

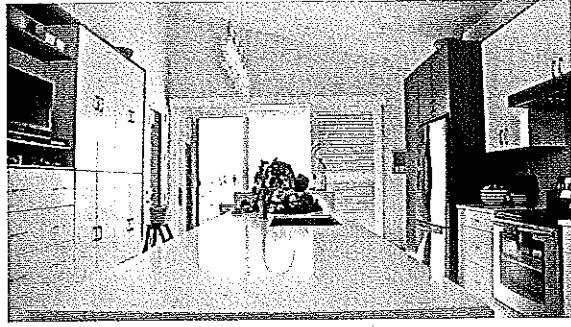
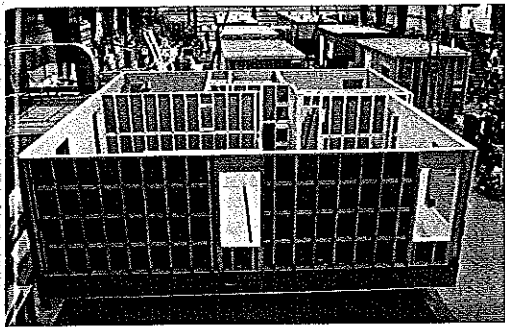
PEMBINA VALLEY

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

CONQUERING THE PREFABRICATED
HOUSING MARKET

By Todd Lewys

Photos courtesy of Bonplast Manufacturing Ltd.



Innovative design and speedy construction drive demand for Conquest's prefabricated structures.



PEMBINA VALLEY

PEMBINA VALLEY

**ALTONA & DISTRICT
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**MORDEN & DISTRICT
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**MORRIS & DISTRICT
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**PLUM COULEE & DISTRICT
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**ROSENORT & DISTRICT
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**WINKLER & DISTRICT
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

>> The Morden & District Chamber of Commerce Awards gala was held Oct. 10 at the Access Event Centre. Recipients were: Brew N' Sip Wine & Beer Supplies (customer service), Nexus Energy Products Inc. (Innovation), Thornview Grocery (marketing excellence), Matt Duda (future leader) and Alex Fedorchuk (community influence).

>> For the first time, Winkler & District Chamber of Commerce members did more than nominate businesses, they also voted on winners for the 2013 P.W. Enns Business Awards. The recipients were: Gateway Resources (inaugural award for non-profit service), Core Fitness (business builder under 10 employees), Border View Electric Ltd. (business builder over 10 employees), Heartland Solutions (customer service) and Winkler Dental Clinic (business excellence).

>> The inaugural Altona Community Expo and exposition was a success. Formerly known as the Arena Sale, the rebranded two-day event was held in September. Organized by the Altona Chamber of Commerce, it featured entertainment, crafts and home baking. Pampered Chef, Green Valley Equipment, Red Sunflower Restaurant, CIBC, Neighbour's Appliance Service and a number of other businesses participated in the expo.

>> Altona Mall has a new owner. Golden West Radio CEO Elmer Hildebrand sold the mall to Hika Corp., which is owned by Jake Rempel of Winnipeg. It's hoped the company will attract new retailers and bring renewed vitality to the mall.

Some companies are built by design. Others just sort of happen. That was the case with Conquest Manufacturing.

"Our company was originally called Challenger Home Builders, and was established in 1956 by my wife's grandfather George Sawatzky," president and co-owner Vaughn Stephenson recalls.

"Back in those days, George, his boys and son-in-laws kind of did everything to make a living. One of the things they did was road construction. Their crews needed a place to stay when they were doing jobs, so George bought old trailers for them to live in over the summer."

Once construction season ended, Sawatzky sold the trailers – for three times what he originally paid for them. That sparked a brainwave.

"It didn't look that difficult, so they started making the units on their own. Things just kind of evolved from there," Stephenson says.

Today, Altona-based Conquest Manufacturing Ltd. – which assumed that name in 1977 – designs and builds prefabricated metal structures on a much larger scale. Its designs are in demand throughout North America – quite an accomplishment for a company that was essentially born out of happenstance.

That said, it's no accident that the company is still going strong after 57 years. Its longevity is a credit to management's ability to identify trends and adapt to change, skills that came in handy eight years ago when the mobile-home market experienced a dramatic downturn.

"Our structures are now modular rather than mobile," Stephenson says. "We made the decision to make the shift to manufacture modern, green homes."

Another decision – to build a high-tech factory – proved pivotal. The new factory came online in 2002, doubling space to 40,000 square feet. Speed, high build quality and low maintenance are among the benefits that stem from the exceptionally efficient factory's geothermally climate-controlled environment.

"Weather isn't a factor, as all our products stay dry. You don't have to worry about them getting wet, which can cause mould or material to deteriorate," Stephenson says. "We also have

our own trades in-house, so everything is done here. We can typically turn a home around in about four weeks from start to finish."

Conquest's structures are used as post offices, hotels, apartment and office buildings, and as work camps in the oil and gas industry. They've been used to create multi-family dwellings and even cottages.

"The beauty of our structures is that you can take them anywhere," Stephenson says. "We actually built a 1,600-square-foot cottage for a customer in Lake of the Woods. We moved six pieces across the ice, then put it together. It was built on steel piles that were driven right into the bedrock. Using our prefabricated home turned the project from a three-year project into a six-month project."

Conquest is turning its attention to the local market with a new line of modular houses called the Challenger Series. Business development manager Mike Friesen says the 925-square-foot homes will have big windows, full basements and single-car garages — and prices under \$200,000 in Altona.

"We realized we were missing out in our own backyard," Friesen says. "Our feeling is that if we can make the concept work at home, we can make it work anywhere. I think people would jump at the chance to get a brand new, energy-efficient green home for that price. If it works here, we'll then take the concept to Steinbach and Winnipeg."

With a condominium project in the works and a fourth generation of family working in the company — son Landon, 28, and daughter Ranae Ginter, 23 — Stephenson says Conquest's continuing success is both humbling and gratifying.

"We've always tried to treat people well, to treat others the way we want to be treated," he says. "I think that pays dividends, as does trying to give our customers more than they pay for. We do our best to build quality products and be creative and innovative, and to stay ahead of the change curve."

"When you combine that with a highly skilled workforce, strong faith and a passion for detail, I think it gives you the ingredients needed for long-term success."