

Dharma Developments setting the bar for building industry

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– The Ottawa Construction News Special Feature

The term dharma carries with it an array of connotations, from its religious significance in Buddhism and Hinduism to its popularity in the westernized world as an idiom associated with spiritual enlightenment and new age philosophies. But like any word, says president and founder of Dharma Developments, Akash Sinha, its real meaning has a personal value that makes it unique to every individual.

“One’s dharma can be defined as a way of life or code of conduct,” Sinha explains on his website, “Our goal is to grow a company that holds high ideals and lives up to them in every way. Dharma Developments is about being responsible for its actions, its staff, its relationships with customers, and its environment.”

With a background in civil engineering, a formal education in urban planning and past positions as a public works consultant and a planner with a large Ottawa developer, Sinha says he always knew he’d form his own company one day that would allow him to implement his own vision. In 2004, he scoured the city for a parcel of land and worked with architects to tweak existing floor plans so they would be “technologically advanced and environmentally greener.”

Sinha was now ready to officially launch Dharma – the company he says is set apart from other builders in the area.

“We’ve developed a business model that positions (us) as a unique builder offering commercial and residential investment opportunities.”

So committed, in fact, is the Dharma group to a greener community, they’ve even developed a personal code of conduct for the company known as “Dharma’s Green Criteria.”

Some of the criteria in the company’s code of conduct include using durable materials that are longer lasting or are comparable to conventional products with long life expectancies, using low/non-toxic materials that emit minimal carcinogens for indoors, the use of minimal chemical emissions products, among a long list of others.

Not only is Dharma committed to befriending the environment, they’re also great advocates of lending a financial hand to

their fellow man.

When Sinha landed his first land development contract, he and wife Katy decided to organize an event that would contribute to building a better community – an event dubbed Urbana. Since Urbana’s inception, it has raised over \$50,000 and helped raise awareness of homelessness in Ottawa.

“We try and give back to the community through our annual charitable fundraiser to help people find and keep decent affordable housing,” says Sinha of the company’s Urbana initiative. Now in its fifth year, Urbana raises substantial monies to help prevent homelessness.

And the giving, believe it or not, doesn’t end there. “We also sponsor local children’s sports teams in Stittsville and around the region,” Sinha says, “and we support the arts through an online magazine we created which gives visibility to exceptional local artists (known as Dharma Arts).”

When asked why Dharma is involved in so many charitable outlets, Sinha says simply, “I believe that the most prosperous and fortunate people are those who give and share.”

But apart from their charitable side the Dharma group also runs a very successful business.

Dharma Developments is passionate about building homes. Their homes are



smartly built with innovative designs and technologies. Whether it’s a custom home, townhome or condominium development, a Dharma home guarantees the buyer’s investment has been designed to provide clean indoor air quality and the energy efficiency that is expected from a green home.

“We are proud to be known as a green builder,” says Sinha, “and we’re committed to being an environmental leader in the Ottawa home construction industry.”

Dharma’s Sales and Marketing Manager, Wendy Bissonnette echoes her boss’s sentiment.

“Many, if not all builders in the Ottawa region focus on Energy Star, but we want to take it a step further,” Bissonnette says. “Not a lot of builders in the Ottawa area are focusing on LEED®.”

Bissonnette singles out the company’s Orville Station project as a prime example of Dharma’s commitment to this.

“The Orville Station project will be the first Silver LEED for Homes Community in Ottawa,” she says. “From the finishings such as low VOC paint, to locally sourced hardwood flooring, to rain water management, to using low-flow faucets. It absolutely covers the gamut in terms of how we stay green.”

Whether building LEED or not, Bissonnette says, Dharma focuses on “building conscientiously.”

“From the products used to how our sites are managed, we want as minimal waste as possible. That is an important focus for us.”

Bissonnette adds the company’s design vision is also a little different from other builders, she believes. “We don’t want to be

too traditional. We try to bring something a little different in terms of the look and feel of our products.”

An excellent example of that is the group’s Powers Enclave development.

Located in Stittsville, Powers Enclave was Dharma’s very first project back in 2004. It consists of 29 freehold townhomes in a private enclave tucked away from Main Street.

The Powers Enclave site consists of many unique and eco-friendly features such as the use of low VOC emission paints throughout; water saver dual-flush toilets in all bathrooms; Hardiplank fiber cement siding with 50 year warranty; low-E argon windows and programmable thermostats.

Dharma has even recently expanded their range of building. In their first venture into commercial fit-up, Dharma has been working closely with designers and owners to completely retrofit 6000 sq.-ft of office space with Uniglobe.

It’s been a challenge that Sinha welcomes wholeheartedly.

“That’s been a great experience where we’ve turned a typical cubicle style office into a highly efficient place of operation,” he says.

No matter what project Dharma gets their hands into, they delve in with their mantra always in mind: We’re fresh, we’re greening, we’re resourceful and we’re community inspired.

“We continually strive to raise the bar in the development industry for our customers,” Sinha says. “And in turn, our customers are helping us succeed in building healthier communities.”

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