

Taiga Nova Earns Finalist Spot for 2011 Emerald Awards

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-supplied photo



D'Laundromat in Taiga Nova -supplied photo

BY REBEKAH BENOIT editorial@macmedia.ca

Taiga Nova, Fort McMurray's green industrial park, has another accolade to add to the park's already lengthy list of accomplishments. Besides being arguably the greenest industrial park in the country, Taiga Nova has now landed Wood Buffalo Housing and Development Corporation (WBHDC) a finalist spot for the 2011 Emerald Awards.

"We're one of only four companies nominated in the business category for all of Alberta, so we're very pleased to be nominated," says Da-

vid Peters, vice-president of development with WBHDC. "We're possibly the greenest new industrial development in Canada, so this is a fair bit of recognition for us."

The Emerald Awards, sponsored by the Alberta Emerald Foundation, recognize the best environmental initiatives in the province from corporations of all sizes, not-for-profit groups, community associations, government and individuals. This year, WBHDC competed with 93 other nominees for a spot as finalist.

Taiga Nova began as a project by the Regional

Municipality of Wood Buffalo before being turned over to WBHDC in 2007. "We have to give a fair bit of credit to the RMWB who initially started the project," says Peters. "They set the bar pretty high."

The park itself features a host of impressive green features. Taiga Nova is crisscrossed by trails and other "amenity areas," allowing pedestrians to walk or cycle easily between businesses. A storm water management pond will provide a wetland sanctuary, complete with dragonfly perches. All buildings in the park are required to be at least 25 per cent more efficient than the Model National Energy Code, and several of the buildings within the development will be LEED certified.

While sustainability is the key focus of the park, Peters says the development also needed to be cost-effective to attract businesses. "We're in a good location, and commercial lots aren't available elsewhere," Peters says of why the park has been so popular for businesses.

"The eco portion of the park is not prohibitive. Yes, there are some additional requirements over and above other industrial parks in the area, but companies can still make a business

case for being here, for buying a lot here."

When the development was first announced, businesses across the region jumped at the chance for a lot in the much-lauded green industrial park, but the economic downturn threatened to derail the project, says Peters.

"Initially, we had three expressions of interest for every lot, but with the significant downturn in the economy in 2008-2009, we did have some concerns," Peters explains. "But things have picked up. Sales continued to the point where we're all sold out now."

All of the park's industrial lots have been sold, and there are only two commercial spaces left. Currently, there are four businesses already built and operating out of Taiga Nova.

"This is an economic success, and it will have a lasting impact on the community," Peters says. "It goes to show that [in Wood Buffalo] we're not all oil and gas. We do have other things that we are interested in up here. We're not just 'slash and burn'; we do have environmental concerns and considerations in place for a lot of the work that we do."

The winners of the 2011 Emerald Awards will be announced June 15.

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