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Entrepreneur has a feel for steel

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By Larry Kusch



GEORGE DOUKLIAS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Jeff Ganczar received the Manitoba Young Entrepreneur Award sponsored by the Business Development Bank of Canada.

Eight years ago he was operating a one-man mobile welding business out of the back of a truck.

Today, Jeff Ganczar, the 31-year-old owner of Capitol Welding Ltd., employs 65 people in a growing fabricated steel business that recently won a multimillion-dollar contract to help build Manitoba Hydro's new downtown headquarters. Last night, he was in Moncton, N.B., where he received the Manitoba Young Entrepreneur Award at a national gala sponsored by the Business Development Bank of Canada.

Ganczar, who graduated from Winnipeg Technical College, was employed as a welder when he decided to form his own business at the age of 23.

He started out repairing heavy equipment and then began doing small fabrication projects -- such as stairs and handrails -- from a shop in his

dad's garage near Headingley.

"I would basically take on anything I had the opportunity to do," Ganczar said in an interview. "I never ever would turn down a job. I still try to follow that philosophy."

When he was 25, his company won a \$500,000 contract to supply metal stairs and access platforms for the Winnipeg floodway gates. By then, he had saved up enough money to bankroll a project of that size.

Today, the ambitious workaholic --who puts in up to 90 hours a week on the job and says it doesn't feel like work -- has several big projects on the go. Out of his plant, on the site of the old Dominion Bridge facility on Dublin Avenue, he is fabricating steel for a \$3 million-plus bridge at Sioux Narrows, Ont.

His company is also doing structural reinforcement work at the Tolko sawmill in The Pas after it repaired the plant's collapsed roof earlier this year.

"They called me up just after it happened," Ganczar said of the sawmill job, "and I got in a plane and went up there and told them we could fix it. And the next day we were making preparations."

When a truck hit the Disraeli% Bridge on Thursday, he got the call to make repairs (delaying his trip to Moncton by a day).

While the downtown Hydro building is mainly concrete in construction, Capitol Welding will supply 30 truckloads of fabricated steel for the project, beginning in December.

As a youngster, Ganczar was always interested in welding and working with equipment around his family's fruit and vegetable farm.

Key to his success?

He picked up some basic skills in steel fabrication working for other companies and quickly honed his skills when he went out on his own. "It almost came naturally to me, working with steel," Ganczar said.

The key to his success? In part, he said it comes from always trying to bite off more than he can chew.

"That's kind of always been my attitude." Ganczar said the skilled trades have received a bad rap, leading to difficulties in recruiting workers. He said he personally felt the prejudice when he chose to go to a technical college instead of university.

"I experienced it first hand and there is definitely a negative stigma attached to trades people in this country."

But he said there are "huge opportunities" to make money and for career advancement in the trades "for somebody who is willing to work."

For example, Ganczar's production manager started working for him three years ago as a casual labourer on weekends doing clean up around the shop.

"He's been working his way up from there, and now he's probably supervising about 30 guys," Ganczar said. "And he's 24 years old."

The successful entrepreneur said he keeps his eyes open for people like that -- who "have a spark in their eye and want to get ahead."

The Business Development Bank of Canada Young Entrepreneur Awards recognize the entrepreneurial spirit and business success of Canadians aged 19 to 35. larry.kusch@freepress.mb.ca

Facts on winner

Manitoba's Young Entrepreneur Award winner:

Who: Jeff Ganczar, owner of Capitol Welding Ltd., of Winnipeg

Age: 31

Business: Welding and steel fabrication

No. of employees: 65 Big contracts: Manitoba Hydro building, bridge construction at Sioux Narrows, Ont., repairs and reinforcement of Tolko sawmill at The Pas.

Ambition: To grow his business into a "world-class organization."

Hobbies: Snowmobiling, dirt biking, "4X4ing"

Pet peeve: People who look down their noses at the trades.