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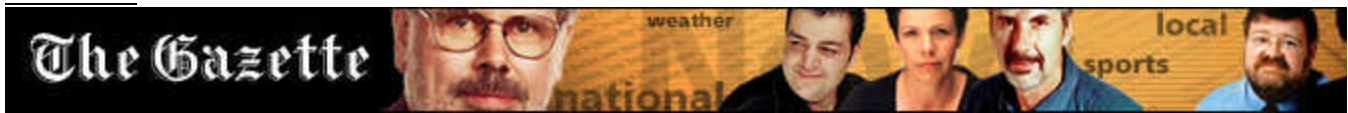
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Maker of air purifiers rushes to supply hospitals with devices to contain SARS Quarantine rooms. Lachine's Quatro makes units that filter 99.97 per cent of virus particles

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Saturday, April 12, 2003

It was a rush from the minute the call came from a Toronto hospital grappling with a SARS outbreak.

The Sunnybrook and Women's Hospital was in urgent need of air-purification equipment to set up makeshift quarantine rooms for people exposed to SARS.

The hospital turned to a distributor handling the products of Quatro Air Technologies Inc., a fast-growing West Island



CREDIT: MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, THE GAZETTE

Mark Stachowski (from left), Greg Phillips and Alex Consalvo stand in room of air-filtering machines being readied for shipping.

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company that makes and sells a line of air-cleaning devices.

Filling Sunnybrook's order for 22 portable air purifiers last month required an all-hands-on-deck push at Quatro's 12,000-square-foot operation in Kirkland.

"They called us at 11 in the morning," recalled Greg Phillips, one of three engineers who own and operate Quatro. "They gave us the purchase order at 1 p.m. At 10 p.m., we shipped it and it arrived at the hospital at 4 in the morning.

"The contractor did the installation and they had 22 isolation rooms up and running within 24 hours."

Four other Toronto-area hospitals have since ordered units from Quatro and institutions in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and B.C. have also expressed interest. So far, the firm has sold about 60 units in three different sizes to hospitals for SARS containment.

The air purifiers - designed by Quatro's owners - draw air and pass it through a series of filters before expelling it from the room. The process creates a room that is under negative air pressure. That means air is drawn into the room when a door is opened, ensuring that nothing gets out without going through the purifier.

The filters remove 99.97 per cent of particles such as dust, spores or viruses that are 0.3 microns or larger. "The particles that we're picking up are so small, but that's how small the virus is," Consalvo said.

The SARS-related orders provided an unexpected bump in sales, but Quatro is by no means hurting for business.

The owners - Phillips, Alex Consalvo and Mark Stachowski - declined to provide sales figures. But they did say that sales have quadrupled over the last two years.



The company has expanded its facilities three times in the last three years and is now in the market for yet a bigger space.

Phillips, Consalvo and Stachowski worked together in the late 1980s at a local industrial air-filtration company. The trio, and a fourth partner who has since left Quatro, started the firm in 1992 to focus on supplying small filtration devices to niche markets.

Besides Quatro, they also operate a sister company, Aerofil Inc., a distributor of larger-scale, permanent industrial air-filtration systems.

Medical applications are only a small part of Quatro's business.

It markets portable air purifiers, dust collectors and fume extractors with accessories customized for numerous industries as diverse as electronics manufacturers, jewelry makers and dental laboratories.

The firm also gets orders for small air purifiers for upscale houses.

The key to its success has been developing an international network of distributors who already service industries, the owners say. Quatro also has partnerships with several original-equipment manufacturers who integrate Quatro's devices into their products.

For example, one major manufacturer of printing equipment packages Quatro purifying devices with its laser plate-making systems.

Phillips said the company is currently working with three U.S. manufacturers to develop products aimed at customers worried about chemical and bio-terrorism threats.

"It's an exciting time because we put a lot of irons in the fire two years ago in different markets and they're starting to hit," Consalvo said.

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