

Silver Cross keeps seniors on the move

By Carol Phillips

For Bob Harvey, starting up a business which recycles home health-care equipment offered him the best of both worlds.

"I find it very intriguing to find a good idea," said the entrepreneur who has successfully run unrelated businesses in the past. And this has proved a good idea.

Harvey founded Silver Cross in November, 1993. Its purpose is to locate used home health-care equipment such as stairlifts, walkers, wheelchairs and bathroom safety equipment. His Oakville-based company then repairs and refurbishes the equipment and finds a buyer.

He got the idea from observing a new equipment company that has been run by his wife's family for 16 years.

"What we saw was a great need for a lower cost alternative," he said.

A brand new, basic wheelchair costs a

minimum of \$600, he said. Silver Cross will sell the same wheelchair, used and in perfect working condition, for \$200.

"We do whatever is necessary to bring it up to a level of excellence," he said.

With offices in Oakville, Scarborough and Brampton, Silver Cross has no storefronts. Through health care agencies, press coverage and networking, people call Silver Cross when they have an available piece of equipment. Silver Cross will then buy it from the owner, pick it up and refurbish it back at the shop.

Keeping its eyes open

Conversely, those in the market for a particular piece of equipment can call Silver Cross and place an order. The company will then "keep its eyes open" for what they require. And when they locate it, and have refurbished it to specifications, they will deliver it right to the house.

They also guarantee to buy it back when the client is done with it.

Harvey said his customers are mainly seniors with mobility and agility difficulties. "The main issue is the price," he said. "But we want (people who need special equipment) to control the process instead of the medical arena."

Giving control

And control is exactly what Silver Cross gave customer Carole Kerr-Iacobucci.

The 51-year-old Toronto resident needed a scooter immediately, but would have to wait six weeks to know if she qualified for funding from the provincial assistive devices program.

The new equipment companies wouldn't sell her a scooter until she had the money in her hands.

"Everybody was quite rude," she said. "If you were ready to buy it right away, there were a lot of people around. But if

not...."

She learned about Silver Cross through a social worker. "They took it on a kind of promise and said if the worst came to the worst and no money came through for me, I could rent it," she said. She described Harvey as having "this attitude that he can do something for you." It was a comfort to find someone so helpful.

Harvey has plans to open a London office soon with further offices in every major centre in Ontario within 12 months. In addition, the company has begun a data base of people wanting to both sell and buy equipment to facilitate locating specialized items.

While he's been in many different businesses, Harvey feels he's found his vocation. "There's no comparison. You're helping people all day long."

The Oakville office of Silver Cross can be reached at (905) 847-5504.