

MARCH 2021 - COOPERATIVE PROFILE

MANITOBA BED AND BREAKFAST MARKETING CO-OP INC

A Stay That Feels Like Home



Who is Manitoba B&B Marketing Co-op?

An Interview with Susan Proven

The Manitoba Cooperative Association had the pleasure of interviewing Susan Proven, the President of Manitoba Bed and Breakfast Marketing Co-op who offered her insight on some of the struggles, motivations and co-op values that are implemented within their B&B co-op. Manitoba Bed & Breakfast Marketing Association became a legally incorporated co-op on December 18th, 1991. They are completely owned by members. At any time, members can vote to dissolve the Association. Members are B&B owners that provide food, accommodation and entertainment in their individual homes.

The individual B&B's operate as a for profit entity while the Manitoba Bed & Breakfast Marketing Association exists as a non-profit co-op. Ethical standards are upheld in the treatment of both B&B operators and guests. In addition, they implement the seven cooperative principles in various ways throughout their business operations. Their membership is open to all B&B's located in Manitoba. Members buy a co-op membership initially, and pay a yearly membership fee to remain in the co-op. In terms of democratic member control, an annual meeting is held to elect those who are willing to serve on the board of directors. During the meeting they discuss current issues, future directions and problems that may have arisen as standard practice while motions are moved and voted on.



Pandemic Challenges

As explained by Susan, during the pandemic it has been important for people to get out and see something new – as many are feeling trapped in their homes.

During the pandemic B&B's have had to change the way they feed guests. Although the B&B's are not restaurants, all members are required to have the Manitoba Food and Health Safety certificate. "People had to start getting a bagged breakfast. Under normal circumstances, an amazing breakfast is offered. The second loss was the connection you make with your guests. Over breakfast, you get to know one another. Most B&B's have many guests and not just one. So it gives people the opportunity to get together during breakfast. It's not just food, but building a connection. Members who were able to continue operating were the ones who could offer a safe room." For example, those who had a room in the basement that was separated with an on-suite bathroom. This meant that guests didn't have much contact with the hosts. People who don't have on-suite bathrooms are the ones who suffer. This cut down around 75% of members revenues. Most members live in the house where they host their guests.



Support to Members

As explained by Susan, "we are always offering services to our members, especially during the pandemic. We hold annual meetings to discuss any issues in the Association, so if people are not satisfied, it offers a place for members to express themselves." During the pandemic, the Association constantly updated and sent out information from the Provincial and Federal government concerning business operations. Bed & breakfasts remained an essential service during this time. "Just like a hotel, people need a place where they can go while travelling, working, or need to quarantine. We always made sure that our members had those updated bulletins from the government." There is continuous communication and updates over email and online correspondence to members.

The B&B's are preparing for a busy summer after a year of families being stuck inside. It offers people an out of city experience where guests can experience trails, lakes, skating, and things you normally wouldn't get in the city.

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Cooperative Values

What it means to be a co-op

The value in being a co-op is that the members promote one another's B&B. "The best thing about the co-op is that we know each other – we do this through our twice a year meetings. We gather and listen to one another to understand what each B&B offers. We get a lot of international tourists in a normal summer and we want to ensure that they have the best B&B experience based off of their needs. So we get to learn exactly what each individual B&B offers. This is a huge reason why people join the co-op. For many people, they don't know the business side of running a B&B, it offers a platform of ideas and marketing suggestions for people. When you're looking to do something new, people require training. In order to join, there are third party inspections and members must meet that qualification, so we help them get there."

The B&B Association always tries to help keep the homes feeling like a home. They are not just a transaction like a typical Air B&B. As explained by Susan, Air B&B's are usually for those who want to make an extra revenue by renting something out. But some people are looking for a more homey experience. You may or may not interact with your guests. It's an opportunity for people to gather. But sometimes, there are other people who want to be on their own – it's usually easy to read a person and understand what they want. But currently, isolation is what people are looking for, especially with the pandemic still ongoing.

"Safety and health inspections by a third party inspector have to be done on a rotational basis for our members. This is based on cleanliness and safety, the two most important things. Is it safe? Did you enjoy the experience? Was it clean? Complaints can be sent into the website. The power of a co-op gives members a right to voice themselves – and investigate members who don't measure up to be a B&B by applying the Associations regulations. When you're in a co-op, you have the right to change things. You don't have to just sit by and say 'I don't like this.' What the majority wants is what we go with – democracy in action."