are 4.1 million disabled Canadians. Of that number, only about 300,000 are in institutions such as hospitals or rehabilitation centers. He concludes that means there are 3.8 million disabled people living in their own homes or apartments and further research has told him that of that number less than two per cent have ever seen the insides of an occupational therapist's office.

For most of us that information equates into some vaguely interesting trivia but to Harvey, this material is a gold mine of opportunity. Harvey is the owner of Silver Cross a company "dedicated to empowering the physically challenged."

Silver Cross, located on the North Service Rd., in Oakville sells convalescent equipment directly to the physically disabled.

"Many of the disabled aren't aware of what products are available to them. This is especially true if they aren't part of a hospital or occupational therapy program," he said.

"Some of these devices make life so much easier," said Harvey whose company sells everything from electric scooters and walkers to magnifying glasses and kitchen ware including a device that makes getting screw-top lids off bottles.

Silver Cross buys directly from the manufacturer and sells directly to the disabled person. There is no expensive retail store to add cost to the product and Harvey is working with a minimum of staff and expense in an effort to keep prices at rock bottom.

Harvey is no stranger to business. In 1989 he sold his multi-million dollar franchised business called King Fence and went to work as a consultant. It didn't take him long to figure that while he was making money working on a contingency basis he wasn't ever going to see an equity position unless he made one for himself.

Harvey spend many months researching the market for the right product or service. His father-in-law was in the business of selling convalescent equipment to hospitals, nursing homes and therapists. Harvey worked with

his father-in-law to learn the business and to consider how to bring his ideas to the marketplace.

"I wanted to create a company which had no inventory, little staff and brought the manufacturer directly in contact with the end user," he said. "What I found were disabled people can't get outside to go to a store. This means a retail store would have very little walk-in sales."

Since walk-in sales were likely to be slight, Harvey decided to go directly to the disabled person's door. To do this he has had to come up with some interesting marketing methods.

Since most of his business is done by referral, Harvey has been contacting seniors' associations and those who work with the disabled to let them know about his service.

The information super highway offers an opportunity as Harvey's research also says that many of those who are disabled and elderly often watch as much as 18 hours per week of television. He is currently researching the possibility of advertising directly to these people.

Harvey is servicing one of the most rapidly expanding groups of people in the country as many of the disabled are seniors. With the government cutting back on services to the disabled and the elderly, Harvey finds his company filling a growing need.

Research is everything to Harvey's new company.

"My research tells me that in 19.7 per cent of all homes with disabled persons, there is a real need for personal supports," he said.

Simple supports like bath tub handles can make all the difference between a disabled person staying at home or housed in an institution. Proper hand grips also prevent falls and injuries. People who need special help getting in or out of a chair can buy one that tilts, allowing for easier access. Some people need help being raised or lowered out of the bath tub and Harvey's company can supply a bath lift.

One of Oakville's many entrepreneurs, Harvey is not content to let business just go on its own. He is currently looking at ways to more effectively reach the disabled in their homes.