

# Try Nunavut, Manitoba firms told

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NUNAVUT may be right next door, but Manitoba companies could risk losing out on opportunities to competitors in Quebec if it takes the region for granted.

That's one of the reasons the Churchill Gateway Development Corp. (CGDC) organized what it hopes will become an annual Manitoba trade mission to Nunavut earlier this month.

"Montreal and Quebec companies have been aggressive," said Darryl Balasko, marketing director of CGDC. "But there are natural ties to Manitoba. There is a kinship."

Quebec also has a traditional connection with eastern Nunavut, where Nunavut's capital, Iqaluit, is located. But Balasko said people on the western shore of Hudson Bay in the Kivalliq region are inclined to look to Manitoba for shopping, business and travel.

Although there may be plenty of commercial opportunities, cargo prices have to be competitive and Manitoba companies have to be ready to head a little off the beaten track.

"I'm extremely happy I went," said Walter Toews, a partner in Steinbach's Hanover Door Systems, who travelled to three Nunavut communities and Churchill on the trade mission. "We're working on one \$25,000 order we landed on the trip that has to be delivered next week and we haven't even begun to complete the follow-up on all the leads we got."

Toews' company has done work for Environment Canada and the Department of National Defence on some of its northern stations, so it had a track record and knew what to expect.

Balasko said the purpose of the 14-member mission was to reconfirm the links that exist between Manitoba and Nunavut, especially Kivalliq region communities like Rankin Inlet, Arviat and Baker Lake.

"We want to continue to build relationships with Nunavut and strengthen existing ties," Balasko said. "We see the resupply of the North through the Port of Churchill as an ever-growing area of commerce for us."

Strong population growth and continuing mining development mean there are increasing cargo and resupply needs in the region.

Agnico-Eagle's Meadow-bank gold mine, 80 kilometres west of Baker Lake, is a significant presence and there is at least one other gold mine and a uranium mine in development in the region.

Even though recent commodity price declines have slightly slowed the mining boom that has been taking place over the last several years in Nunavut, general cargo tonnage out of Churchill to Nunavut was up dramatically in 2008 -- from 7,000 tonnes in 2006 to 17,000 tonnes last year. It is expected to increase to 19,000 tonnes in 2010.

Mining activity is contributing to natural population growth in the region and with housing in chronic short supply, Balasko said he believes Manitoba homebuilders should find new business there.

Currently, much of the homebuilding in the region comes from Quebec suppliers.

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