

WINNIPEG, MB

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Diversity Food Services

Social Enterprise: Food Services | Restaurant | Catering

Feeding hungry university students is no easy task. Few businesses understand this challenge better than Diversity Foods, which operates four locations on the University of Winnipeg campus. Diversity is not your typical university cafeteria. Owned and operated by two non-profit organizations, Diversity is a social enterprise whose mission is to serve healthy, local and affordable food and reduce the campus' environmental footprint.

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As is the case with many partnerships, this joint effort between SEED Winnipeg and the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation (UWCRC) was the result of good timing. In 2008, a new residence was built on the University of Winnipeg campus, which accelerated the need for a food service provider that could adequately provide for students on the mandatory meal plan, while meeting existing cafeteria and catering demands. SEED, meanwhile, had been working on a feasibility study for a restaurant that could provide quality jobs and training for immigrants in the restaurant sector. This was largely because the standard model of restaurants often meant low quality jobs; yet this was a common business idea brought to SEED, which provides

capacity building services to improve social and economic vitality among marginalized communities. After a series of meetings, the two non-profits agreed to enter into a partnership, collectively created a business plan, and officially launched Diversity Food Services in 2009. The combination of UWCRC's institutional support, SEED's community finance connections, food service expertise from both organizations, and a strong management team have helped Diversity grow into a thriving business and integral pillar of the University community.

Diversity operates four locations on campus, including the main cafeteria, a coffee shop, a small "food-to-go" outlet and a full-service, up-scale restaurant. Their primary objective is to produce high-quality, healthy food prepared in a socially responsible manner that is sensitive to students' needs and best interests.



Diversity purchases local, seasonal products whenever possible, and cooks them in ways that preserve nutrition and produces healthy, appetizing dishes. In addition to providing important lessons about nutrition and health, this socially responsible business model gives patrons the opportunity to deepen their understanding of sustainability, food systems and nutrition.

Since beginning operations in 2009, Diversity has exceeded all expectations. Sales have almost tripled from the year Diversity took over food services on campus. In addition to their financial success, Diversity has also received recognition with a variety of awards for their food quality and community contributions. The awards on Diversity's trophy shelf include: two Golden Carrots Awards; the Round Table Award for Sustainability; Iron Chef Manitoba; the Champion of Diversity Award, and; a Gold Medal at the Gold Medal Plates competition.

Diversity's business practices are sustainable from purchasing to plate. All packaging material and cutlery is compostable. In fact, Diversity's rigorous composting practices helped the University divert 41 tons of compost out of landfills in 2012. This reuse resulted in annual savings of 61.5 tons of Greenhouse gas emissions.

Developing relationships with local farmers and producers is key to Diversity's success. Purchasing practices focus on reducing transportation costs, decreasing the dependency on food grown with herbicides and pesticides, and securing products that benefit those who grow them through a commitment to fair-trade practices. Diversity currently purchases from 147 Active Vendors within Manitoba, 80 of which are food service local suppliers. The products that are

unavailable locally – chocolate, coffee, rice, dried fruit, and tea – are all purchased from certified Fair Trade dealers.

Through their purchasing practices, Diversity is supporting Manitoba's food economy. A little closer to home, Diversity is using its hiring practices to reduce poverty and stimulate the local economy in surrounding communities. By offering meaningful employment opportunities to new Canadians, Aboriginal people, and community residents, they have established high quality jobs for dozens of people. Diversity has trained staff from all over the world, with 22 countries represented among the current staff team. All staff positions receive strong wages and benefits, career advancement opportunities, and access to training and capacity building. There are also plans for future employee-ownership in the venture. Providing training, mentorship and employment to those who may face barriers to meaningful work is vital to the success of the business.

Through an unlikely partnership, Diversity Food Services is demonstrating that social enterprises can effect widespread change at the local and international level. By modeling a new system based on socially responsible actions that consider environmental, economic, and cultural impacts, Diversity is building awareness among employees, suppliers, students, faculty, and community patrons that healthier, and more sustainable food systems are possible. Through progressive purchasing and hiring practices, Diversity Foods is helping to build stronger communities, reduce waste, and enhance environmental outcomes.

CED in Manitoba

CED is Community Economic Development

This profile is one of 50 stories of Manitoba communities working to build fairer and stronger local economies, reduce poverty, and revitalize neighbourhoods. Not all of the initiatives use a fully comprehensive CED approach, but each represents an important component of a CED solution. Read all our profiles of CED at www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/CEDprofiles