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ATB steps up to support Albertans

JOEL SCHLESINGER
Postmedia Content Works

Plan for the unexpected. It's an idea ATB has long taken to heart as a leader in building a better tomorrow for Albertans. While no one could have foreseen this pandemic and its impact on Alberta, ATB's leadership wasn't caught flat-footed.

"When COVID-19 hit, we quickly had a plan with three clear goals," says Curtis Stange, president and chief executive officer of the home-grown financial institution.

"Keep our team members and customers safe, continue to support Albertans and businesses, and protect the long-term sustainability of our organization."

Certainly, ATB has a vested interest in the well-being of its customers and Alberta. The financial institution — an Alberta Crown corporation — has supported Albertans for more than 82 years, through good times and bad.

Unquestionably, recent

months have been challenging for many.

But from the start, ATB focused on supporting Albertans. Early on, ATB created a relief program for customers and helped businesses get federal government support quickly by building an automated system.

"That led to far fewer opportunities for errors and less time businesses had to wait to get help, as well as easier followup if they had concerns."

Stange notes the impact of ATB's effort was significant since one in four Alberta businesses work with the financial institution.

"Confidently, I can say we distributed in excess of \$700 million to small businesses across the province through the federal program."

Meanwhile, ATB reached out to thousands of businesses and individual customers to see how it could help even more. That included helping companies reduce costs and find new revenue.

"For example, we support-



Curtis Stange is the president and chief executive officer of ATB. *WIL ANDRUSCHAK, POSTMEDIA CONTENT WORKS*

ed a small business owner as he adapted his oil transportation fleet into refrigerated trucks to haul frozen food. We also saw a specialized vehicles dealership pivot to focus on rentals and repairs after demand for new vehicles shifted."

ATB also helped Albertans most in need by rais-

ing much needed funds for the United Way and mental health organizations across the province, and reaching out to tens of thousands of ATB customers with critical advice for their financial future.

More broadly, Stange says ATB is focused on supporting Alberta as it shifts gears

economically, providing expert advice to help core industries like energy and agriculture create the jobs of tomorrow. In particular, ATB envisions helping to build a diversified Alberta economy.

"At ATB, we're working with Albertans — from supporting innovation in our agriculture, technology and

energy sectors to improving mental wellness — so our province can thrive once again," Stange says.

And ATB aims to foster advancements and digitization in the province, serving as an anchor for business resiliency and future economic growth. For example, Stange points to ATB's financing of a new solar power generation facility near Claresholm. Upon completion, the facility is expected to generate 132 megawatts of power.

However, ATB does not solely focus on one economic sector. Rather, Stange says the financial institution is dedicated to raising the financial well-being of all Albertans. While that's always been its mission, ATB's leadership is even more important today given the challenges Albertans face and will eventually overcome.

"Building a brighter future is not about looking back on what's already been done," Stange says. "It's about considering the possibilities of tomorrow."



Shell Canada and its employees, including president and country chair Michael Crothers, left, helped raise more than \$100,000 for the Calgary Food Bank after the pandemic struck. *SUPPLIED*

Shell and its employees support community

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Shell Canada employees aren't the type to stand by in a time of dire need.

And that's certainly been the case during the pandemic.

The Calgary-headquartered firm of more than 3,500 employees across Canada left no time to waste when COVID-19 hit, pressing the accelerator on its successful #FuelingKindness initiative to support Canadians struggling to put food on the table.

"It was really a rallying cry to our employees and our retirees," says Sue Whitley, manager with social performance and Indigenous Peoples policy at Shell. "Certainly, at food banks, it was evident that they faced many challenges."

Shell workers, past and present, donated small and large sums through the

initiative, with Shell Canada matching every dollar up to \$100,000.

"We expected that would be the maximum, but we had such a rapid response that by the end of April we had reached that goal, so we increased our 1:1 matching commitment to \$125,000."

All told, Shell, its workers and retirees had raised more than \$253,000 for food banks across Canada — including the Calgary Food Bank — by the time the initiative ended in June.

The campaign to support food banks is just one of many efforts by Shell, which has deep roots in Calgary, to support Canadians in trying times.

"Our principles, from a corporate perspective, are very much embedded in caring for the community," Whitley says. "We provide funding to support a variety of local charities and other non-

profits near our operations."

Among its most long-running and successful, particularly in Calgary, is its partnership with United Way.

Over the past 30 years, the company, its employees and retirees have contributed more than \$100 million to the United Way.

"Our giving initiatives and care for the community are not something that's been triggered by the pandemic," Whitley says. "It's something we've focused on for decades."

"Whenever a crisis starts, we consider what we can do to help right away, and then we look at how we can help in the recovery, followed by what we might do to assist in the rebuilding phase," she adds.

"We recognize the need to always offer a helping hand, and an ongoing responsibility to the communities in which we work and live."



Lindsay Osmond is partner and leadership consulting lead at Boyden, which partners with organizations to navigate talent challenges through the lens of equity, diversity and inclusion. *SUPPLIED*

Boyden helps businesses build inclusive leaders

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Being a successful business leader goes beyond boosting revenues and hitting budgets.

In these tumultuous times, leaders are looked to for openness and empathy as well, says a leading expert on workplace diversity and inclusion.

"The pandemic has changed everything for leaders of organizations from just nine months ago," says Lindsay Osmond, partner and leadership consulting lead at Boyden.

The firm is a leading provider of consulting and recruiting services for executive leadership. More recently, however, Boyden has focused on assisting organizations — government and private sector — to recruit and train leaders who foster more diverse and inclusive workplace cultures.

That is particularly

important in recent months. Not only do managers and executives have to worry about their organization operating efficiently; they also must be more thoughtful about those they lead.

"It's about understanding each employee's situation, such as stressors due to unexpected isolation, home schooling, working from home, a partner losing a job, changing job demands or lack of a support network," says Osmond.

In doing so, leaders must recognize that their behaviours and perceptions are influenced by their own experiences. This awareness is key when negotiating topics such as equity, diversity and inclusion, not only in the workplace but also externally with clients, key stakeholders, etc.

Leaders are being challenged to recognize the uniqueness in people and create a fair and accessible opportunity for all. This

allows the organization to reflect the communities in which they work.

"Inclusion is about making sure everyone feels their opinion is heard and respected, and that they can truly show up as their authentic self," says Osmond.

And it's not just Boyden's forward-looking clients embracing these ideas. The company practises what it preaches.

"Boyden has been on its own journey to build a diverse and inclusive culture," says Kevin Gregor, a long-time partner at the firm. Organizations sometimes feel it is overwhelming, so creating a safe place for people to start talking is a great way to start, Osmond adds.

"Research shows a purposeful, driven organization with a strong culture of inclusion and diversity is much more innovative," she says. "But it also turns out these organizations have better financial returns."

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