

Profile: Future Nets

In just a dozen years this progressive New Brunswick net builder has grown out of its first garage-size repair facility into a substantial business with several large buildings, 40 employees and 11 acres of land.

By *Stephanie Conley*

In the spring of 1990 Clarence Blanchard decided to make his dream for Future Nets a reality. He had very little money and no formal business plan, but he knew that there was potential for a net manufacturing and repair service for emerging local aquaculturalists.

In the first year, Clarence, along with three other employees, found a few customers, bought a knuckle boom for lifting and carrying nets and began to construct and repair nets in his brother's garage. Clarence describes his first few years in business as "starting with no building, no pot and no window to throw it out."

Eventually, he got a contract for \$10,000 from a local aquaculture company, took out a bank loan for \$4,000 and began setting up relationships with his suppliers. He remembers first approaching the bank manager and asking for a loan to start the business and the bank manager denying him the money, saying that he couldn't give him the money because he only had "dream piles."

Now celebrating his 12th year in business, Clarence Blanchard is living his dreams through piles of orders for nets and plastic cage repair. The modest garage that he first started in has been replaced by several large buildings on 11 acres of land, including a net loft, storage facility, plastic cage manufac-

turing facility, net wash station and his newest addition, New Brunswick's first net drying tower.

After a visit to Norway last year, Clarence returned to New Brunswick with many ideas for his company, namely that of a net dipping and drying tower like one he saw in his travels.

"The tower is modeled after the Norwegian drying towers," Clarence explains. It stands an impressive 82 feet high, 24 feet wide and 12 feet long and has the capability of hanging two nets at once. The nets are first dipped in an anti-foulant, hung for several hours to drip-off the excess liquid and then they are carried by an overhead monorail to the drying tower. Clarence says that after the dip and drip "its all up to Mother Nature." – and a series of large industrial fans that line the inner tower.

Throughout the winter months, a construction heater blows 100°F air through the tower to dry the nets.

Clarence plans to replace the construction heaters with natural gas heaters in the coming months. In summer, the walls of the tower, made of a heavy industrial canvas, can be rolled-up to allow summer heat and warm breezes to speed up the drying process. Although there are still some bugs to work-out, Clarence says that he is very happy with what he sees with the tower so far. He politely describes this massive new building as his "expansion," but laughs when he says that "we outgrew our expansion before we completed our expansion."

He plans on continuing to expand his facility throughout the coming months with the addition of a retail store, new offices and large boardroom. Clarence's wife and production manager, Sheila, describes one section of the expansion as "Clarence's first real office."

But Clarence, 42, seems very content with not having an office. He believes that the most valuable service that he can provide clients is hands-on service and close attention to detail. He spends about 25% of his day in hands-on work like mending nets or doing plastic cage repair work; although, he jokes and says that Sheila "is demanding more work out of me since she started working here."

Clarence describes two of Future Nets most "treasured possessions," an employee by the name of Harold Deveau who has been



Aerial view of the Future Nets facility showing net loft, storage areas, cage manufacturing plant and the newest addition, an 82-foot high net drying tower (right).



with Clarence since his very beginning and the vintage sewing machine that Harold still works with – the first sewing machine that Clarence ever bought. In fact, over half of the employees that work at Future Nets have been there for at least half of Future Net's lifetime. Clarence is very proud to have 40 employees from both the community and Newfoundland. He said that he would love to have more Newfoundlanders on staff because of their "tremendous work ethic."

And speaking of work ethic, Sheila describes Clarence as being "sort of a workaholic" as he was "wearing all of the hats" before hiring an office manager two years ago and Sheila as production manager just last year. About half of Future Nets business comes from the United States through companies like Atlantic Salmon of Maine and Stolt Sea Farms. Clarence said that he is very thankful for the dedication of his clients in Maine because if it

weren't for them, Future Nets would not have experienced such great success. Clarence is also very proud of the relationships that he has built with local aquaculture growers, saying that "the local companies have been really supportive of me since day-one." When asked if he plans on expanding into other markets, he says absolutely not. He adds, "If I can do a good job here in the local market, there is no need for me to go elsewhere. I just want to give the locals a high quality product."

Although Clarence says that he has felt the industry's slowdown this year, he feels positive that the industry will soon make a strong comeback. He thinks that the key to the industry's long-term success will be offshore farming and further experimentation and development in alternate species. Clarence also believes that one of the key factors to the New Brunswick industry's future success lies in "better communication with Maine and our other Maritime neighbors to know what is going on with each other."

With all of the expansions and technological advances that Clarence is planning for Future Nets, he remains totally grounded and extremely optimistic.

He also puts a very strong emphasis on the dedication of his employees and clients. He says that he never planned to grow this fast, but with the support of the local industry and his clients in Maine, his dream has become a reality. "I've been lucky, really, really lucky."



Sheila and Clarence Blanchard

ZEIGLER FINFISH Floating & Slow-Sinking Diets

- ✓ Ingredient Selection Based on True Finfish Digestibility Testing
- ✓ Protein Sparing to Reduce Nitrogen Discharge and Cost
- ✓ Proper Amino Acid Balance
- ✓ Low Phosphorus Levels (Slow-Sinking <1%, Floating 1.0-1.3%)
- ✓ Improved Flesh Quality and Texture
- ✓ Customizable to Specific Species and Rearing Conditions
- ✓ Meets FDA Requirements Regarding Restrictions on Mammalian Protein Sources
- ✓ Manufactured under an ISO-9001 Quality Management System
- ✓ Starter and Medicated Diets Also Available

PLATINUM

40% Protein, 23% Fat
(Floating & Slow-Sinking)
Trout, Salmon, Arctic Charr

GOLD

42% Protein, 16% Fat
(Floating & Slow-Sinking)
Trout, Flounder, Striped Bass, Haddock, Arctic Charr,
Sea Bass, Sea Bream

SILVER

40% Protein, 10% Fat (Floating)
38% Protein, 12% Fat (Slow-Sinking)
Trout, Perch, Striped Bass, Red Drum, Sport Fish

BRONZE

35% Protein, 5% Fat
(Floating)
Omnivorous Fish, Tilapia, Catfish,
Tropical Pond Fish, Turtles



Zeigler Bros., Inc.
P.O. Box 95, Gardners, PA 17324 USA
717-671-6181 • Fax: 717-671-6826
www.zeiglerfeed.com sales@zeiglerfeed.com