

Albertans Celebrate Co-ops, Look to Raise Awareness

International Year of Co-operatives launch convenes people in the movement

CALGARY – Alberta’s International Year of Co-operatives launch events was an opportunity for people in the movement to convene and celebrate achievements and look towards what’s next.

Held at the Calgary Farmers’ Market, a morning event featured the national webcast and an Alberta program. In the evening, a gala featured music, refreshments and speakers.

First Calgary Financial director of corporate citizenship Dani DeBoice attended Calgary’s evening gala celebration, and said the year is exciting because it puts the spotlight on co-operatives’ impact locally and internationally.

“It’s a really good opportunity for us to tell the story of how co-operatives can make a difference in the community, how they give back through community efforts,” she said.

Dani said she was drawn to working at a credit union because of the value alignment and opportunities for community engagement, impact and giving local voice.

Many people don’t understand that co-operatives offer the same opportunities as a mainstream institution, as well as value alignment and broader community impact, said Dani.

“From a credit union perspective, we really need to inform people that credit unions are a whole spectrum financial services institution but offer you to really have an impact on a local level and get more involved,” she said.

First Calgary has more plans for the year, said Dani, among them sharing stories with members.

“It’s nice to see how co-operative even the planning process has been, all of the people coming together to make tonight a reality,” she said.

Marcia Mailloux works at Théâtre à Pic, a Francophone co-operative that helps its members find work in theatre and creates plays.

She said she is a product of her upbringing in St. Isidore, a village founded as a farming co-operative that wholly adopted the co-op model.

“I am hoping that a lot of people will realize that such a format exists and that it is a valid option to develop your company, develop ideas, and that there is more than enough for everyone to have their part,” she said.

Jacky Durrie belongs to Sunnyhill Housing Co-operative and the Southern Alberta Co-operative Housing Association. She attended the launch events out of interest in both the national launch and province-wide broadcast, she said.

She said she hopes 2012 will lend more credibility and understanding of what a co-operative is and how they work, especially in the area of ownership.

Jacky’s co-operative is planning to purchase some International Year of Co-operatives pens buttons and magnets and talk about the celebrations during meetings and social events, she said.

Banff housing co-operative resident Jane Newman drove to Calgary for the gala.

“It’s a great opportunity to get together with other people that are likely living in housing co-operatives and/or working in the co-operative world and see what it was all about,” she said.

Several speakers took the stage to share different aspects of what co-operatives mean to them, and Jane said it was interesting to hear so many perspectives from people who love what they do.

“There’s a real community here,” she said.

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