

Focus on Leadership

A SPECIAL SERIES ON CALGARY'S BUSINESS VISIONARIES

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Photos, Wil Andruschak photo

Devitt & Forand Contractors Inc. owner and president Gary Boan at his company's Garrison Extended-Care Centre Project.

Nailing down roots

If you're a client of Devitt & Forand Contractors Inc., you have direct access to the company's top executives.

"If an owner has a problem and he wants to talk to the CEO, he picks up the phone and phones him and he answers. There are direct lines right to the top," says company president Garry Boan.

That decidedly un-bureaucratic structure is one of the keys to the success of the company, which specializes in commercial, industrial and institutional construction. It's also what makes it a fun place to work," says Boan.

"We are a locally owned and operated company. We don't have any big bureaucracy here, so the people who are here can make decisions. They take action, you get answers immediately," he says. "Each project is an individual project, and we approach them all as the most important project we have, because each one is the client's most important project."

Devitt & Forand's roots here date back almost half a century, but it was acquired by new owners 18 years ago, after

which the company grew in numbers and ambition.

"That's when we started getting into auto dealerships, health care and extended care. We've always done commercial work and interior renovations, and we've also done multi-family residence and recreation facilities," says Boan.

Some of the company's most notable projects include a LEED-certified police station in Ramsay, a significant upgrade-in-progress at the Westside Recreation Centre and a 200-bed extended-care facility currently under construction in Garrison Green.

"We've done some BMW dealerships and Bentley and Aston Martin, and they're always kind of fun," says Boan. "But the extended-care facility in Garrison Green is also something we're very proud of."

"The phasing and the construction of it is a bit of a challenge, and we like a challenge. It's going to be quite functional, it's a very nice-looking building and it's going to be very comfortable for the residents who live there and the staff who work there."

Devitt & Forand's team has 90 members — carpenters, labourers, gold-certified superintendents, project managers, an engineer and office staff among them — and many are long-term employees.

"We have a lot of experience and expertise, so we can offer some pretty good advice to owners on constructability," says Boan. "We have a lot of repeat clients — so that's a testimony to our service and quality levels."

The company became LEED-certified a few years ago because the move was an example of good environmental stewardship, and good business. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is a Green Building Rating System.

"We could see it coming a few years ago, and decided we should get involved. Initially, it seemed to be a bit challenging, but once you've been through it a few times, it's really not all that difficult. Doing LEED projects is good for the environment, good for the city and it's good for our bottom line, so it only makes sense."

Zoom blazes a trail in web video integration

In 1999, a Calgary production company wandered somewhat accidentally into the online video industry. A decade later, Zoom Communications Inc. has zoomed into a unique niche of the Canadian marketplace.

"We started as a traditional film and video production company 13 years ago, and we had a corporate client come to us wanting us to put a video online, on their website," says company president and CEO Jeff Bradshaw. "We couldn't find anybody to do that, so it kind of sparked us and we got into the webcasting business."

Today, the firm is the only one of its kind in Canada — and perhaps North America — that specializes in web video integration consulting.

"We go into companies and analyze who they're communicating with and how online video can be integrated into their overall communication strategy — whether they're communicating with employees, investors or the general public," says Bradshaw.

While some companies can produce high-quality online videos, and others create excellent websites, Zoom is the only one that excels in both areas simultaneously.

The company also has its own Web video software applications to deliver its products.

"We also offer solutions called Studio in A Box, where we'll go in and consult on what kind of cameras and edits we supply, and even train them on how to produce their own content," he says.

"Some people think it's kind of cannibalizing your own video business, but our take is that they're going to do it anyways. They can't always afford to bring in a professional video crew to do their videos."

If Zoom trains corporate clients to produce four-fifths of their own videos, and deliver them via Zoom software, the



Zoom Communication's president and CEO Jeff Bradshaw (standing) in his company's editing suite with video editor Jordan Bosch.

clients will likely come back to the company for the other 20 per cent that demand professional quality, Bradshaw explains.

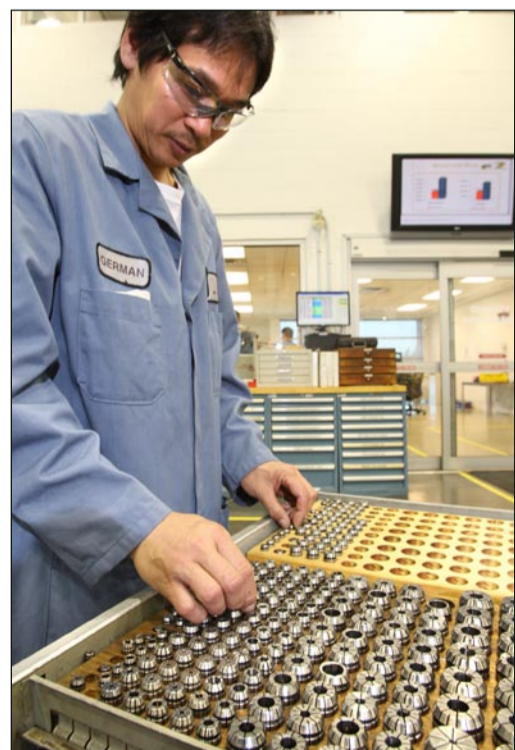
But the company's success, and the fact it's located in Calgary are no coincidence, Bradshaw says. That's why Zoom got involved in the Action Calgary initiative.

"We've been working with Calgary Economic Development for a number of years, so this is kind of an extension of that," he says. "For us, it's important to attract new talent to the market, and retain what we have here. We're onboard because we really want to promote Calgary as a leading-edge community in new media technology. For us, it was just a matter of working together as a team to promote the market."

The firm may not be a household name in Calgary, but most residents of the city have seen examples of the company's work at one time or another. "We deal with some of the TV networks in Toronto. We're the Alberta bureau for The Score TV network, for example. We do all the Jumbotron production for the Stampeders. We've worked with CTV Calgary quite a bit over the last couple of years," Bradshaw says. Helping corporations tell their stories more effectively is the passion behind Bradshaw's business.

"We're a different kind of company. We're kind of the new way to communicate, and that's exciting for us," he says. "The corporate communications world is changing quite rapidly, and we're excited to be a part of that."

Initiative to help put manufacturing industry on the map



Calgary-based Optima Manufacturing supplies machine components and assemblies for equipment manufacturers around the globe.

In 2008, Canada ranked 16th out of 34 industrialized countries when it came to manufacturing productivity. The United States ranked fourth.

If you find this statistic alarming, you're not alone.

The Government of Alberta and Calgary Economic Development launched the Productivity Alberta initiative to help turn those kinds of numbers around.

"Our No. 1 trading partner is doing so much better on this metric than we are," says Karen Hanes, business development manager of manufacturing with Calgary Economic Development. "This comparatively weak productivity, combined with the strong Canadian dollar, puts us in a very precarious position when it comes to exports."

Productivity Alberta aims to develop and implement policy, programs and tools to help Alberta companies in the goods producing sectors — primarily small and medium enterprise right now — to increase efficiency and competitiveness in a global market.

The initiative is led by the Government of Alberta but, it's industry driven, says Hanes.

As the Calgary face of Productivity

Alberta, CED has interviewed more than 150 businesses to find out what the challenges are, taken Alberta company representatives on best practice tours of Ontario facilities and hosted a variety of leadership forums and workshops.

"What we want at the end of the day is for companies to be aware of this issue of productivity — gain some knowledge of what's available to them that will help them, and get companies onboard with this focused effort to improve their productivity," says Bruce Graham, president and CEO of Calgary Economic Development.

Calgary-based Optima Manufacturing participated in a number of Productivity Alberta-led initiatives, and is already seeing some results.

"One of the initial wins from this program came in our order entry process, where we saw a 61 per cent improvement in the process flow," says Optima president Duane Hertzler. "It's not always about manufacturing processes; we look at everything throughout the organization."

Optima supplies machined components and assemblies for equipment manufacturers around the world — pri-

marily in the oil and gas, transportation and process control industries — so international competitiveness is a key consideration.

"We've always had a very lean structure, but a lot of our customers are in those productivity improvement journeys as well, and they want to see a bit more formality to our programs," Hertzler says. "Embarking on the lean journey has allowed us to formalize the process that was always part of our culture. It was a natural progression."

Like many Calgary manufacturers, Optima was too busy during the boom years to tinker with its processes in the name of productivity.

The economic downturn provided some time for that kind of improvement across the manufacturing sector, Hanes says.

"During the boom years, the focus in manufacturing companies was on hiring people, and training them to the extent they needed to, just so they could do a job. It wasn't really on optimizing their performance," Hanes says.

"Creating a culture of continuous improvement can be challenging for them, but we're here to help."

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