

## AIME Success Story: Makoose Wood Innovations

### Company Profile

- Country of Ownership: Canada
- Year Established: 2008
- Primary Industry (NAICS): Forestry
- Primary Business Activity: Custom wood products
- Industries Served: Mining, Manufacturing, Government (municipalities)
- Total Sales (\$CDN): Approx. \$1M
- Products and Services: Core sample trays, planed wood
- Number of Employees: 11
- Clients: Aspenware, Goldcorp,
- Geographic Markets: Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia
- Actively Pursuing: Growth in current provinces and other Canadian Manufacturers

### Company Background:

Located in the Wabauskang First Nations, Makoose Wood Innovations (MWI) began by providing forestry services throughout this region and provided custom wood products from a fairly isolated location. Located 120 km away from the nearest city (Kenora), the Wabauskang First Nations has a population of about 100 people and most of the labour force works at MWI. Doug Riffel, owner, states that he's proud to have created jobs in the North and that he's always looking for opportunities to expand his operations.

Early in 2011, Doug expanded his custom wood product line to attract new clients and began working with larger clients in the mining industry, such as Goldcorp, to supply core sample trays. In the summer of 2012, MWI recognized an opportunity to make veneer products from Northern Ontario's high quality poplar, and built a new partnership with Aspenware – a manufacturing company, to supply them with the required raw materials for their environmentally responsible, wooden, disposable utensils. There's no doubt that MWI has found success through building strong relationships with their clients and their community.

### Training is good for business, “Plane” and Simple

Introduced to Aspenware by the MNR, there was an opportunity to build a partnership and supply Aspenware with planed sheets of poplar. Doug had the opportunity to visit Aspenware's operations and received some training on their industrial machinery. In order to become the perfect partner for this new client, MWI needed to purchase new industrial equipment. Considering that safety is a high priority, it was imperative that MWI's employees were trained to operate the machines effectively and Doug stated, “People are our most valuable asset.” He added in good humour, “We have everyone go home the way they came.”

Not only was this an opportunity to train staff on a new machine to increase business, Doug also took upon the challenge of developing Health and Safety policies and streamline their processes to create efficiencies.

The AIME North initiative assisted by funding the training program development and execution after the new machinery was required. The true benefit to the AIME North initiative was that it allowed the programs to be developed internally: a consulting firm to develop their programs for them would be too expensive considering the need to see the operations first hand and the cost for such firms to travel.

Taking the time to develop the right program with proper research and input from the employees was the right course of action for MWI. “We started right from scratch and everyone has a lot of say in how we are set up and how things work.” Giving front line staff the ability to make improvements to the operations allowed MWI to attain effective workflow. “We ran the production for about an hour and then had everyone stop and talk about what they saw and what they might change.”



## **Yves Landry Foundation Introduces AIME:**

In response to the dramatically deteriorating conditions for manufacturers in Ontario, the Yves Landry Foundation (YLF) launched the AIME initiative (Achieving Innovation and Manufacturing Excellence) in the fall of 2008. AIME was developed by YLF and funded by the Government of Canada to support manufacturers in Ontario, particularly those who were facing the kinds of funding challenges for employee training that MWI was facing.

Doug had discovered the AIME North initiative in his search for a program where the application covered the project as a whole. Doug had past experiences in applying for support for his business, but stated that the AIME North initiative was much easier. "When you're running with an idea for your business, you can't wait 2, 3, to 5 years." He continued to say that working with the project coordinator at the YVES Landry Foundation was a positive and successful experience.

MWI had looked specifically for programs that could help them develop a better business in Northern Ontario and came across a few grant opportunities, but none that offered as good of a fit as the YVES Landry Foundation's AIME North initiative. Doug mentioned that he was able to move his business forward because of the directives the program covers, "Without the AIME North initiative, this would have gone a lot slower, not as smooth, and we wouldn't have advanced as far as we have."

## **Future Outlook:**

With the support of the AIME North initiative, MWI has the proper systems in place and they were able to save overhead costs by developing their programs and tools internally; the largest benefit being that they didn't rush the process and developed the best solutions. "At the end of the day, it's all about quality of life for myself and our employees."

Makoose Wood Innovations is looking forward to growing again, seeking out other Canadian manufacturing clients as well as expanding its product line of wood products from Core Sample Trays and the planed sheets of poplar. Doug mentioned how they should be able to provide Pre-Fabricated Cabins in the near future, to compliment the tourism industry in North Western Ontario.

For more information about the Yves Landry Foundation or the AIME program contact:

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