

# Money

Pigeon Guard's Dan Black helps feathered pests fly the coop

## Bye bye bird brains

By RYAN JAMES  
Toronto Sun

Some say Dan Black's job is for the birds.

But the owner of Pigeon Guard is doing pretty well. His bird-proofing business serves up to eight happy customers a day, and keeps his schedule full for two months in advance.

Black believes that if you want something done right, do it yourself. It's an approach that's kept him in business for five years.

"It started off when I saw a netting job on a balcony. I thought it was a good idea, but they did a really crappy job," he says. "I thought I could do it better. So I made one for myself, and a few for other people, and it took off from there."

Now he does it every day. "I do mostly balconies," he says. "I put up a barely-visible mesh from top to bottom."

### Balconies and roofs

A balcony job costs between \$25 and \$120.

His rooftop jobs are almost as common.

"Pigeons tend to hang out where one roof joins another, so I'll put up a mesh there too."

He designs a lot of his own materials. One of them is "needle-guard" — a strip of tiny rubber needles that make key areas less fun for pigeons to sit on.

"I copied the basic design, and improved on it," Black says. "I got one of my employees to make it, so it's cheaper."

In worst-case scenarios, Black has to do some pigeon evictions.

"If the place is totally infested, I'll put a trap on the roof," he says. "I build them myself. There's a one-way door, and food and water inside ... so they can go in there and party for a while. Then I come to empty the cage every few days."

He says trapped pigeons are humanely removed and permanently relocated with assurance they will never return to the area.

Black handles businesses and office towers as well. So far his largest undertaking has been the clock tower at Yonge St. and Summerhill Dr.

"The first step was cleaning out 10 tonnes of pigeon \$#%&' from the top of the tower," he explains, frankly. "I rented the biggest dumpster I could find — and,



**PIGEONS ARE NO MATCH FOR THIS GUY...** Dan Black with his nemesis — and just the thing that brings him so much

yeah, it measured out to be 9.8 tonnes."

With a little more space to work with, he then sealed off every nook and cranny.

"I had to try hard to keep from damaging or changing anything — it's a historical building," he says. The job paid Black \$20,000, and earned him a good name.

"I've given up on advertising — now it's mostly word-of-mouth," Black says.

And he's glad for it. He spent his first two years in business "knocking on doors, telemarketing and twisting arms" before it picked up.

"At first, I practically had to beg people to let me do it. Now I'm

booked solid for two months."

After working on lake freighters one summer, he started Pigeon Guard as something for him to do in the off season. It turned into something more.

"I had some time off in the winter. I started working on this, and never went back," he says.

He bought a new truck, and spent \$1,000 of his personal savings to get started.

### Full-time work

Now he works a 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. schedule, six days a week. He keeps a part-time job too — he's first mate on some of the cruise boats sailing out of Harbourfront.

"I just put on my epaulets, rush down there and work 'til 11," he says.

Pigeon Guard is Black's first

attempt at running his own business, and it's looking more and more permanent.

"The pros are obvious," he says. "I'm my own boss, I make my own choices, set my own prices. As far as the cons, I don't get any employee benefits, and there's lots of government red tape."

### SMALL FACTS

**COMPANY:** Pigeon Guard  
**TELEPHONE:** 905-0407  
**WEB SITE:**  
[www.emporium.on.ca/pgn\\_gtd](http://www.emporium.on.ca/pgn_gtd)  
**EMPLOYEES:** 3  
**START-UP CAPITAL:**  
\$1,000, plus a new truck

Black started Pigeon Guard as a sole venture. He's still bookkeeper, an accountant and some part-time help.

He's set up a Web site for clients as well as part-time help. "I'm going international," he says. "I'm hoping to take it to the States on how to

As business picks up, he hopes to find some full-time help with the pigeon-proofing. "I'm very picky."

"It's hard to find so much help for more than I've found that people have a job, don't have reasons," Black says.

"I don't want to trade them in for their quilt, then have them quit, take a long time to get what's involved."

Small Business News

**Small Business**

S

V

et Pasha, SUN  
 n business.  
 n Guard as  
 ce hired a  
 stant and  
 to find  
 bers.  
 onal," he  
 ain people  
 do it."  
 p, Black  
 l-time help  
 ing. But he'  
 meone that  
 n two week  
 who don't  
 a job for a  
 in them and  
 he says. "I  
 how them  
 on Mondays.