

Owner of The Healing Bath lost booth, products in Labour Day blaze



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Stratford's Leslie Humphrys-Eliasziw, owner of The Healing Bath, lost her booth in the blaze that destroyed the St. Jacobs market this week. (SCOTT WISHART The Beacon Herald)

A Stratford small business owner says she is grateful for the outpouring of support she's received since losing her booth in last weekend's St. Jacobs Farmers Market fire.

"It's really touched me," said Leslie Humphrys-Eliasziw on Thursday.

"I got an email yesterday from someone who was at the site saying 'I can see your window decor, I can see that in the rubble,'" she said.

The market booth was the sole permanent retail location for Humphrys-Eliasziw's home-based business, The Healing Bath, which markets a variety of bath products made from imported Dead Sea salt and minerals.

About 60 vendors lost everything when the main market building, a two-story post-and-beam structure, was destroyed in a \$2-million fire early on Labour Day.

Humphrys-Eliasziw recalled she was pulling into the parking lot on Monday for her final day exhibiting at the CNE when her cellphone went crazy with messages. She sat in shock in her van watching video of the fire, she said.

"I could see my booth, I could see everything where I was ... it was all very surreal."

On her way home from Toronto she drove to St. Jacobs, arriving at about 2 a.m. to see what was left of the building.

"And that's when it really impacted me ... oh my, it's gone, there's nothing there," she said.

While her head tells her everything will be OK because no one was injured and businesses and products can be replaced, she said, it's still an emotional struggle.

"The vendors, we all work together, we helped each other," she said of the close relationships she has developed at St. Jacobs.

She's been in touch with the market owners since the fire.

"They're going to try and accommodate or work something out so that we can be back up and running to hit the Christmas season," she said.

"I definitely will be back in St. Jacobs. It's just a matter of when."

Meantime, Humphrys-Eliasziw said she will continue to rent sales space in trade shows and special events like this weekend's Stratford Garlic Festival as well as sell the products through the business's website.

She was fortunate that she had a good deal of stock with her at the CNE instead of in St. Jacobs. Still, she estimated her loss at about \$10,000.

Humphrys-Eliasziw imports about 23 tonnes of Dead Sea salt and minerals from Israel annually to make her line of bath products. Although the products have made it into swag bags at the Oscars in Hollywood, she said, the niche business is still "very small" and home-based. One of her daughters is the girl on the product labels. The whole family gets involved in packaging and labeling the products created by Humphrys-Eliasziw.

Canada's largest year-round farmers market on the outskirts of Waterloo partially re-opened Thursday with about 300 vendors set up outdoors and in the Peddler's Village building, which escaped damage in the fire. Premier Kathleen Wynne was on hand for the re-opening of the market.

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