

Growing the Good: Calgary Co-op Helps their Members Help their Community

DAVE CASPER: Welcome to growing the good. I'm Dave Casper, head of vimos North American commercial banking business. We're working with our customers to help them through this incredibly volatile time. They're stepping up in so many ways, helping to keep commerce moving and keep people safe. I have the pleasure of speaking with a number of CEOs running businesses in a variety of industries, hearing their personal stories about the challenges they're facing, and some of the very innovative ways they've adapted in these uncertain times. Today I'm speaking with Ken Keelor, the CEO of the Calgary Co Op Association, a retail Co Op operating in Calgary, Alberta. Welcome cam. Thanks so much for joining me today. Just so we can ground everybody for our audience. Why don't you just give a little description about the business and how you operate?

KEN KEELOR: Yeah, so Calgary Co Op is North America's largest retail cooperatives. We are owned by 440,000 members here in Calgary and surrounding areas. What membership really means is that for \$1, you become a member of our cooperative. And then based on how you shop by different lines of business. At the end of every year, you receive what we call patronage, which consists of a checks and or shares in the cooperatives. We have 440,000 member-owners, and our lines of business are gas convenience stores, we have food stores, an entire healthcare business. And then we have what I call a recreation business, which is our wine spirits and beer business. We also are very big in real estate in Calgary, and one of the top five actually, and so we have a lot of tenants. We're very big on local, you know, local, hiring local suppliers and providers, local products, primarily because as we always say, you know, we were here before local, really we are local,

DAVE CASPER: that's an excellent summary, let's go back to the beginning of the pandemic, give us a sense of what some of the initiatives you did and what things you've put in place to keep your members safe and your employees safe.

KEN KEELOR: You bet very early, it became evident, this was not about dollars and cents, it was about people, you know, the safety of it members and our members is always a top priority for Calgary Co Op. It's always the number one thing. And very early on in this pandemic, very, very early. As we knew we were deemed an essential service, we had to figure out how to protect the members, and still do business and help our community. And so we first started by activating our emergency planning team, we've always had one, but we activated and the emergency planning team has representation across all our lines of business. But from the onset of the virus, that team was in close consultation with public health officials, including Alberta Health Services, and the Public Health Agency of Canada, just making sure that aligned who are aware of guidance and recommendations, and I sit on that planning

team as well. So I was in calls to three times a day with that team. So in terms of safety in our stores, we have always been strict about cleaning and sanitizing, but we stepped it all up a notch. And in terms of what was already in place, we quickly took additional measures to ensure safety of team members and our members. You know, we have about 30 or 35 items on our inventory list of things that we did. So it was extensive and it was evolving.

DAVE CASPER: I feel safe just listening. You've done a lot though, beyond just helping your members and your employees. Tell us a little bit how that Co Op is stepped up to the communities.

KEN KEELOR: Yeah, community is central to Calgary Co Op at any cooperative really, but our cooperatives for us really, you know, our vision is to touch the lives of our communities. And so first we right away launched what we call the Calgary Co Op care package. And we knew that our community was going to need help. And so we took this step to offer our community members a package of food essentials, free of charge to anyone who was quarantined as directed by the public health agency. We handed out 2800 care packages to those who needed the most in our charities in our city have been really hurting even before COVID and through COVID they really felt it. So we launched a program called Calgary Corp cares and it provides an opportunity for members and team members to donate to six key charitable partners and to support that Calgary also matched the the donations of our members up to 25,000 bucks.

DAVE CASPER: This is what the members themselves did or is this what what the company did?

KEN KEELOR: Yeah, we came up with the idea of picking six charities. We find that our members really want to know where the donations are going to. And so we pick the six charities and so members can go online and you can select the charity you want to contribute to. Or you can contribute at the till, by asking the cashier to key in your contribution, and it will come right onto your bill. And then we are matching that up to \$25,000. Out of the cooperatives, out of the corporate funds

DAVE CASPER: That's really great, is something that the club has done previously, in other crisis situations, there's this really come up as a result of this pandemic.

KEN KEELOR: You know, we constantly have a list of things almost that we're doing. And it's just focused on what's happening in our community. And what's topical, the one that is comes to mind and is probably the most emotional one for Albertans is the 2016, Fort Mac fire. I like that example. Particularly because it was one where we didn't actually come up with the idea, local advertising agency

CNB, came up with the idea of Fort Mac fights back, you know, Fort Mac, fight back t-shirts. And so we brought those t shirts into our source stores, and we sold them, and the proceeds went to the Red Cross. We certainly deeply rooted in our communities. And from a pandemic point of view, we knew the impact would be serious on the communities. And so really mobilized the teams and trying to make, you know, safety a priority, just doing the right thing at the right time to reflect the community sentiment, because really, it's their needs we try to satisfy and sometimes those needs are emotional or directed at a specific cause they want us to support

DAVE CASPER: I really appreciate the time he's taken to speak with us today. Thanks so much for sharing all the good work that the Calgary Cooperative is doing to support all the local communities. It's a great story. I know our audience will appreciate it. Thanks again. Thanks for listening to growing the good. I hope you'll join me again for another conversation. Until then, stay safe.