



# Montreal Woollens

## IN THIS ISSUE

**Rimowa**  
*Luxurious Luggage*

**Montreal Woollens**  
*One of the  
World's Leading  
Textile Manufacturers*

**MetoKote**  
*Weathering the  
Economic Storm*

**2008 Award  
Winners**  
page 5

**Building Activity  
Statistics**  
pages 6 & 7



One of the

## World's Leading Textile Manufacturers

The textile industry at one time in history was a significant contributor to the economy of Cambridge, with the communities of Galt, Preston and Hespeler home to a great number of woolen and textile mills. But Cambridge's textile industry in recent years has diminished in presence, and today only a few companies of this heritage remain, with Montreal Woollens, or MW Canada, being one of the most prominent.

Robert Berger's office is a hive of activity, abuzz with inbound phone calls, blackberry messages and littered with skeins of yarn and fabric samples. Berger, who stepped into the role of President and CEO thirteen years ago, represents the third generation of the Berger family to lead MW Canada, a company founded under the name of Montreal Woollens by his father and grandfather in 1963. The company relocated from its original home in Montreal to Cambridge in 1976 when it pur-

chased the manufacturing facility on Elgin Street. From that point forward, all business investment has flowed into Cambridge.

A premier fabric supplier to the window covering industry, MW Canada markets its innovative design products across North America and around the world. The company supplies roman shade, roller shade, pleated shade, drapery, and vertical blind fabrics to such leading brand names in the window covering industry as Hunter Douglas, Levolor, Bali, Graber, and many others who supply to major retailers including Sears, Costco, Home Depot, Lowe's, and Blinds to Go.



"About 75 percent of the custom blind designs you find in a retailer's book of samples originates from MW Canada, right here in Cambridge," says Robert Berger. "We're in the 'unique' business, producing thousands of new designs a year for the North American, European, Middle Eastern and Asian

...continued on page 2

WHETHER RELOCATING, EXPANDING OR FORGING NEW OPPORTUNITIES, CAMBRIDGE IS A GREAT PLACE TO DO BUSINESS. FOR PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE WITH YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS, CONTACT THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STAFF AT 519-740-4536.

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markets. With the right product development, we are able to identify the market needs for premier textiles and consistently offer 'something different' to customers."

"We have a rich tradition in textile manufacturing here in Cambridge, and Canadian products have an excellent reputation around the world, especially for premier quality goods. We have the right distribution channels and are constantly striving to deliver products tuned to the cultural needs of our international markets, allowing us to very effectively compete on a global scale."

The manufacturing process at MW Canada uses time honored textile creation methods. Fabric begins with a design; raw materials are dyed, and then undergo warping, weaving, knitting, and many different coating and finishing processes. The final stages the manufacturing process includes pleating, slitting, printing, and laminating, to create a product ready for market. But it is at this point tradition leaves off and technology kicks in at MW Canada. Time proven craftsmanship is complemented by a highly automated manufacturing process that utilizes state of the art machinery run by computer savvy staff. "We have automated every piece of the business today for maximum efficiency and cost effectiveness," says Berger.

MW Canada has also worked hard to reduce its environmental footprint across the manufacturing process. Over 90 percent of the company's waste is recycled. All its products carry a worldwide certification to ensure that there are no harmful substances used.

"Green products are an essential in today's world market. We take these initiatives very seriously," says Berger.

Today, finding and retaining the right blend of workforce talent, with technical skill sets in addition to textile manufacturing knowledge, is one of MW Canada's most significant business challenges.

"The textile industry has an aging workforce. Many employees here at MW Canada have spent their entire work life with us. When they leave us, pieces of our history go with them," says Robert Berger.

"Textile manufacturing techniques are not taught in schools today. Few candidates arrive on our doorstep proficient in textile manufacturing or with any industry experience. This shortage of qualified labour poses a potential threat to our business. So we decided to take matters into our own hands, and built an internal program to capture and share our business's collective industry knowledge as well as give our employees an opportunity to build and enhance their learning and skills."

With funding assistance from the Textiles Human Resources Council, MW Canada established a Skills and Learning program in 2006 to give its 65+ employees the opportunity to advance their learning and upgrade their skills. The company established a dedicated training room called the ER (Education Room), with computer portal access to courseware, and constructed an individualized learning program for each employee aligned to their specific needs. Courses offered through the learning pro-

gram include GED (high school equivalency), English as a second language, literacy, computer literacy, math and communication skills. The MW Canada learning program received a national award from the Canadian Council of Learning in 2007, and in 2008 was awarded the Mayor's Award for Excellence in Workforce Training and Development by the City of Cambridge. MW has proven through its history that business growth and success is directly driven by creative thinking, the marriage of technology and craftsmanship, and a deep commitment to workforce training. It is relying on this recipe to navigate its way through the latest economic downturn.

"Yes, we have been affected by the economy of late. Our business and our staff have felt the impact. But we have survived downturns in our business before, and we will again. After the rain it always gets sunny again. Indeed, it is my belief that this recession could be the launching pad for huge possibilities for MW Canada. It presents us with new opportunities to further innovate and aggressively pick up market share. Not everyone in our industry is going to be as smart, resilient and efficient as we are."

