

life in the ESPRESSO LANE

ROBERT HARRIS COFFEE ROASTERS CAFÉ SATISFIES HUSBAND AND WIFE OWNERS



⇒ Buying a franchise often goes beyond just self-employment – if you choose to work with your spouse for the first time, it can mean launching a marriage into the uncharted waters. So, not to put too fine a point on it, can bed and business be a successful mix? ‘Absolutely!’ chorus Fiona and Graeme Stirling, a married couple who have also been partners in various businesses for over 28 years. Their most recent venture started in September this year when, after some 24 months time out on grandparent duties, they took over the reins of the

Robert Harris Coffee Roasters café at The Hub Hornby in Christchurch.

So how do couples manage to work together for so long? ‘One drives the left hand and the other the right,’ jokes Graeme, before Fiona steps in to explain that the single most important contributor to a successful working relationship is having clearly defined areas of involvement and responsibility. ‘For example, Graeme is a brilliant barista and enjoys interacting with customers, whereas I prefer to be out the back doing bookwork, administration activities and helping out in the kitchen. As a result, after 28 years we honestly do still enjoy being in business together. We started out with a country tavern in Drummond in Southland, then for a couple of years a large supermarket in Te Anau. After that we owned motels then had the Riccarton Muffin Break franchise before buying a café at Queenstown Airport. That was such a positive experience we had no qualms about getting back into a franchise when the Robert Harris Coffee Roasters opportunity came up.’

GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

Although the Stirlings’ café at Queenstown Airport was an independent business, they had served Robert Harris coffee made with the same espresso machine used in all Robert Harris Coffee Roasters cafés. This happy relationship with the brand in no small way contributed to their decision to buy Hornby. ‘We liked what we saw: the location is brilliant, being on the outside of the mall on the sunny side facing the main carpark with two large anchor stores opposite. The fit-out is only four years old but we’ll soon be bringing it in line with the striking “kiwi icons” theme that Robert Harris launched last year. In the meantime, we are enjoying being under the Robert Harris Coffee Roasters umbrella, and appreciating the freedom it offers to put our own style on our café.’ As well as gluten-free and other healthy food choices, Graeme and Fiona are planning to promote the Robert Harris *Eat for Keeps* programme designed to encourage customers and staff alike to adopt healthy eating habits.

The couple say they found the two weeks’ initial training that Robert Harris Coffee Roasters provides extremely worthwhile. ‘We think it is equally valuable whether you have previous experience or, like many new franchisees, no knowledge at all of running a café,’ says Fiona. ‘In addition to learning the systems and operations procedures that help you run the business smoothly, we also met other Robert Harris franchisees locally. While there are organised meetings and national franchisee conferences, it’s reassuring to know the other franchisees in



GRAEME AND FIONA STIRLING (LEFT) AND THEIR CAFÉ AT THE HUB, HORNBY

the Christchurch area are always there to help each other too.’

Robert Harris is now on the look-out for franchisees for new and existing cafés nationwide. ‘If you are considering a change of lifestyle, Dunedin, Invercargill, Blenheim and Wanganui are among the towns and cities on our radar,’ says franchise manager Rod de Lisle. ‘For the right people, there are plenty of opportunities to build and grow successful businesses right now. So whether you have experience or not, contact me now!’

And Graeme Stirling has the last word. ‘If you’re a couple thinking of going into self-employment, you really can’t go past Robert Harris Coffee Roasters.’ ■

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