

PIVOT



CPA
CANADA

National
Magazine
Awards: B2B
BEST ISSUE
winner 2020

LIFE SUPPORT

FCPA Rick Jamieson
is helping to build
10,000 ventilators

Inside the Canadian
companies that
dropped everything
to fight COVID-19



THE FUTURE OF FOOD

BUILDING A BETTER
BURGER, THE FIRST
GMO FISH AND
THE POST-PANDEMIC
GROCERY STORE

JULY/AUGUST 2020



Face shield
by Tinkerine
Studios Ltd.

The ChangeUp

**Before the pandemic, they were
carmakers, brewers and clothiers.
Now they're making the things
Canadians need to survive.**

BY MATTHEW HAGUE

COVID-19 has affected every business in Canada. Most of the companies that survived lost clients, cut salaries and laid off employees. More than a million Canadians lost their jobs in March alone, and the national economy is expected to contract by more than six per cent in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Yet dire times have led to innovation. More than 5,000 Canadian companies—large, small and in between—have shifted their focus to help with the pandemic. Clothiers have switched from polo shirts to protective masks, breweries are making

hand sanitizer instead of beer, and auto manufacturers have pivoted to produce the desperately needed ventilators that keep those worst afflicted by the disease breathing.

Many of these companies are responding to a shuttering international supply chain, which has left Canada bereft of essential personal protective equipment: scrubs, masks and face shields. Others are keeping us well nourished despite restaurants closing en masse. Here, five companies across the country that reinvented themselves in the crisis.



“Our moment to serve”

FCPA **Rick Jamieson** temporarily stepped away from his job as president and CEO of ABS Friction, a brake-pad manufacturer in Guelph, Ont., to co-found a company building 10,000 ventilators.

“In early March, I was at my winter place in Florida, playing golf, enjoying the sunshine. My wife and I flew back to Canada on March 12 for a meeting and a Leafs game, thinking we’d only be up north for a few days. We left one of our cars and all our summer clothes down south. I don’t know when we’ll get back there.

Soon after I came back to Canada, a friend of mine, Jim Estill, the CEO of Danby Appliances, asked me to join a consortium he was putting together, a group of manufacturers trying to find a solution to the ventilator shortage. I’m a CPA by background, a tax accountant. I’m not an engineer. And making brake pads is very different than ventilators. They aren’t something I could do at my factory in Guelph. But Jim persisted, putting together a diverse team in what is now called Ventilators for Canadians. We each bring something different, something valuable. Scott Shawyer, CEO of robotics company JMP Solutions, has a lot of engineering expertise. Paul L’Heureux, CEO of Crystal Fountains, a company

that makes architectural water features, can rapidly prototype anything. We have medical expertise through our partners Baylis Medical and Medtronic, both of which make medical devices.

My background as a CPA has helped a lot, too. It’s helped us in contract negotiations and in our thinking about all the risk management involved. Our original plan was to bootstrap, using money from our own companies. That plan, however, became difficult when the economy fell apart. Our businesses started to suffer and we all had to start laying off staff, so we decided to fundraise. Two very generous anonymous donors pledged \$3 million, so we put together a contract proposal for the federal government for further financing. In early April, we made a deal with the feds to deliver 10,000 ventilators by mid-September.

I think of the first few weeks of Ventilators for Canadians as a sprint, a dash to put together the plan and the money. Now I think that we’re in a marathon phase, doing the hard work to ensure the ventilators get made—that all the materials and parts come through, that our various assembling facilities produce what we need. Since mid-March, I haven’t had a day off. Most of my days have started at 6:30 a.m. and ended at 10:30 p.m. I’ve barely had time to think about my car and clothes in Florida, let alone my actual business, ABS Friction, which I’ve fortunately left in the care of two capable managers. But my partners—Jim, Scott, Paul—are grateful we have the energy and expertise to do this. None of us have ever fought in a war. We think of this as our moment to serve the country, much like our fathers did when they fought in World War II.”