



Who do You Really Want to Be?

by Arlene Antonik

Are you Halloween challenged? Does the thought of attending a Masquerade Ball make you want to run and hide behind a mask somewhere? Or does your alter-ego rejoice at the thought of turning into Superman or Captain Jack Sparrow or Queen Marie Antoinette? Whichever fits, Victoria Costumes is ready-made for you.

Owner Charlotte Rennison definitely falls into the latter category. As a child, she watched from the wings as her parents hosted costume and theme parties at their home. Growing up, Charlotte delighted in 'dressing up.' She started to collect costumes and accessories and held theme parties of her own, and she was always the one friends turned to when a costume was required.

While her costume collection continued to expand, Charlotte earned her degree in Psychology and began her career in Psychiatric Care. But when the costumes in her home displaced the dining room suite and the basement filled up with racks of outfits and boxes of belts and bowties, top hats and spats, masks and mustaches, a decision had to be made.

Were the costumes just a side interest or could costume rental become a business?

On January 1st, 2008, Charlotte made a New Year's resolution to give it a try and Victoria Costumes was born.

"The transition turned out to be an easy one," Charlotte explained. "My husband created the webpage, and friends

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and family spread the word that I was open for business. Working from home allows me to be here with my daughter Isis in her pre-school years."

With year one complete, can the business be deemed a success? The Saanich Peninsula Chamber of Commerce must think so, as they chose Victoria Costumes for their 2009 New Business of the Year. Charlotte also received an Honorable Mention for the 2009 Innovation and Entrepreneurship Award.

Has the slowdown in the economy affected her business? "Not at all," Charlotte replied. "I don't want to say the downturn has been a good thing, but people come to me and say they want to dress up and be somebody else for awhile and forget their troubles. I've often thought the 'Psychology of Costuming' would make an interesting thesis."

The two months leading up to Halloween are Charlotte's busiest. Last year Charlotte hired 10 temporary staff to help her and she knows a larger location will be required this year. Wrestling some garage space from her husband might offer a short reprieve, but Charlotte recognizes that the

Do you envy Spock his ears?

business is quickly outgrowing their house, located at 2175 Tanlee Crescent in Saanichton. "It's a fine balance," Charlotte mused. "Expansion means less time for fitting customers which is the part of the business I enjoy the most."

Even before the company was officially launched, Charlotte participated in numerous charity and fundraising events. "I'm all about helping out in the community," she said. She provides costumes and models for numerous community events and fashion shows including Cops for Cancer, the Lions Club Food Bank, Cats Cradle Animal Rescue and Stelly's Secondary School's Global Perspectives Annual Gala.

Charlotte makes good use of modern technology to publicize the business and keep in touch with her customers. The webpage at www.victoriacostumes.com includes information on upcoming events, rental rates, how to book an appointment, etc.

The company also has two Facebook groups: I Love VictoriaCostumes.com and I Want to be a Victoria Costumes Model. Nearly 400 people have signed on as volunteers to model the costumes for anything from the Sidney Day Parade to music videos and photo shoots and requests from the local entertainment industry for models and costumes are steadily increasing.

Do you envy Spock his ears or dream of transforming into Obi-Wan Kenobi or Princess Leia? Cinderella or Prince Charming? The Joker, Batman or even a sexy, female Robin? If you have a theme, 'Saanichton's Costume Sweetheart' has a scheme for putting it all together for you. ☺

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