

# Focus on Leadership

A SPECIAL SERIES ON CALGARY'S BUSINESS VISIONARIES

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## Element uses DIRTT to clean up offices

Element Integrated Workplace Solutions is in the business of creating functional, clean office environments, but it's a company that isn't afraid to get some DIRTT on its hands.

Element works closely with fellow Calgary-based firm called Doing Things Right This Time (DIRTT) to provide an innovative, versatile kind of office walls and floors.

"It's a new way to look at wall and floor systems," says Doug Louch, principal of Element IWS.

"With a traditional fixed-in-place drywall system, if you have to make any changes, you rip it down, take it to the landfill, throw it away and build it again.

"This system allows you to reconfigure in any way you want without destroying anything."

In addition to reducing waste by eliminating the need for demolition, DIRTT walls are environmentally friendly because they're made of green materials, such as recycled and recyclable aluminum, and finished with non-toxic lacquers.

In addition, these prefinished frame walls are 10 centimetres thick, so they're as soundproof as any stick-and-drywall product.

If you want to hang a picture hook or white board onto the wall, you don't need to pound in nails — these products are integrated into the design. If you want your office door to open to the left instead of the right, or in rather than out; if you want glass panels or half-walls, you simply switch out the panels.



Wil Andruschak photo

**Doug Louch, principal of Element IWS, which works closely with DIRTT.**

"You don't have to destroy or construct anything. It saves tons of dollars in terms of reconfiguration, and tons of material that would otherwise go into the landfill," Louch says.

DIRTT's raised floor systems are equally versatile.

A system of wood-cement tiles and carpet tiles provide sound dampening and cushion, while underneath a web of steel and fire-retardant plastic elevates the floor by 4.25 cm, creating under-foot space for computer, telephone and electricity wires.

"You can access your technology much more easily in the floor than in the ceiling," Louch

says. "And the wires don't have to terminate at floor level; they can also come out of your wall system."

DIRTT is a private company owned by several partners based in North American cities. Element is a major stakeholder in the venture.

DIRTT has factories here and in Savannah, Ga. DIRTT has 300 employees (250 in Calgary), and Element has 14.

Louch says DIRTT is the largest manufacturer of moveable walls in North America, with the bulk of its product going to the United States.

"But Calgary is a big part of our business. This city is under construction, and we're certain-

ly getting our fair share."

Element and DIRTT got involved in Action Calgary because their owners think their story is worth telling.

"We're a local manufacturing facility that does a lot of business across North America, which is fairly unique in Calgary. We did \$20 million in sales our first year, and five years later we're looking at \$100 million," Louch says.

"Calgary is our home, and it's been good to us. Calgary has always been an entrepreneurial city, where anyone has an opportunity to do well, and Action Calgary builds on that. We're glad to be able to contribute."

## Harmony project to balance region and province

Bordeaux Properties Inc. and Calgary Economic Development's Action Calgary initiative are coming together in perfect harmony.

"Our participation in Action Calgary is through a project we are involved in called Harmony," says Birol Fisekci, president and CEO of Bordeaux. "Internationally recognized, Harmony is more than just another residential development. It will provide opportunity for the local region and the province as a whole."

Located in Springbank (about 10 kilometres west of Calgary's city limits), Harmony is designed on three key perspectives: environmental, social, and financial sustainability.

Harmony strikes a balance where the community would provide a place to live — work

— learn and play, Fisekci says.

"Harmony is a perfect balance, which provides the Action Calgary initiative with an important and unique business and investment opportunity to showcase in the Calgary region," he says.

"It is important for national and foreign markets to recognize the opportunities exist at a regional level. Calgary Economic Development is taking the lead on this and they do an outstanding job of representing the Calgary region."

Harmony will be constructed in six phases over 15 to 20 years, and will eventually be home to 3,500 residential units. Amenities will include a championship golf course, vibrant mixed-use town centre and significant employment campus.

Bordeaux has partnered with the Copithorne family — the original land owners — to bring this vision to reality.

"Harmony is premised upon respect for the history, tradition and natural environment of the Harmony lands — a remarkable community that is elegant, vibrant, livable and welcoming," says Fisekci.

Neighbourhoods will be oriented around a village core set on a 135-acre recreational lake, with a focus on open space throughout the balance of the community.

A holistic approach to planning will create a truly sustainable community, as well as provide a variety of housing opportunities for various demographic groups, and include employment, educational and

recreational lands, says Fisekci.

"A key factor for Harmony's vision is to create a thriving, self-sustaining community that creates employment and lifestyle opportunities for its residents as well as the greater region," Fisekci says.

"Such a community will greatly contribute to the local economy, as well as create environmental and lifestyle advantages by improving quality of life, create better regional traffic by evening flows and therefore reduce (vehicle) emissions by reducing travel times."

Bordeaux is an employee-owned, integrated land and housing company. Through its homebuilding operations Baywest Homes, Bordeaux has been operating in the Calgary area since 1986.

## First Calgary looking forward to growing with the city

First Calgary Savings wants to contribute to the success of the Action Calgary program, but its involvement in the initiative isn't entirely altruistic.

"It's a great venture all-around, but the Action Calgary strategy we're focused on is workplace development and productivity," says Paul Kelly, president and CEO of First Calgary Savings.

"We can work with, and learn best practices from, others and hopefully that will allow us to participate in the growth of Calgary and the growth of the workforce."

First Calgary Savings has had a bit of a breather when it comes to staff turnover, thanks

to the recession.

But in the longer term, Kelly expects attracting and retaining talented workers to be a major challenge for any Calgary company.

"One of the Action Calgary initiatives will help bring people here. And once they're here, the choice of all workers is what type of company you want to work for — their values and their culture. I think we at First Calgary have a pretty compelling story to tell," he says.

First Calgary Savings is the only member-owned financial institution based in Calgary. And with 100,000 member-owners and an asset base of \$2.5 billion, it has the financial breadth to serve its members.

"Everyone who has financial services with us is one of our owners. They get to vote for the board of directors, and we pay them patronage dividends based on the amount of business they do with us," Kelly says.

On the surface, there may be very little difference between dealing with a national bank and First Calgary Savings, but vive la difference, Kelly says.

"I think there's a different culture than in a national organization. When people come in for a loan or are dealing with the branch, no one says, 'someone in Toronto or at the regional office is going to have to make the decision.'"

"Credit decisions are being

made by people who live here and know the market intimately.

"And as a small institution owned by the people that come to deal with us every day, it's a different service experience you can get with First Calgary than you would with a national organization."

First Calgary Savings has about 500 employees, and branches located throughout the city, as well as a commercial operation and auto dealer services centre downtown.

"We're doing a bit of a pilot project right now — we're in the process of opening a retail location in Okotoks. It'll be our first location outside of the city limits, so it's very exciting."

## Joe Media showcases city's artistic side

Producing the telecast of last weekend's Gemini Awards was a milestone for Calgary's Joe Media Group, but president and CEO Joe Novak stops short of calling it the company's most notable project to date.

"We've never done anything like the Geminis before, and we were excited about it, because we got to show off Calgary," Novak says.

But productions like CBC's *The Secret of the Nutcracker*, *The Fiddle and the Drum*, with Joni Mitchell and the Alberta Ballet and documentaries about Iraq, the Arctic and tasers also make him proud.

"So when you ask me 'which one?' there's not one project that really stands above the others."

Founded in 2002 by Novak and company chief operating officer Matt Gillespie, Joe Media also produces high-end, national TV commercials and corporate videos for companies based here in Calgary and beyond.

"We were called by a company in Philadelphia to produce a series of corporate videos in India, and we won an award for this series," Novak says. "There are some great companies here in Calgary. The skill level is phenomenal. You don't have to be in New York or Toronto."

Novak is a passionate promoter of the city, which is part of the reason Joe Media got involved with Action Calgary.

"It's part of the DNA of being in Calgary. I think part of what makes cities grow is good communication — internally and externally. That's where we come in."

Corporate video is a growing part of Joe Media's business, as companies recognize the value of bringing in outsiders to tell their stories.

"The way people communicate today is different than it was five or 10 years ago. We're a content provider — we tell stories. We bring that same skill set and use it to help corporations tell their stories, whether it's internally or externally."

Joe Media has a core staff of 12, but brings in freelance expertise as needed, swelling the team to nearly 200 for some projects.

"We're a diversified, small company. I'd say we've grown modestly over the years," Novak says.

Two of the keys to the company's success are its perspective on competition and its long-term, relationship-based approach, Novak says.

"In this industry, you really compete against yourself. Producers come up with ideas and pitch them to the broadcasters, so it's not really competition in the traditional way," he says.

"With corporate and commercial work, we look at the project as a partnership. It's not whether we get this job, it's whether you come back to us for the third, fourth or fifth job."

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[info@calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com](mailto:info@calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com)

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