



Albert and Avonhurst Gas Bar

Sherwood Co-op

As part of Saskatchewan Co-operative Association's ongoing series of co-operative profiles, we interviewed Allen Merritt, General Manager for Sherwood Co-op.

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What is the Sherwood Co-op? Where is the co-operative located?

Sherwood Co-op is a locally owned and operated retail co-operative and is one of the largest retail businesses in the city of Regina, Saskatchewan.

When was it established? By whom?

Sherwood Co-op was incorporated April 8, 1931. The co-op will celebrate its 80th Anniversary in 2011. In the beginning, the aim of Sherwood Co-op was: "To be an organization that enables people as members to share ownership, control and operation of a retail system providing those goods and services commonly required at an economic advantage and for the benefit of the members."

What community needs does the co-operative address?

Sherwood Co-op operates six Gas Bar/C-Store/Car Wash facilities with a new state of the art Gas Bar/C-Store/Tunnel Car Wash scheduled to open in June 2011. We also operate two large Marketplace Food centers, a large Home/Building Center in Regina, and a Hardware Building Centre in the town of Indian Head.

How many members does your co-operative have? How do they participate in the co-op?

Sherwood Co-op had over 48,000 members, over 370 employees, over \$45 million in total assets, and total sales of \$125.6 million in 2009. Members support the co-op by actively purchasing some of their basic needs for food, fuel, home building and renovation products from a locally owned and operated business. By attending the Annual General Meeting each year, members can participate in the democratic process of governing the co-op, receive information on the financial performance of their co-op, be nominated for a position on the board of directors, and participate in the election of three directors each year.

What makes your co-operative unique?

As a retail co-operative we share our profits with our member-customers in proportion to how much they purchase from the co-op each year. Our competitors do not share their profits with their customers. In addition to the millions of dollars in equity that we return to our members each year, Sherwood Co-op makes sizeable donations to worthwhile local community events, organizations and youth sports and activities. We also have an active Kid's Club with approximately 2,300 children enrolled and the Co-op sponsors young co-operators to attend Co-operative Youth Seminars held each summer in Saskatchewan.



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What have the greatest successes of the co-operative been? How do you feel they were achieved? What are some of the challenges the co-op faces?

Over the past 10 years, Sherwood Co-op has been able to successfully recover from near bankruptcy in the early 1980's. Over the past five years, the co-op has achieved significant growth both in sales dollars and in the volume of petroleum litres sold in spite of the ever-increasing level of competition. These results have been achieved due in large part to the increased focus, emphasis and commitment by the Board and Management to operate an efficient retail business together with aggressive marketing, upgrading of facilities and equipment, and the development of new gas bars and one new food store.

One of the biggest challenges facing our co-op today is to remain competitive in a highly competitive marketplace. Because our business has grown so rapidly in the past five years, many of our competitors, who are large national and international retailers, have taken notice and are becoming more aggressive. This requires the co-op to celebrate our success without becoming complacent and to constantly monitor and adjust our operations quickly when change is necessary.

Why are retail co-ops important in Saskatchewan communities? What do you envision for your co-operative in the next 5 years?

I believe co-ops play an important and vital role because they provide an opportunity for people in both large and small communities to share ownership, control and operation of a retail business that provides the products and services relevant to themselves and their specific community. This allows members of local co-ops to have a say in how their co-op will operate and what



Cooper pumping gas

lines of business are relevant to their own community. To quote the late Mr. Wayne Thompson, former CEO of Federated Co-operatives Limited: “When local co-ops provide their members with Co-op Equity and Cash Back along with quality products, excellent service and community building efforts, we have a winning combination. We believe that there is no better system of doing business in the world than the co-op system when it works the way it was intended.”

Co-ops are a significant player in retail business throughout Western Canada. Our growth has been remarkable over the past 15 years. We now operate some of the finest facilities and equipment in the communities we operate in. In 2009, retail co-ops across Western Canada paid out \$272 million cash to local co-op members, and over the past ten years retail co-ops have paid out a combined total of \$1.2 billion cash back to local co-op members. That’s a very significant amount of money paid back to members and their local communities. By continuing to focus our efforts on strong marketing, excellent customer service, quality products and community building, I believe that Sherwood Co-op will continue to grow and become even more successful over the next five years and beyond.



Sherwood Co-op's original gas bar

How can people find out more about your co-operative?

They can visit our website at www.sherwoodco-op.com.



Group shot at the newly renovated Rochdale Crossing Marketplace