

# The rise of the Domain Hall

## How the people of a small Manitoba town came together to revitalize their community

By Lynne Bereza, AMM Communications Coordinator

Looking back at the Mayors, Reeves and CAOs meetings of last March one would be hard pressed to find a location quite as unexpected as the Domain Hall, where the Central District meeting took place. The tiny community of Domain consists of only about 21 homes and 150 people. So how did they come to have a large, new, formal hall?

While giving opening remarks at the Mayors, Reeves and CAOs meeting, it was evident that AMM Rural Vice-President and RM of Macdonald councillor **Doug Dobrowolski** is extremely proud of the hall. Given this pride – and the fact that he sat on the building committee responsible for raising funds for the new hall – he seemed an obvious choice to answer that question.

As is often the case in so many small communities, the local hall is a well-used and beloved building where many important events had taken place over the years – the types of events that contribute to and shape a community’s history. But, the old hall was 63 years old and suffering the effects of time and use. A committee of community members was formed to debate whether to try to repair the old hall or to build a new one, a concept the committee was open to but which met with some resistance from the community at large. As Dobrowolski notes, “there were some naysayers. It took a few meetings to get everyone convinced a new hall was the

way to go.” What

propelled Dobrowolski to be one of those pushing for an expensive new hall? “I always feel every community needs a gathering place. Once people started to see concrete being poured and walls going up, they took ownership of it.”

The new hall was not an inexpensive undertaking, but the community of Domain came up with some novel ways to pay for it. They also obtained a Community Places Grant and a grant from Industry Canada. Local businesses such as Enns Brothers and the Local Federated Co-op did their part, as did some from out of town. For instance, Rosenort Credit Union donated all the chairs, recognizing that people from Domain do business in Rosenort.

Perhaps the most ‘visible’ corporate fundraising effort is reflected in the hall’s light fixtures. Each one (and there are over 30 lights) has a sponsor’s name prominently displayed on it. Indeed, it is one of the first things one notices upon entering the hall. These sponsorships did not go cheap – at a sponsor level of \$8,000 per light, the committee was able to raise a significant amount of money.

Locals pledged a great deal of personal funds to the hall, as well. Landowners paid \$1/acre for three years, while residents were asked to pledge a minimum of \$500. Local farmers also raised money by farming a ¼ section of land for three years – at one time 17 combines worked together to harvest the crop! “Overall, local residents raised

just under \$400,000 – and the hall has about \$85,000 in the bank today,” beams Dobrowolski. And more work is planned. “We are looking at installing a geo-thermal system next.”

While the fundraising effort was indeed a triumph, the most telling proof of success came after the doors opened. “The community support has been tremendous,” says Dobrowolski. “We have so many events, like a darts night, our annual Gala Dinner, a *Meet Your Neighbour* night, and plenty of other special events, not to mention weddings and socials.” Naturally, local people have first chance to purchase tickets for any event – after all, they paid for the hall!

While residents are thrilled with their new hall, a real point of pride within the structure is devoted to all that is old – the hall’s “heritage room”, which highlights the history of the town. “We wanted local community clubs to have a space within the hall to call home,” explains Dobrowolski. “The heritage room has pictures of our history, as well as the original lights from the old hall. We’ve even incorporated the doors from the old hall – they’re on the storage closet.”

Asked to summarize the success of such a huge project, Dobrowolski points firmly to the people of Domain. “You need willingness from within. If people believe in something, they will find a way to get it done,” he says with conviction. This willingness may also come from locals who are all too familiar with what the loss of a community icon can do to a town. “A few years earlier we lost our local store and that was a real blow to our community,” explains Dobrowolski. “When your gathering place is gone, no one comes to town.

This hall has helped to revitalize our town.”



Light fixtures proved to be a large component of the hall's fundraising effort.

