

SUN CERTIFIED BUILDERS COOPERATIVE LTD.

**Dedicated to Building Certified Energy
Efficient Buildings in Manitoba**



Who is Sun Certified Builders Co-op Ltd?

An Interview with Evan Proven

The Manitoba Cooperative Association had the pleasure of interviewing Evan Proven, Vice President of Sun Certified Builders Co-op Ltd who touched upon the importance of choosing sustainable building practices and why they built their business using the cooperative model.

Sun Certified builds residential and commercial buildings that meet measurable energy standards. They use Energy Modeling to guide us to Passive House or Net Zero Energy building results that are economical and environmentally sustainable. Sun Certified Builders Co-operative Ltd. is a multi stakeholder cooperative offering both builder and supporting shares. They are dedicated to building certified energy efficient buildings in Manitoba. Their members have experience in building construction in areas such as: energy modelling, building design, building systems consulting, new construction, fine mill working, Home renovations, residential/commercial energy efficiency retrofits. They believe that simple solutions beat techno-fixes. Air Seal and cellulose insulation are the first tools they apply to reduce building energy consumption and provide their customers with healthy, comfortable buildings. Sunlight is free and solar systems have become economical so they use them as a source of renewable energy to supplement good building design.

Incorporation

The Need for the Co-op

2012 was the year Sun Certified incorporated, which also happened to be the international year of cooperatives as declared by the United Nations, so there was quite a lot of publicity surrounding the topic. As Evan explained, "The Manitoba government with MCA during that time had some grants available, so we were able to get an incorporation grant for our co-op. In terms of our background, we are a family owned business. We started as family owned business but have since added two new non family members so we currently have 4 family and 2 non family members." Sun Certified was looking for a model that allowed members to share resources and profits but something they could expand on. "We all grew up in rural Manitoba so, you know, any small town in rural Manitoba has co-op inputs whether they are grocery stores, gas, credit unions, etc. The idea of a cooperative is nothing out of the ordinary for those who have grown up in rural Manitoba. Those are predominantly the types of businesses that service our small rural towns. So, the idea of a worker co-op made sense to us as a way to structure our partnership that would allow flexibility for our members, including myself. On a personal level, it allows me to have more time to spend with my family and focus on my studies, so it definitely offers that flexibility perspective."

"The reason that we incorporated the business was because we wanted to build energy efficient new builds and pursue energy efficient renovation projects. We made the decision that if we're going to do construction work, then it's going to be energy efficient and resilient, and if it's not either of those, then we aren't interested. We try to focus on climate change to build with the intent of mitigating those effects. We've always gone with scientifically verifiable researched best practices."

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"In terms of scientific evidence," says Evan, "it states that if we're addressing climate change, then we're talking about carbon emissions. Carbon emissions from the processing and manufacturing of building materials has to be factored into the lifetime carbon emissions of a building. Therefore, we try to source organic based building materials, because those will then sequester carbon in the building throughout the lifetime and also typically don't produce very much carbon in their manufacturing."

"Our cellulose manufacturer is based out of Morden, Manitoba, and cellulose is the insulation material most widely used in our retrofits. So our environmental footprint of that material is very low. It allows us to produce houses that have a very low carbon footprint. We are lucky in the sense to have a local manufacturer, which is typically not the case."



Supporting Members

"In order to support our members," explains Evan, "we try to have monthly board meetings. We're a multi-stakeholder co-op so we have our worker members and supporting share membership. The supporting share group votes one of the board members. For us, that allows for some outside innovations and expertise for those who aren't necessarily affected by the operations of the business. In addition, we established an education fund a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, that's been at the backburner due to COVID which has led us to focus on other priorities. Right now we're having a difficult time because of material prices to due COVID."

"My father was a main component and driver towards energy efficient buildings in Manitoba and was a complete technical guru. He was really pushing the envelope in the province in terms of what was happening. After he passed away we established the Randy Proven Zero Carbon Fund, which is administered by the Winnipeg Foundation. It is a grant that people can access to pay for passive house training. Those are some of the many ways we support our members in our co-op. This grant shows dedication to principle number 7, concern for community."



The Power of the Co-op Principles

"I volunteer on the board of the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation," says Evan, "I act as the prairie representative. I've been in touch with a lot of our prairie members and some of the Manitoba worker co-ops. It's been good to hear from them about how members have come up with solutions to new problems that have arisen during these difficult times. It's the members that are creating innovative solutions, for example, Organic Planet Worker Co-op, where their members were volunteering their vehicles to do deliveries for groceries. In general, across the board, people have been saying that their membership has really stepped up to come up with ideas and solutions on how to continue to keep working through the pandemic. The employees and members in the co-op world are truly invested in the business succeeding. In a cooperative, one key benefit is that there's a democratic process that allows for the membership to implement the ideas that they have. This represents cooperative principle number two, democratic member control."

Principle #6: Cooperation Among Cooperatives

Evan explained the importance of cooperative principle #6 and how networking, sharing resources, and building external relationships is key to their growth.

"Not only are we looking to other cooperatives to build relationships with, but we're also looking to social enterprises in Winnipeg. There's 2 construction companies in specific, Purpose Construction and Build Incorporated which are social enterprises. We've been trying to sub-contract work to them wherever possible instead of going to other businesses specifically because of principle 6. There's not necessarily any other worker co-ops in Winnipeg that are doing building construction. But, social enterprises share similar values, and so we see them as a likeminded partner. We share knowledge and resources with them, and vice versa, so it's a very fruitful partnership." Sun Certified has tried to reach out to other cooperatives in Manitoba to let them know that they exist and if other co-ops are looking at renovations or new build projects, they would be very interested to partner with those businesses so that they can too, build resilient and energy efficient renovations.

"We've also been working with a few different companies. One of the companies is called SEEFAR Building Analytics. They do these total cost of building ownership analysis. What that analysis does is it provides and monetizes the net present value of the energy efficient upgrades that you've implemented in a build as well as the resilient features. It allows the evaluation of the building by the appraiser to come in higher than it would without factoring in those energy efficient upgrades. A lot of people will end up with these issues where they'll go to the bank because they want to borrow money to build an energy efficient house, but the bank can't reconcile the higher value for the house because they have no way of assessing a value for the savings that the energy efficient upgrade will generate over its lifetime. This has been a financial issue for energy efficient upgrading. But this analysis is providing the tools for the appraiser to evaluate the property properly."

"We're always happy to provide consulting services or even just have a conversation with any of the other cooperatives looking to do renovations - to provide them with the resources that we've been building up so they can justify borrowing a little bit more money to pay for those energy efficient upgrades."

