

The Forks North Portage Partnership

The process of bringing economic viability to downtowns and waterfronts

BY CHRISTOPHER CUSSAT

THE FORKS NORTH PORTAGE PARTNERSHIP (FNPP) is actually a combination of two companies. It began with The North Portage Development Corporation in 1984, an organization tasked with creating a vibrant, downtown neighbourhood. In 1987, The Forks Renewal Corporation was established to redevelop 56 acres of land at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers—the birthplace of Winnipeg. Then, in 1995, the two merged under one management structure in order to achieve better operating efficiencies.

Jim August was recruited to be FNPP's CEO in 2000. He describes FNPP as multifaceted; the organization works simultaneously as developer, retail operator, entertainment provider, and parking company, and it has been involved with operating a public market, a tourist destination, and the city's IMAX theatre. FNPP also oversees 2,500 parking spaces and hosts events and public concerts. "Our customers range from private investors and developers to locals, tourists, and moviegoers," August says. "I often say, 'You wouldn't wake up in the morning and create a company like this.' Nothing exists quite like it anywhere to my knowledge. Our diversification in the downtown-management and -development business is unique in North America and maybe worldwide."

Even FNPP's structure is not the corporate norm. "Ultimately, we are owned by government, but we operate at arm's length with a citizen-based board of directors, and we don't depend on any outside sources of funding," August notes.

August's broad professional background in the areas of economic de-



View of The Forks Historic Port with Forks Market Tower in the background.

velopment, strategic planning, and organizational development for various entities and communities seems to have perfectly moulded him to lead a company like FNPP. He's also spent more than a decade operating his own private consultation practice. "Basically, I have done a lot of work with cities and downtowns in advisory and staff roles, learning how they work and function," he says. "I was also involved on the board of the International

Downtown Association [IDA], so for probably 30 years, I've been working in these areas."

August believes that one of FNPP's major keys to success has been pulling together a good team of people. "I have an outstanding team that we've assembled over the years," he says. "It's really about getting the right people in place and trying to be as open as one can to new ideas while still staying focused

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
WINNIPEG, MB

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
MANAGEMENT
DEVELOPMENT FOR
TOURISM, RETAIL,
AND ENTERTAINMENT
INDUSTRIES

ASSETS:
\$90 MILLION (LAND
HOLDINGS AND REAL
ESTATE)

ANNUAL REVENUE:
\$10 MILLION

EMPLOYEES:
75



“I often say, ‘You wouldn’t wake up in the morning and create a company like this.’ Nothing exists quite like it anywhere to my knowledge.”

Jim August, CEO

on the vision. I think that people need to be challenged and need to be able to run with projects and make them happen. So we have a challenging environment on one hand, but people in key roles also have opportunities to use their own creativity.”

Recently, FNPP has been finalizing a more formalized project-management system. “It’s something that I’ve always wanted,” August says. “We’re really becoming more electronic and more technical in how we manage projects. I think that this will make us even more

effective and efficient in how we do things.” He acknowledges that FNPP has learned much from organizations like the Urban Land Institute and the IDA, as well as from Winnipeg’s private-development community.

Tangibly, FNPP’s success is evidenced in its many awards, including two from the International Waterfront Center, the Canadian Institute of Planners’ top award for Vision in Planning, a Phoenix Award from the Society of American Travel Writers, and a Province of Manitoba Tourism

Award for the city’s new international youth hostel.

As a Canadian executive, August greatly appreciates the support and professionalism of his peers. “One of the great things about working in our community, and actually across the country, is basically that wherever I call, people are more than willing to talk about new ideas and new opportunities,” he says. “I deal with a pretty receptive group of people, and my colleagues have always provided a lot of value-added knowledge to me.” CEQ

A MESSAGE FROM SHELTER
CANADIAN PROPERTIES LIMITED

As property manager of the IBM Building and Kiwanis Chateau, a life-lease residential building in the North Portage neighbourhood, Shelter Canadian Properties Limited has worked with The Forks North Portage Partnership for more than twenty years. Residents at Kiwanis Chateau enjoy convenient access to a wide range of commercial and recreation services as a result of the many initiatives that have been undertaken by The Forks North Portage Partnership. We congratulate The Forks North Portage Partnership and wish it continued success.

A MESSAGE FROM DOWNTOWN
WINNIPEG BIZ

A Hub of Activity

There is an exciting pulse in downtown Winnipeg, with historic buildings neighbouring exciting new developments, and shopping and dining districts accentuated by a lively arts and entertainment scene.

From the grand presence of the MTS Centre on Portage Avenue to the future skyline of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, our city centre is changing before our eyes.

With almost 1,000 units of urban living—including funky loft condos in the historic Exchange District and along the Waterfront—and two growing downtown educational campuses, new life is pouring into the heart of our city.

Visit www.downtownwinnipegbiz.com.