

# Muskoka **BUSINESS**

## GemThane makes wood finishing go high-tech

by Walter Franczyk

A new Bracebridge company is about to make the Muskoka look last a lot longer.

Gemthane Siding and Wood Finishing Systems (Muskoka) Inc. is setting up shop in the old Alcan plant on Muskoka Beach Road, where it will finish wood siding with an industrial-strength coating that lasts much longer than ordinary paints and stains.

Local operations manager Jeff Sowrey was hired about a month ago, and job offers were made to three local people last week.

"It's exciting," Sowrey said of the company's product. "I've got a feeling it's going to explode and be the biggest thing in Muskoka."

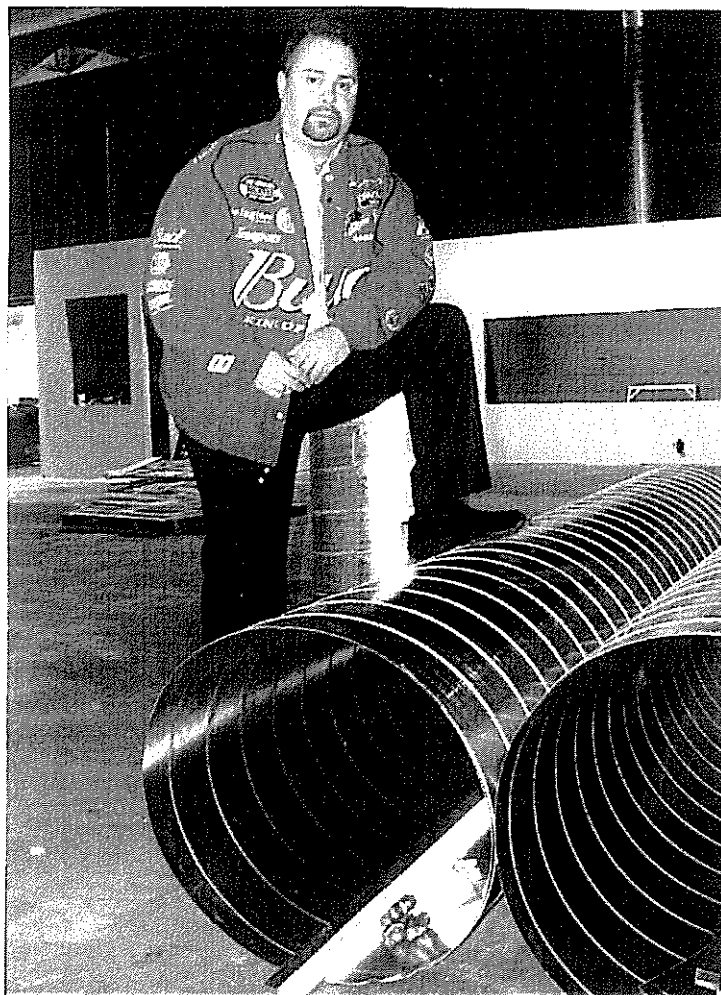
Ross Mitchell, a Lake Muskoka cottager since 1996, created the new company.

"When I bought our first cottage in '96, it was in desperate need of being repainted. It was only 10 years old," Mitchell said in an interview.

Mitchell is chief executive officer of Madison Chemical Industries Inc., which makes polymer-based coatings for gas and oil pipelines, storage tanks, wind towers and other industrial facilities around the world. He decided to finish his cottage with a company product normally used in commercial, industrial and institutional maintenance.

"I painted my cottage with GemThane because I didn't want to do it twice," he said.

When it came to finishing his second cottage, Mitchell found paints and stains on the



**IN THE WORKS.** Jeff Sowrey, operations manager at GemThane Siding Systems and Wood Finishing (Muskoka) Inc. plant in Bracebridge, predicts the company's products will be popular with Muskoka cottagers and homeowners. The wood-finishing factory, under construction in the former Alcan plant on Muskoka Beach Road, is expected to employ 10-12 people.

Photo by Walter Franczyk

market left a lot to be desired, so he used an existing GemThane product and massaged the formula to get the look and durability he wanted.

Building contractors raved about the finish.

The two worlds of cottages and chemicals

converged, creating a new coating with residential applications

Mitchell said the company's local plant would eventually employ 10-12 people and serve customers in a radius of about 75 kilometres of Bracebridge.

It will be producing prefinished siding by the end of November he predicted.

Wood siding will be milled and kiln-dried off-site. When it arrives at the plant, it will go through a two-step process that makes it impervious to the environment.

The first step is the high-pressure application of an instant setting, polyurethane resin that encapsulates the wood.

"When it's cured, it looks pretty much like a heavy coat of varnish," Mitchell said. "But it will withstand gasoline, battery acid, nail polish remover, abrasion and chemicals. You could actually use it to line your swimming pool. It's so tough."

This base coat is fortified with a permanent antimicrobial that inhibits the growth of bacteria and mould.

"This permanent antimicrobial additive is literally food grade, so there's no environmental issues or problems," Mitchell said. "It's something like pressure-treating, but without the environmental concerns."

The topcoat is also a polyurethane, similar to the resins used to coat jet aircraft, Mitchell said.

"It's formulated in such a way that it looks, more or less, like an ordinary stain, but has tremendous weathering characteristics," he said.

In addition to wood siding, the company can also coat soffit, fascia and window trim, Mitchell said.

"Pretty much anything you can supply us with, we can coat," he said.