

Steel firm soars to new heights

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INSTALLING the eight-storey solar chimney atop Winnipeg's fourth-tallest building might be 32-year-old Jeff Ganczar's crowning achievement.

But you get the impression the steel fabricator and his young, dynamic company, Capitol Steel, will find plenty of new heights to scale.

Ganczar, who got his entrepreneurial start less than a decade ago doing welding jobs from the back of a truck, is supplying all of the steel beams -- as well as the finer metal work -- for the \$278-million Manitoba Hydro building, scheduled for completion in May.

At the same time, he's been manufacturing massive steel spans supporting a railway bridge over the expanded Winnipeg floodway, bidding on contracts for the proposed Wuskwatim hydroelectric dam and salivating at the prospect of a Canadian Museum for Human Rights building at The Forks.



Photo by Joe Bryska / Winnipeg Free Press

"I hope to be keeping some of that work in the province," he said of the Wuskwatim power project, noting a Quebec steel company has won some of the early contracts. "I hate to see this good steel work go out of province."

Sometime in early March, Winnipeggers who are downtown should see the solar chimney -- which will look from a distance more like a wide flat panel -- emerge from the top of the 22-floor Hydro structure.

Installing the chimney, which will handle the exhaust from the tower's complex ventilation system, will be tricky.

"It's like nothing we've ever done before because you're working on kind of the top of a concrete shaft that's already (22) storeys up in the air," Ganczar said.

"So we're going to fabricate it in such a way that it makes the site work as simple as possible because it's a very difficult job."

Capitol Steel, formerly known as Capitol Welding Ltd., will do that work at its sprawling complex on the old Dominion Bridge site on Dublin Avenue.

As well as building the solar chimney, the company supplied 80-foot steel beams supporting the Hydro building's south-side atrium. And it's also supplying all of the miscellaneous metal used in the new downtown building's staircases and hand rails.



Photo by Joe Bryska / Winnipeg Free Press

"The majority of the building is concrete, but there's still millions and millions of dollars worth of steel in there and we provided all of the steel," Ganczar said, estimating the volume at about 40 truckloads.

Ganczar, who received the 2006 Manitoba Young Entrepreneur Award, sponsored by the Business Development Bank of Canada, got his start repairing heavy equipment and doing small metal fabrication projects in his dad's garage near Headingley.

When he was 25, his company won a \$500,000 contract to supply metal stairs and access platforms for the Winnipeg floodway gates. And he's been taking on larger and larger projects ever since.

For quite some time, he's had plans to open a satellite operation in Alberta, but he's had no time. His company, which employs 65, has been run off its feet at home in Manitoba.

"We're fortunate right now because there's been a lot of construction activity in the province. And there's going to be for another few years," said Ganczar, who is known to put in 90-hour weeks.

Asked if he could have guessed a decade ago that he would be adding the crowning touch to one of Winnipeg's tallest buildings, he admitted: "Probably not in my wildest dreams."

Then he added: "I hope in the future I'm going to do a lot more things that I never dreamed that I would do."

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The 10 tallest buildings in Winnipeg

Height Storeys

1. Canwest Global Place 128.0 metres 33
2. Richardson Building 124.1 metres 34
3. Commodity Exchange Tower 117.0 metres 31
4. Manitoba Hydro Tower* 112.5 metres 22
5. 55 Nassau 109.0 metres 38
6. MTS Place on Main St. 96.0 metres 24
7. Fort Garry Place 3 94.0 metres 31
8. 1 Evergreen Place 89.0 metres 29
9. 11 Evergreen Place 85.0 metres 26
10. One Canada Centre 82.3 metres 18

* Once eight-storey chimney is installed later this year