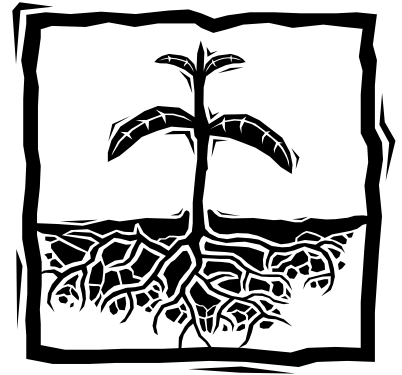


## Sustainability Stories



There are a growing number of sustainability success stories in Calgary. This section profiles five of these stories. They highlight local efforts by modern day sustainability pioneers to make our city more sustainable.

- Bow Chinook Barter Community
- Canterra Tower
- Collective Kitchens
- Highwood Crossing Farm
- Vision Quest

# Bow Chinook Barter Community



"That will be a quarter of an hour plus \$9.95 please," says the clerk to the person in front of you. You're standing in line at Kensington's Sunnyside Market, waiting to buy your organic tomatoes. A quarter of an hour? What's going on?

It's an economic transaction based partly on barter – the exchange of one commodity or service for another. As old as civilization, barter has emerged only in crisis situations since the spread of the cash economy. In Calgary, it has recently been resurrected through the efforts of the Bow Chinook Barter Community (BCBC).

Gerald Wheatley has been involved with BCBC since its inception. In 1995 he was on the board of the Arusha Centre when Arusha staff member Linda Grandinetti proposed that a barter organization be set up to facilitate the exchange of goods and services in the community through a local currency. The first Bow Chinook HOURS, as the currency is called, came off the press in January 1996. Each HOUR is valued at \$10. In 1997 Gerald was hired as a program coordinator for BCBC.

"I never imagined that work could be this satisfying," says Gerald. "Being involved in a project from conception, watching it grow – it's incredibly rewarding." Today almost \$30,000 in local currency is circulating in Calgary. Eighty-five storefront and home-based businesses accept HOURS as part or full payment and 300 members are currently running listings offering or requesting services in BCBC's free bi-monthly newspaper. Barter potlucks, where members can meet for a meal and for barter transactions, have been running monthly for almost five years.

How does barter make a community

more sustainable? First, it's good for the earth. Because the currency only has value within the community, it encourages the use of local rather than imported goods. It facilitates reduced consumption because people are able to trade goods and get things repaired rather than buy new. Even social connections have an environmental impact – people have access to more resources, allowing them to work, drive, and consume less.

Economically, local businesses gain by accepting HOURS. For example, Casa-blanca Video now accepts HOURS, which attracts barter community members. Participating businesses also gain access to goods and services that don't require cash payments, thereby reducing their expenses and increasing cash flow. And finally, we'd be a little non-plussed if the person accepting our cash asked us how we had earned it, but that frequently happens when HOURS are exchanged. Businesses and customers get to know each other better, which builds trust and allows economic networks to become established.

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People get involved with BCBC for all kinds of reasons – to get a good meal once a month, to relieve social isolation, to support alternatives to dehumanizing economic systems, or just to get things they need for a good price. Whatever the motivation, Gerald has seen that over time participants

absorb principles and ideas that change the way they think. Members often begin to ask why some of the most important work in society receives the lowest wages, and how big businesses can sell goods for so little money. "It's creating a more human-based economy," says Gerald. "Instead of cold, hard cash, local currency is warm, fuzzy money."

This year BCBC has taken some exciting steps. In a one-year pilot project, Calgary Transit has allocated 500 transit tickets to the barter community, which will be sold for 100 percent HOURS at potlucks. Through a partnership with Calgary Parks and Recreation, 350 swimming pool tickets will be available for HOURS beginning in December 2000. Gerald hopes to expand these programs in the future, as well as to continue to increase the goods and services offered through BCBC.

At Sunnyside Market, HOURS received from customers accumulate. Some are used to pay staff, if they are requested; others to buy necessary services. You will notice their most recent purchase the moment you step in the door – a beautiful new display unit overflowing with heirloom tomatoes, avocados, and squash, built in exchange for HOURS by local cabinet-maker Geoffrey Lyford.

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# Canterra Tower



A dark secret lurks in the basement of Calgary's "greenest" office building. While the rest of us go about our daily routines, thousands of photophobic California redworms are munching on the organic waste of this 46-storey building's food court, transforming coffee grounds and cantaloupe rinds into rich earth.

The vermicomposting program at Canterra Tower is only a small part of a comprehensive Environmental Health and Safety program that began in 1991, three years after the highrise was built. The program was the brainchild of Bruce Mackenzie, now the general manager of Canterra Tower for Oxford Properties Group Inc.

After the tower was commissioned, Mackenzie's team began to introduce energy management changes. In addition to these cost-saving measures, projects were begun to increase the quality of electrical power, conduct pilot projects on carbon monoxide detection, and ensure CFC containment. The changes quickly brought economic results. Between 1992 and 1994, the electrical bill decreased by 20 percent, a saving of \$300,000. The total savings during those two years came to almost half a million dollars.

After those small successes, it wasn't hard to convince the owners to finance bigger initiatives to save even more energy. New lighting was installed throughout the building, almost doubling Canterra's greenhouse gas reduction to 28 percent. One of the many new operating strategies introduced was "peak shedding." By reducing electrical use during peak use periods, consumption dropped by 31 percent between 1992 and 1999. Total energy conservation efforts during those seven years saved \$1.5 million in net tenant operating costs,

making the tower more attractive to prospective tenants.

Solid waste management is another major priority for Canterra's management team. In 1994 a voluntary recycling program was initiated. Paper is collected in several locations on each floor. All waste and recyclables are delivered to the basement loading dock where additional recyclables are sorted out by staff hired specifically for this purpose. Between 1993 and 1996, the amount of solid waste land-filled annually decreased by more than 60 percent – from 271 tonnes to 102 tonnes. Adding the vermicomposting program eliminated smell from the waste, allowing hauling to be reduced to once every two weeks instead of four times a week. That not only saves money, but the decrease in trucking also reduces fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

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It's no surprise that this building has won numerous awards over the last five years, including the prestigious national Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) Earth Award. Canterra Tower is unique not only in Calgary, but in Canada and the world.

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Why all the money talk? Mackenzie insists that he and his team would never have been able to accomplish the greening of Canterra Tower had there not been an economic return for the building's owners. This is corporate Calgary, after all. "But I happen to believe passionately that this is worth doing," he says. "We have a community of people who are renting an environment they want to be in."

That community is aware that the Environmental Health and Safety program has attended to the comfort and health of tenants as well as to

environmental issues. The ventilation rate in the building is one-third better than the industry standard. A study conducted a few years ago during rush hour found that the air quality inside the building was better than the air outside.

The combination of a healthier office environment and lower operating costs have kept the tenant retention rate at 95 percent or higher. At the beginning of the Environmental Health and Safety program, when tenants had lots of complaints, the regular meetings of management, owners and tenants were well-attended. "It's hard to get people to come out now," says Mackenzie. "They're happy with what we're doing."

It's no surprise that this building has won numerous awards over the last five years, including the prestigious national Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) Earth Award. Canterra Tower is unique not only in Calgary, but in Canada and the world. For Bruce Mackenzie, the awards are one method of measuring the progress of the management program. Another measure is the bottom line-profit. "We've proven that by being environmentally conscious, we save money."

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# Collective Kitchens



When I walk through the front doors of Robert McClure United Church, I don't have to ask the way to the kitchen. The rich mixture of aromas leads me to six hair-netted women, too busy chatting, slicing, sautéing, and tasting to notice my approach.

Five of these women are finishing their training to become coordinators of Collective Kitchens. The sixth is Shelley Cooper, a registered dietician employed by Healthy Communities of the Calgary Regional Health Authority to provide support for the 28 existing Collective Kitchens as well as training for new coordinators.

A Collective Kitchen is a group of about five people who pool their energy and money to cook low-cost nutritious meals for their families. The total cost for participants averages \$1 per meal. The cooking usually takes place once a month in community centres, churches, or schools that have donated their facilities. Each group has a coordinator who passes on her knowledge and helps to create a supportive, fun atmosphere. Shelley teaches the coordinators about food safety and nutrition, as well as how to modify recipes to make them healthier and less costly.

Collective Kitchens began in Calgary in 1992 and is constantly expanding. Between February and October 2000 Shelley trained 45 coordinators, including staff from various agencies, church and community members, and nutrition graduates.

Four years ago Marichu Antonio took the training to become a coordinator. She had settled in Canada with her family just months earlier. Having worked as a community development worker in the Philippines, Marichu decided to volunteer with the Calgary

Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (CMCN), who eventually hired her.

Marichu started to conduct community leadership training for immigrant women as they began to organize their own Collective Kitchens and cook their ethnic cuisine. "We expanded the concept to help newcomers, especially women, to adapt to Canada," says Marichu in soft-spoken, slightly accented English. "The kitchen is the safest environment for women to talk. While they are cooking, they start to become open about their lives."

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*Collective Kitchens nourish individuals, families, communities. Such a simple concept with such far-reaching effects.*

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In one group, they would joke about crying while chopping onions, "but it was more because of the stories than the onions," says Marichu. After the East Indian group began to talk about domestic violence issues in their homes, one member finally took her son with her to a shelter. "Because of the support she got from the Collective Kitchen, she was able to get a job with our catering business. After a few months she got another job, and she is now living in her own apartment."

The catering business Marichu refers to emerged from the kitchens that she started with the immigrant women. The various ethnic cooking groups began having potlucks together every four months, complete with traditional dress, music, and dancing. They invited Caucasians from non-profit organizations. "The food became very popular, and we were asked to cater for the open house of the CMCN." From that first catering event, word spread quickly and Collective Kitchens Catering, a non-profit enterprise owned and operated by the

CMCN, was born. From Middle Eastern kibbie balls to Vietnamese lemon grass chicken – just reading the menu on the CMCN website will get you salivating.

With funds from United Way and The Calgary Foundation, the catering enterprise hired a catering manager, built a commercial kitchen, and secured a delivery van. Their revenue climbed from \$8,000 in 1997 to \$28,000 in 1999. Kitchen helpers are paid well above minimum wage. "Usually it's their first Canadian work experience," says Marichu. "We hired an Arabic woman who had applied several times for food-related jobs, but wasn't accepted. After three months working for us, she was able to get a more stable job on the first interview."

Like the groups that Marichu facilitates, some of the other Collective Kitchens are centred around specific needs. There are groups for young single moms, for people with disabilities and for college students who are eager to move beyond Kraft dinners. Four recent pilot groups for senior citizens proved to be particularly successful. The pilot project included one man, who is now helping to coordinate a kitchen and is hoping to get more men involved.

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# Highwood Crossing Farm



Travellers still stop at Highwood Crossing – not to ford the shallows of the Highwood River as in days gone by, but to meet the Marshall family, tour their 300-acre farm, and perhaps buy some fresh granola. The farm, only half an hour from Calgary, is a favourite dinner-time destination for the day-long Foodie Tootle Tour, organized by a local chef several times a year to introduce Calgarians to local food producers. When the bus comes to a stop beside the farm house, Tony Marshall steps in, gives a brief history of the farm, jokes about how the deck fell off their house when the last busload posed on it for a photo, and invites everyone into a small building next to the house.

We step into the immaculate “press house,” leaving our shoes at the door, and watch as Tony demonstrates oil-pressing with the machine they purchased four years ago. The cleaned certified organic flax seed is cold-pressed at 37 to 40 degrees C. Unlike conventionally produced oil, which can reach temperatures of over 240 degrees C, Highwood Crossing oil is produced with no further processing, no preservatives, no caustic sodas or bleaching agents, no solvents or genetic engineering, and no chemicals used in the production of the seed. Because of its purity, Highwood Crossing oil is bottled and sealed in oxygen-free opaque glass bottles to protect it from deterioration.

“Our environmental days go back a long way,” says Penny, Tony’s business and life partner. Years ago Penny started the Earth Cycle Paper Company with a friend, bringing recycled paper into Alberta when it was only available in California. She also helped to establish the recycling program in High River before finally deciding to focus on the farm and her growing children. Until 1996, Tony worked both on and off the

farm to make ends meet, while Penny, trained as a professional home economist, experimented with crop rotation and educated herself through conferences and industry literature.

In 1989 the Marshalls made the decision to return to sustainable agricultural practices similar to those used on the same land by Tony’s great-grandfather almost a century before. Highwood Crossing Farm was certified organic in 1993. Their organic crops have included wheat, rye, flax, oats, barley, peas, hay, sweet clover, and canola.

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People are waking up to the benefits of supporting local small businesses that produce healthy food without costing the earth.

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“Our challenge right now is that it isn’t a level playing field,” says Penny. “Huge companies are marketing seeds that are genetically modified, which has a direct bearing on what we can and can’t grow.” Recently, they had to stop growing canola because of the proximity of other farmers growing genetically modified crops and the possibility of pollen drift into their fields. They are now purchasing organic canola seed to make oil, but even that seed must be sent away for DNA testing before it can be certified, another expense in an already costly process.

Despite the challenges, the Marshalls seem content with their choice to farm in a way that sustains the earth and builds relationships between producer and consumer. This past summer, Tony and Penny set up their stall at the Millarville Market for 17 weeks. With the help of their teenage daughters Megan and Kerry, they sold a variety of products, including buns, muffins, and a flax-seed pancake/muffin mix. “It’s a great way to relate face-

to-face with our customers,” says Penny. “We don’t get to do that as much in the retail stores.” If you happen to be shopping at Community Natural Foods on the right day, though, you’ll see Tony flipping flax-seed pancakes and Penny offering samples of popcorn flavoured with flax oil instead of butter.

As the shadows slant across the lawn, the Foodie Tootle group settles on the patio, plates loaded with barbecued sausages, fresh organic bread, and mixed greens tossed in one of Penny’s delicious canola oil dressings. The river gurgles just below us, flowing as it has for millennia toward Hudsons Bay. The sense of tradition is palpable, reflected even in the name of the farm, but something new is happening here as well.

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When chinook winds howl around his ranch house west of Calgary, Jason Edworthy smiles. To the executive director of Vision Quest Windelectric Inc., a pioneer wind energy company, that stiff breeze prophesies more than a warm spell.

Vision Quest, incorporated only four years ago, grew out of a company founded by Edworthy in 1980. "There's no doubt that the roots of our interest were based in environmental values and clean energy," says Edworthy. "We were interested in reducing fossil fuel use and emissions and making a significant contribution to climate change action." With 20 wind turbines up and running, Vision Quest is well on its way to achieving those goals.

When our toast pops up in the morning, many of us are too sleepy to think about where the electrons that flowed into the toaster originated. In Alberta, most of them come from coal, not the most earth-friendly source! But do we have any other choices? The good news is "sort of."

One option that has been available for several years is to support the purchase of wind power through Enmax's Greenmax program. In May 2000, Enmax Corporation announced a 10-year contract with Vision Quest to provide about 30,000 megawatt hours per year of wind-generated electricity. That's enough energy to power about 5,600 homes.

Of course, there is no way to direct specific electrons to a specific address. "All the electrons enter a big bathtub – the wire service, or grid," explains Edworthy. "At any given moment, the electric system is entirely in balance in the province because there's no place to store electricity and there are no leaks in the system. So when Vision Quest puts 10

megawatts on the grid, that displaces 10 megawatts generated elsewhere." Essentially, then, if you join Greenmax, you are paying an extra fee to have wind energy put on the grid.

The contract with Enmax required Vision Quest to add 16 new turbines to their existing four. Two commenced production in June and 14 in the fall of 2000, all in the Pincher Creek area at the Castle River Wind Farm. Each wind turbine, including propellers, is 73 metres – that's about 23 storeys-high. How does Vision Quest minimize the environmental impact of 20 such structures?

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*16 new turbines will reduce air emissions by 35,000 tonnes per year. That's the equivalent of the carbon stored in 16 million kilograms of coal or 3.8 million fully grown trees.*

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"There are four major criteria when we look at a piece of land," says Edworthy. "It's gotta be windy, we must have access to the wire system, we prefer to deal with a single landowner of a large tract of land, and the site has to pass an environmental screening process." That screening is done by an independent professional biologist and includes a general survey of flora and fauna, watching especially for species that might be vulnerable. If evidence is found of archeological sites such as teepee rings, an archeologist is brought into the process.

"We're especially sensitive to avian issues," says Edworthy, aware of controversy elsewhere in the world where some wind turbines have been poorly sited in places with active bird populations. Statistics from peer-reviewed avian studies within the industry, however, show that there is between zero and one bird impact per turbine

per year world wide. Compare that to the average suburban home, where 6 to 10 birds per year meet their fate slamming into windows.

In addition to wind energy, Vision Quest sells emissions reductions. The 16 new turbines installed in 2000 will reduce air emissions (greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide) by 35,000 tonnes per year. That's the equivalent of the carbon stored in 16 million kilograms of coal or 3.8 million fully grown trees. Vision Quest's emissions reductions are among the first registered in Canada and are sold as a "value-added" product. "Even though there are no compliance requirements on carbon dioxide yet," says Edworthy, "companies realize that we're heading towards a less carbon intensive economy and are preparing for that."

Back at the ranch, the wind whistles through the propellers of Alberta's first grid-connected wind turbine set up near Jason Edworthy's 50 percent solar-heated home. With the demand for Vision Quest's windpower increasing across Canada, Edworthy certainly has something to smile about.

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