



Mireille Saurette (centre), chair of the Brandon Fair Trade Committee, accepted the Fair Trade Town of the Year award on behalf of the City of Brandon last week at the 2016 Canadian Fairtrade Awards in Halifax, along with fellow committee members and Marquis Project members. She is pictured with Jose Abad-Puelles, from left, Lynn Nightingale, Dinah Ceplis and Zack Gross. (Rachel Sparling)

» 2016 CANADIAN FAIRTRADE AWARDS

Wheat City earns top honour

BY JILLIAN AUSTIN

Chocolate, coffee, wine and flowers are just a few of the certified fair trade products available in Brandon.

The fair trade commitment is on the rise locally, with 24 stores and 19 restaurants, cafes and gas bars now on board.

The efforts are being noticed on the national stage, and for the third year running, Brandon has been named Fair Trade Town of the Year.

“We work diligently with the community, and I think one of our secrets is that we kind of plant the seed of fair trade in anything that we do,” said Mireille Saurette, chair of the Brandon Fair Trade Committee, a Marquis Project initiative.

For example, the committee offers fair trade tea and sugar during local events, as well as fair trade coffee at global cooking classes available through Westman Immigrant Services.

The national award is one of 16 given out by Fairtrade Canada, and local representatives accepted the honour last week in Halifax at the 2016 Canadian Fairtrade Awards.

Another award went to a Brandon organization: Grace Mennonite Church received the award for Faith Group of the Year.

Other categories included Workplace of the Year (City of Selkirk), Campus of the Year (McGill University), Product of the Year (KICK ASS by Kicking Horse Coffee), to name a few.

The City of Brandon became Manitoba’s second and Canada’s 19th Fair Trade Town on May 20, 2014. Brandon is one of 1,873 Fair Trade Towns designated worldwide and among 22 in all of Canada.

“Fair trade offers producers in the Global South a better deal and improved trade conditions,” according to the local committee’s press release. “As a global movement, fair trade brings attention to people around the world who work under exploitative conditions and highlights the true costs of goods in global supply chains.”

Internationally recognized principles and standards are set by Certified Fairtrade to promote greater justice in the global economic system. This includes environmental stewardship, protection against child labour, promotion of safe and empowering working conditions, respect for cultural identity, transparent and accountable business practices, and capacity development of producers to seek markets

There are a few requirements to become a Fair Trade Town, such as establishing a steering committee that is committed to promoting fair trade. Product availability is another aspect. A city of Brandon’s size must have 13 stores that sell at least two fair trade products and at least seven restaurants or cafes that offer two fair trade products.

Currently, Carolyn’s Floral Designs sells fair trade roses, Blue Hills Bakery offers

fair trade coffee, while The Dock sells fair trade wine and beer.

Coffee Culture has coffee, tea, sugar and chocolate bars.

A full list of fair trade stores in Brandon can be found at marquisproject.com.

Other important aspects include public awareness, education, community events and political support, Saurette said.

“We started this initiative when it was mayor Shari Decter Hirst and she was quite committed to the cause even before we started the process,” she said. “Mayor Rick Chrest has been very supportive as have the councillors. I think they recognize how this is bringing Brandon on the map, and we’re leaders here in Manitoba.”

Chrest praised Saurette and the committee for Brandon’s commitment to this initiative.

“We’re fortunate we’ve got some people that are really passionate about this and they do the work and they do it in a real positive, inclusive manner and it’s just helped us to build and build,” he said.

As more and more businesses get on board, the fair trade movement in Brandon continues to snowball.

“We’ve got a good solid core of organizations and businesses that are involved so that’s helped to keep it going and keep it building,” Chrest said.

The award will be presented to Brandon City Council on Monday evening.

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