

# The Road Home

*Dan Dyck's WFG Team Helped a Local Shelter and their City Move Toward Ending Homelessness by 2018*



The city of Red Deer, Alberta, has an ambitious goal – stamping out homelessness by 2018. So, when Senior Marketing Director Dan Dyck and his WFG team decided earlier this year they wanted to make a contribution to their community, it was only natural they wanted to further that project with a fundraiser to benefit the Central Alberta Safe Harbour Society.

Dyck first proposed an event to benefit the Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen, which his father, a pastor, started 15 years ago. However, another associate, Gord Friesen, soon offered another suggestion. Gord's wife, Maribeth, works with the Mayor's Task Force on Ending Homelessness in Red Deer in 10 years. She recommended another group under the Safe Harbor Society umbrella: People's Place, a local homeless shelter that suffered flood damage and badly needed new beds for its residents.

The result: WFG associates put together a July barbeque and silent auction during Red Deer's annual Westerner Days event that raised almost \$6,000 for People's Place (with The WFG Charitable Trust supplying another \$6,000 in matching funds).

"We've never had a group raise this much money for us," said Linda Kelly, program coordinator for People's Place. "Normally an event like this will raise \$500 to \$600." The shelter looks to the community to help it raise \$30,000 for its annual operating budget.

Dyck said a committee of WFG associates spent about three months planning the event. The committee included Gord Friesen, J.P. Lanigan, Kathy Finley, Shannon



**THE GANG'S ALL HERE** (ABOVE) WFG SMD Dan Dyck (right) and WFG MD John Connelly pose with Red Deer Mayor Morris Flewwelling. (LEFT) WFG's Calgary Stampede chuckwagon driver, Colt Cosgrave, rides in the Westerner Days parade with WFG's Donna Letwinetz and Sarah Burgoine.

Lanigan, Chad Reed, Melodie Johnston, Shaun Ritchie, April Illsley and Peggy Martens, all from Dyck's office. Also on the committee were Brianne Rau and

Dan Sims, associates of Darren Tymchyshyn, whose WFG business shares an office with Dyck's group.

Westerner Days is similar to the better-known Calgary Stampede event. The morning parade featured Colt Cosgrave (who WFG sponsored in the Chuckwagon Races at the 2007 Calgary Stampede). Cosgrave drove the WFG chuckwagon in the Red Deer parade, accompanied by WFG associates in his wagon and riding horses alongside. After the parade, he came to Dyck's office with the chuckwagon and signed autographs.

The WFG fundraiser lasted seven hours and attracted more than 500 participants, including Red Deer's Mayor Morris Flewwelling. Forty associates plus their family members served hamburgers, hot dogs and drinks for free, encouraging donations in return. There was also a silent auction of items donated by local businesses.

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Dyck said, "For the event, our team wore T-shirts with 'No Family Left Behind' on the back and World Financial Group on front. Some of the clients from People's Place came to the event, and they got T-shirts as well."

Kelly said there were four Safe Harbour/People's Place staff members at the event. "All that



**ALL FIRED UP** (ABOVE) WFG's Richard Hammond rustles up burgers for the hungry crowd. (LEFT) Linda Kelly of People's Place (standing, far right) and several People's Place/ Safe Harbour workers and volunteers man the information booth.



required of us was to come, sit at a table, chat with people and answer questions," she said. "WFG took the bull by the horns and went with it."

People's Place serves a mostly male population of chronically homeless people. "They often have some addiction issues or mental health issues, and usually both," Kelly said. "In addition, we serve people who are new to the city, looking for a place to stay on a short-term basis while they find work." The facility has 23 beds and, during the busy winter months, often has to turn away up to 25 persons nightly to stay in the "Winter Inn" temporary cold weather shelter.

"I can't describe how good we felt to know that a community partner is so on board with what we're doing," Kelly added. "I want the folks at WFG to know how much their efforts were appreciated. We need to get more business and corporate community involvement like this."

Maribeth Friesen, Gord's wife and an employee of the City of Red Deer in the Social Planning Department, worked with WFG staff to help get the word out about their event. She said Red Deer has been working as a community around the issue of affordable housing and support for people who are homeless for more than

15 years. City surveys have counted 110 to 120 homeless per season, although "we believe the actual number is more like 250." The city has a total population exceeding 87,000 and was the first in Canada to set a goal of establishing a 10-year plan to end homelessness.

"The WFG fundraiser was a tremendous help," Maribeth said. "We're always looking for ways to engage the private sector. Through this event, WFG not only furthered its corporate identity of helping families; they also showed leadership in the community. They made a significant contribution to the quality of life for the people who stay at the shelter."

Dyck said his team "got a lot out of it, and we'll do this again. The WFG motto 'No Family Left Behind,' seems to be pretty inclusive. As a company, our mandate is to help middle-income families . . . So this was an opportunity for us to step outside our boundaries. Our motto really means nobody left behind – not just middle income families."

Kathy Finley, a WFG associate who took a lead role in the event, said, "I've been on the receiving end, so I know how it feels to have people come together to help support you. It's good to be able to give back."

The fundraiser was a great team building activity as well, Dyck said. "As a team, we're giving back to the community, rather than just being here to run a business." It also brought together other WFG people in the area as well. For example, Executive Marketing Director Sheryl Berry, who has another WFG office in Red Deer, split the event's expenses with Dyck.

Dyck said his father instilled community service in his family through his life's work. "Gratitude is fundamental to all success," Dyck said. "You need to be grateful for what you have, and one of the greatest ways to show gratitude is giving back. Plus, these people need our help."

– Bobby L. Hickman

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