

Team Canada Mission Keeps Doors Open for Yellowknife Architects

Participating in the Team Canada 1997 Trade Mission to Korea, the Philippines and Thailand helped Park Sanders Adam Vikse Architects Ltd. to establish what it anticipates will be a long-term presence in the Asian market — despite the current economic downturn.

This architectural consulting firm, which has extensive housing accomplishments to its credit throughout the Northwest Territories (it designed many of the government-funded buildings), and which already had a foothold in Korea, saw the Team Canada mission as its first big chance to expand on a larger scale overseas.

The house plans designed by the firm, which specializes in wood-frame construction of various building types, can be modified to suit individual clients or custom designed to meet specific needs. The company also provides comprehensive architectural services, including site planning, building design project management and building materials consolidation.

These talents the 15-year-old company of 11 people had successfully applied in the development of market opportunities through two model-house projects — already sold — in the Seoul area before 1997.

Team Canada a facilitator

Although he had already developed contacts with the Korean side, Chong Man Park, principal with the firm, is convinced that concluding the deal for an additional eight wood-frame houses (which brings the total value of contracts to \$900,000) was greatly enhanced by the presence of Team Canada.

"Negotiations for the additional eight units were made all the easier by our being seen in the company of the Prime Minister and Team Canada mission members," says Park.

"Being part of Team Canada looks impressive," he adds. "It helps you instantly overcome the first big hurdle — credibility — which gives participating Canadian companies a much easier time in negotiating contracts with local business people."

But that doesn't mean that companies don't have to do their homework beforehand.

"You still need to have the right contacts, the right product or the right services in order to fully profit from Team Canada backing and prestige," advises Park.

An evolving market

Korea, as most Asian markets, has slowed down somewhat, which Park believes explains why his eight houses, already finished, are still on the market.

"They were targeted for upper-middle-class families," he says. "But with the current financial difficulties in the whole region, that market has slowed down considerably."

This is not to say, he adds, that the market won't rebound sooner or later.

"As a matter of fact, some Canadian companies are building houses in Korea even now, which shows that there is still good business to be done there."

That's why he feels that Canadian trade commissioners, as well as commercial officers such as C.S. Lee at the Canadian Embassy in Seoul, can help young Canadian companies looking for business opportunities in Korea.

"They can provide a lot of good information for first-time Canadian companies in that market."

Park also recommends taking part in Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)-led trade missions and participating in trade shows such as the Country Style Housing Show, which features not only 2x4 wood construction but also log houses and steel-frame housing in a country accustomed to brick and concrete construction.

"And of course," he adds, "the Team Canada trade mission can strengthen the trust between partners and the relationship with foreign contacts."

Park has high hopes that this relationship will also translate into the construction of an additional 34 houses — a contract that is being negotiated in Korea.

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