

Normerica finds a home in the land of opportunity

The counties surrounding greater Washington, D.C., are some of the wealthiest in the United States. Fast-appreciating property values and low interest rates have provided homeowners in the region with the incentive to renovate their houses or build new custom ones. A Canadian company that specializes in massive handcrafted products has been busy helping.



A Normerica timber frame home

Normerica Authentic Timber Frame Homes, based in Gormley, Ontario, is one of several Canadian exporters of building products that has had success recently in the U.S. mid-Atlantic states, which include eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Normerica was introduced to Great Falls Construction, a U.S. custom home builder, at an event sponsored by Canada's Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation International (CMHC), which introduced Canadian exporters to the Custom Builders Council of Northern Virginia. After the event, Normerica made regular follow-up calls with Great Falls Construction until there was a project available which was suitable for its Canadian timber frame system.

Working with the builder and architect, Normerica provided custom design options for the timber frame portions of the home. A cost-effective price, coupled with a total service commitment and on-time delivery, were required to ensure the project's success.

The result was a unique custom-built home in northern Virginia featuring Canadian custom timber.

Normerica's business development manager, Henry Brenzel, is now working to expand the company's business in the mid-Atlantic region by focusing on other interested builders, architects, realtors and developers.

Brenzel says selling in the mid-Atlantic is similar to their experiences elsewhere in the U.S., including Colorado, New York, Maine and Georgia.

"There are some challenges in entering this market, perhaps the greatest one being the slower-than-expected growth of timber frame construction and the difficulties in creating and developing rewarding long-term relationships with the builders and architects," says Brenzel.

As Normerica has shown, exporters who are focused and diligent in their efforts to build relationships will have success in this market.

But what attracted Normerica to explore the mid-Atlantic region as an export destination?

"We had done some market studies ourselves that highlighted the potential for us in this region. Our initial involvement with the Custom Builders Council of Northern Virginia through CMHC International and the TCS was also crucial," he says.

The mid-Atlantic region is also appealing for the high-end investment that wealthy American homeowners are prepared to make. Custom homes in the region start at \$1 million, although \$2 million and up is more common. The renovation and upgrade market is equally impressive.

Trade officials worked closely with CMHC International to promote Canadian building products and services in this region and to develop a network of architects, builders and distributors to assist Canadian exporters.

Priscilla Prias, a trade consultant with CMHC International in Toronto, stresses the importance of local partnerships.

"Following our February 2002 mission to the region, we met with the Custom Builders Council of Northern Virginia and then Custom Builders USA. These groups have provided a means for us to reach out to the building community and showcase high-end Canadian products. As a result of initial introductions facilitated through these relationships, several companies have had success selling to this market in the past year and a half," says Prias.

Normerica learned about the services of Canada's trade commissioners at the annual Construct Canada trade show in Toronto.

"We would absolutely recommend the Trade Commissioner Service and CMHC International to others," says Brenzel.

For more information, go to www.infoexport.gc.ca or contact Angela Dark, Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., tel.: (202) 682-7745, fax: (202) 682-7795, email: angela.dark@international.gc.ca.

Armenia eyes many B2B opportunities with Canada

Toronto, January 18-20, 2007 > Armenia may be off the radar for many Canadian exporters, but that just may change with Expo 2007, a business-to-business exposition that is expected to attract hundreds of Armenian exporters.

Today, the former Soviet republic boasts one of the fastest growing markets in the Caucasus region, due in part to major economic reforms.

"Armenia has one of the most liberal trade regimes in the world," says Vahram Pirjanian, President of the Canada Armenia Business Council. This status is especially noteworthy given the country's hardships as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. After the collapse, the economy was hit hard and its gross domestic product per capita fell by 75%.

But 1994 marked a turning point, when Armenia's government revamped its fiscal and monetary policies which put the country on the road to economic recovery.

And Canada has started to reap the benefits of this reform. Information technology is one of Canada's leading exports to Armenia and Armenian exports to Canada are mainly comprised of finished products and services such as jewellery, apparel, beverages and other manufactured goods.

But Pirjanian believes more can be done to deepen Canada-Armenia trade relations.

"In the past, questions always revolved around Armenia's political environment. Now, we are asked how and where to make investments in Armenia. It is possible to invest in and trade with Armenian businesses and make a profit, create jobs and increase exports. The participation of so many businesses and representatives at Expo 2007 is a clear indication that greater trade opportunities exist."

For more information, contact Vahram Pirjanian, CABC, tel.: (416) 574-6704, website: www.cabcontario.com.



More ways to network in Guatemala with launch of chamber of commerce

Trade and investment opportunities between Canada and Guatemala solidified further recently with the creation of the Guatemala-Canada Chamber of Commerce.

Peter Gregg, the first president of the chamber and CEO of International Strategic Resources Group, a Canadian investment promotion company, is optimistic about potential in Guatemala.

"Canadian brands such as McCain's, Marco Polo and Blackberry are increasingly well known in Guatemala. A membership with the chamber is a great way to network with key individuals engaged in an increasingly important aspect of the Guatemalan and Canadian trade and investment relationship."

Canadian embassy efforts to bring local buyers to Canada, foster Canadian trade missions to Guatemala and to undertake a targeted market development program are providing important business leads for Canadian companies active in this region.

"Should the pending free trade negotiations between Canada and Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador conclude successfully, the Central America region will offer more opportunities for Canadian companies," says Carlos Rojas-Arbulú of the Canadian Embassy in Guatemala.

For more information, contact the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Guatemala, tel.: (011-502) 2333-7461, website: www.canchanguate.com, or Carlos Rojas-Arbulú, Canadian Embassy in Guatemala, tel.: (011-502) 2363-4348, email: carlos.rojas-arbulu@international.gc.ca.