

## [Fredericton Entrepreneurs Relaunch The Hartt Shoe Company](#)

Dec 5, 2017 by [Mark Leger](#)



Andrew Bedford is one of the co-owners of the re-launched Hartt Shoe Company in Fredericton. (Image: submitted)

**FREDERICTON – Andrew Bedford was on Facebook a couple of years ago when he came upon a photo and a post about a man’s 45-year-old, shearling-lined leather Hartt boots.**

“He’d been wearing those boots every day of winter for 45 years and that really struck a chord with me,” says Bedford. “From that moment on, I was like, ‘oh my God, this brand is amazing.’ ”

An entrepreneur like Bedford could create a new line if he were to start a shoe company. Or he could go with a tried-and-true brand that was no longer on the market and bring it back, which is what Bedford and his partner Peter McMath have done as they get set to relaunch [The Hartt Shoe Company](#).

“Instead of wearing a pair of shoes for a year and throwing them out, there’s more value here,” he thought after he saw that post. “The old way of doing things may be better.

“Hartt is too amazing not to exist. Why isn’t this a thing? And then I just started putting the pieces together.”

Founded in 1898, the iconic New Brunswick company operated for more than 100 years before it closed in 1999. It had a factory in Fredericton and retail stores across the country.

“The Hartt shoe company was known coast-to-coast and in the U.S. market and beyond,” he says. “A lot of people don’t realize the scale that Hartt was at [throughout] its vibrant history. By 1910, they were making 2,000 pairs of shoes a day and had 500 staff.

“There was a retail store a block from Parliament Hill in Ottawa. There was one on St. Catherine’s Street in Montreal. It was a national thing.”

Bedford says people were fiercely proud of the Hartt company and factory and were devastated to see it closed by [The PRADA Group](#). Hartt had previously been purchased by Church's shoe company in England, and Church's was subsequently bought by PRADA.

McMath and Bedford are happy to help revive the company and restore the pride in the brand.

“When PRADA made the decision to close the factory here, Fredericton and New Brunswick lost something it was very, very proud of,” he says.

“I think there's an innate love for the brand. For 100 years, so many people worked there and so many people were so proud of the workmanship and quality. I just think it was always a point of pride. So we're very, very happy to be able to work to revive that.”

Bedford also says there is a renewed appreciation for products like shoes that are high-quality and made to last.

“We've done the whole ‘manufacture things offshore as cheaply as you possibly can’ as a business strategy,” he says. “I think that has reached a peak ... I think there's a new appreciation for these quality goods. It costs a little bit more, but you know you're going to have shoes that last 20-25 years with proper care.”

The new company officially launches Tuesday with an event at the Beaverbook Art Gallery. They've spent the last week putting the final touches on Hartt's online platform, where customers can view the new “Heritage Collection” and place an order, and see the line of boots that will be available at a later date.



Image: The Hartt Shoe Company Facebook page.

Bedford and McMath are working on a wholesale distribution model for retail stores, but they're starting out selling the shoes and boots exclusively online. "Online companies like this are booming, especially through e-commerce," says Bedford.

The shoes are being manufactured in Europe after an exhaustive search, he says. So many companies had switched to "glued-sole" shoes manufactured in low-cost, offshore factories it was difficult to find a high-end manufacturer.

"We were able to find one in the mountains of southern Spain – this beautiful old factory," says Bedford.

"It's more than 100 hundred years old. It has all the same type of equipment that Hartt had, the same process, right down to the carts that they use to wheel around the factory were very similar to the ones in [in Fredericton]. So it was just this beautiful coincidence that we're able to find someone that makes very similar shoes."

The shoe and boot designs have been modernized, says Bedford, but they've been as faithful as they can be to the original Hartt shoes.

We went out and we talked to many former employees," says Bedford. "We found as many vintage Hartt shoes as we could find. From there we built our Heritage Collection around historically, what was the best selling shoe, what was the shoe they were best known for and what were the details."

"We actually had an in-depth conversation a couple times with a local man whose job it was to design shoes [for Hartt]. So we've had a lot of input, though we obviously had to modernize the designs a little bit."

The shoes are built to last, says Bedford. They also still have that timeless, classic design, so they will last for decades just like the ones manufactured in the old Hartt Shoe Factory.

"I've got a pair from the 1960s that I wear," he says, "I would have to tell you how old they were. You wouldn't know otherwise. It's not only that the shoes last so long, it's that the classic men's dress shoe, the style has changed very little over the years. You're sure to get a lot of life out of it."