



**Your Exporting Resource in Northwestern Ontario**

Volume 1, Issue 1

## Welcome to the First NMA Newsletter!

Welcome to the first issue of NMA News. NMA News will be a bi-monthly newsletter and will be delivered in email format. The goal of this newsletter is to bridge the large gap between our communities. Because our region is such a large geographical area, we decided to put this together to help inform the communities what we are up to. If you would like to add to the newsletter, please contact us at [info@nmatrade.com](mailto:info@nmatrade.com).

## Pushing Out West

In the last week of November, NMA's Trade Advisor, George Kamstra, ventured a little further West. From November 26<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup>, George attended the Agricultural Manufacturers of Canada (AMC) Convention in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

AMC is a lobby association that speaks on behalf of the interests of the agricultural manufacturing industry.

This year's conference theme was "Winds of Change – Three Forces Changing the Agricultural Industry" and focused on Bioenergy, Labour, and Technology. The

conference allowed people to network

with the agricultural manufacturing industry leaders and to look for ways to maximize resources and control costs. It had an audience of over 300 delegates in the manufacturing and supplier sector.

While there, George met with numerous people including the executives of the Western Retail Lumber Association, the Agricultural Manufacturers of Canada, the president of the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association, and numerous attending manufacturers from all across Canada.

George also had the opportunity to meet with the trade representatives from Manitoba Trade and Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP).

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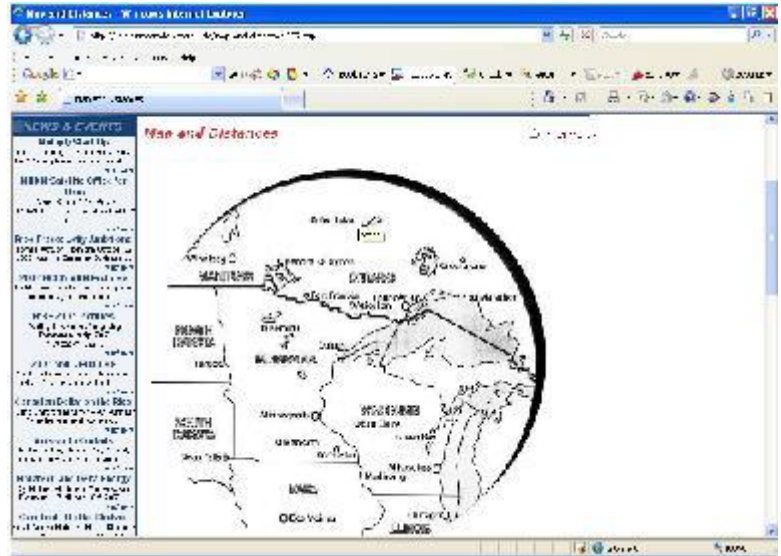
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## New on the Web [www.nmatrade.com](http://www.nmatrade.com)

NMA's website can be a great resource for anyone interested in finding information regarding exporting. Our website offers a list of our services, current relevant news articles, a list of our regional network and their contact information, links to other export resources and research, a comprehensive list of events and tradeshows in Northwestern Ontario and Northern Midwest United States, maps and distance charts, pictures, and access to NMA presentations and newsletters. If you have any suggestions or comments, please email us at [info@nmatrade.com](mailto:info@nmatrade.com)



## Granite Tops' Success in New Markets

Granite Tops Inc. fabricates, distributes, and installs marble, granite and natural quartz countertops, furniture, and flooring. They have been serving Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario for over 15 years and have also had great success in exporting to the United States. Recently, they broadened their marketing efforts provincially and inter-provincially.

John Hakala, Manager of Sales and Marketing for Granite Tops Inc., said that "before we began exporting, we became very successful in the Thunder Bay region. We had five full time employees." In 2000, the company decided to diversify and expand their market and begin exporting. "As a result, today, we now employ 15 full time employees."

Granite Tops decided in 2002 that in order for the company to grow they had to do two primary things, establish where the potential markets might be and determine how they could increase the capacity of the shop output to meet these new demands.

Both of these questions were answered when the company commissioned the B.D.C. Consulting Group to complete a strategic marketing plan. The plan recommended two primary objectives for the company: Concentrate their sales efforts into Northern Minnesota and purchase a computer controlled stone (C.N.C.) fabrication machine.

Success in this new market was not easy. Granite Tops had to figure out how they would get their product to distant customers. They couldn't go into the U.S. and install the granite themselves; they had to find a way to work around that.

"We had to establish a network of granite installers in the U.S. that would do the work for us. We used retail hardware stores and high-end cabinet makers to sell our granite so we did not have to open our own store. It created less hassle for us."

John also stated, "This new network helped us find ways to get our products sold and installed to US consumers and aided us in acclimating to the laws and regulations in a different country."

**Granite Tops was able to increase their overall sales by about 35 percent ...**

After some of the bumps were smoothed out, Granite Tops was able to increase their overall sales by about 35 percent over the three year period exporting to the U.S. The company was the recipient of the 2003 Ontario Global Traders Award for Market Expansion.

However, the recent drastic drop in the housing market in the U.S. and the high Canadian dollar has flattened sales to the U.S.

"Our exports have remained steady since we began but have recently started to fall to about 25 percent of our overall sales due to the slow housing market," To offset this slowdown and keep sales levels increasing, "Now, we are establishing inroads into Western Canada by entering the market in Alberta, as well as expanding eastward to some Northeastern Ontario markets such as Hearst. Our overall sales continue to increase as our company takes advantages of opportunities in our expanded trading area." (continued on page 4)





## Manitoba Chamber Hosts Inter-Provincial Trade Presentations (Continued from page 1)

George attended the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce’s presentation on inter-provincial trade that including presentations by Gary Doer, Manitoba’s premier, as well as one by Shawn Robbins, Director of Internal Trade for the Government of Alberta that covered topics regarding the Alberta - B.C. bi-lateral trade agreement. (Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement [TILMA] a partnership between the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Alberta)

The Conservative Senator from Saskatchewan, Senator David Tkachuk, was presenting information to this group on the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), the overall trade agreement that is the framework established by all provinces.

On the Nebs front George also had the opportunity to meet with Guy Precourt,



Senator David Tkachuk

the Regional Services Coordinator of Norman G Jensen Inc. (Custom Brokers), to discuss the possibility of his participation in the Reverse Nebs seminar being held in Fort Frances on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Guy has worked with Kate Sabo of the Consulate and is checking with his company to see if they will participate as presenters.

## Upcoming Events

Jan 4-6 & 11-13: Home & Landscape Expo (Minneapolis, MN)

**Jan 13-15: FedNor Meeting (Sault Ste. Marie, ON)**

Jan 11-13: Northwest Iowa Home Show (Spencer, IA)

**Jan 17-22: George in Saskatoon and Medicine Hat for the WRLA Praire Showcase**

Jan 20-22: Northwestern Building Products Expo (Bloomington, MN)

Jan 21-23: Great Lakes Building Products Expo (Grand Rapids, MI)

Jan 23-25: KMOT Agriculture Expo (Minot, ND)

Jan 25-27: Novi Home Improvement Show (Novi, MI)

Feb 5-6: Design and Construction Expo (Farmington Hills, MI)

Feb 5-6: Design and Construction Expo (Novi, MN)

**Feb 6-11: Geraldton Chamber of Commerce Trade Show (Geraldton, ON)**

Feb 6-11: The Home & Garden Show (Des Moines, IA)

Feb 7-10: Home & Recreation Show (Milwaukee, MN)

Feb 8-10: Rochester Area Builders Home Show (Rochester, MN)

Feb 9-10: Home & Recreation Show (Brookings, SD)

Feb 14-17: Minnesota Home & Patio Show (St. Paul, MN)

**Feb 15-17: Fort Frances Home and Leisure (Fort Frances, ON)**

Feb 15-17: Cedar Rapids Home Show (Cedar Rapids, IA)

Feb 20-21: Conex Minnesota (Minneapolis, MN)

Feb 27-Mar 2: Minneapolis Home & Garden Show (Minneapolis, MN)

Feb 29-Mar 2: Greater Springfield Home & Garden Show (Springfield, IL)

Feb 29-Mar 2: Chicago Home & Garden Show (Chicago, IL)

Mar 1-4: Sioux Empire Home Show (Sioux Falls, SD)

**Mar 5: Reverse Nebs (Fort Frances)**

Mar 7-9: TriState Home & Builders Show (Dubuque, IA)

Mar 12-13: Midwest Builders Show & Conference (Rosemont, IL)

## Opinions, Idea, Suggestions?

Do you have something you want to comment on? An article in this newsletter or a different media outlet?

Maybe your business or organization has an announcement they would like to make. Or maybe there is something you want to see in the next issue. If so, please email us at [info@nmatrade.com](mailto:info@nmatrade.com)



## A Message from the Trade Advisor

Made in Northwestern Ontario... From paddles to pack-sacks, jams to jewelry, each of our communities has entrepreneurs that are diligently producing unique products. We very rarely hear about them in our press coverage or our daily life.

If there is a local knowledge of the product and its markets, the information seldom travels to other areas of our broad region.

The NMA website is an ideal area to showcase these products and these entrepreneurs. With your help in putting us in contact with the right people, we can build a Northwestern Ontario product showcase for our manufacturers to help get their message to a broader audience. Who knows --- you might become a part in the building of marketing campaign that will be the “next best thing since Nipigon Nylons.”

Contact Heidi-Lynn or myself and we will touch base with the manufacturer and establish a small profile on the World Wide Web and try to help in other ways to create more customer awareness for them.





## NMA

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*Happy New Year from the staff at  
NMA!*



The Northwest-Midwest Alliance project is a community economic development initiative that researches, develops, and facilitates export and investment opportunities for Northwestern Ontario with a focus on creating long-term sustainable employment and economic opportunities

Our staff is ready to:

Provide mentoring to launch potential exporters into the marketplace

Contribute and assist in the preparation of an export business plan

Deliver concentrated export training sessions to export-ready businesses

Provide guidance/assistance to small businesses who are initializing their first export transactions

Provide networking sessions/opportunities to allow for an exchange of dialogue and information between successful exporters and non-exporters

Create awareness of the NMA and our services through advertising and workshop delivery

## NMA's Work with Granite Tops (continued from page 2)

"I foresee that the housing problem in the U.S. will continue for a while and with our company being a home improvement oriented business, we are directly affected by that situation south of the border." Granite Tops continues to sell into the U.S. despite the housing sector slow-down. "It will take a while for the U.S. to recover, but we will continue with our exporting efforts."

Granite Tops have often utilized the services of Northwest – Midwest Alliance (NMA) when attending trade shows, collecting market information, or with any other export related question or problem.

"Trade shows, such as the Arrowhead Home and Builders Show put on by Arrowhead Builders Association in Duluth, Minnesota; have

been very successful for Granite Tops." John said "NMA has really helped us participate successfully in these types of shows getting our name known in other markets."

"NMA has been a great tool for us. We utilize their knowledge and expertise to help make our export endeavours run more smoothly. It's nice to have a liaison between the business owners and all of the government programs out there. It can get confusing, and NMA was able to help us sort out all of the government programs available to us."

Granite Tops provides an exemplary model for other Northwestern Ontario manufacturers, in the opinion of trade advisor George Kamstra, of the NMA.



**GRANITE  
TOPS**  
BY **DURACON**  
TILE & CONCRETE LTD.

"Their company mixes and blends a healthy balance of planning and perseverance. Their management team augments this formula with investments in updated technologies and people to produce their successes."

As Granite Tops embarks on their new five year plan, the base model and formulas will remain intact. The systematic expansion of their company will continue. The foundations for their plans are as solid as the granite that they work with.