



Tell us a bit about your co-operative – its origins, purpose and what needs/value your organization provides to the community.

In 1988, natural gas deregulated in Ontario bringing vegetable and flower greenhouse growers together for a common need. The premise was to purchase natural gas at large wholesale volumes and share in the savings each individual greenhouse could not secure on their own. They wanted to have their own experts so that they always had an energy expert in their corner and not worried about making a profit. We were originally a not-for-profit however the crisis in energy during the late 1990's and early 2000's facilitated our move to a for profit co-operative offering service to members and non-members. After successfully moving to a for profit organization we also expanded to offer electricity, solar and energy services. Our members' needs as the energy landscape shifted becomes our offering. We exist for our members!

How is your co-operative responding to the current needs of your community (members, clients, community as a whole)?

The energy and agri-food/agri-tech industry are ever changing. Currently, the energy market is confusing with pandemic "relief" which is temporary, political mandates, stretches LDC resources and market volatility. As energy experts we put "energy speak" into language our members can understand and apply to their business. Our role is to offer intelligence, educations, services, savings and risk strategies so our members can focus on their businesses. We continue to expand our energy services as our members request assistance. Our regular updates and virtual town hall meetings offer updates, a great forum to discuss developing energy stories and educate members while providing a community of like-minded business entrepreneurs that understand their challenges.

What is your vision for co-operatives in rebuilding the economy post-pandemic?

Our members have been very busy, for the most part, during the pandemic, as they offer food and agricultural products. We will continue to offer sound energy expertise, advice and solutions. The pandemic has affected the energy markets significantly and therefore our partnership with members will aid them as energy markets are forecast to increase during the initial stages of the recovery.

What does the future of the co-operative sector in Ontario look like to you?

The co-op sector is primed for acceptance by consumers that hadn't previously considered co-operatives as a viable alternative. I believe the social and responsible environment in business is looking for a sound and respectful alternative - co-ops. They may not realize they are asking for co-operatives but they are. We need to make sure the co-op solution is the first solution - easier said than done I know. I see great things for the co-op sector as more and more consumers and companies embrace a balanced approach to business.

What aspect of OCA's mission/strategic programs do you think is most important as a way to rebuild a more co-operative economy?

I think there are two programs that come to mind - Government Relations activities and Youth programs. By having the government behind the movement the legislative efforts and incentives open up doors. By educating kids in school about co-operatives, they begin their careers with more options!

Anything else you would like to add?

OCA offers great programs and support to existing, growing and new co-operatives that is a great value to all involved.