

Combs receives CD Builder Award

The Turtle Mountain Conservation District (TMCD) Board nominated Murray Combs, former TMCD Provincial Appointee for the Manitoba Conservation Districts (CD) Builder Award. Each year a Conservation District may nominate a person whose leadership and dedication has led to the growth and success of the Conservation District Program. Murray was selected among other worthy nominees for the CD Builder Award by the Manitoba Conservation District Association (MCDA) Board. He was presented with this prestigious award at the MCDA Conference held Dec 12th, 2017. The following is the presentation made during the awards banquet.

Murray Combs has been the Provincial Appointee for Turtle Mountain Conservation District for 13 years from 2002-2015.

Murray started farming in 1975 in his grade 12 high school year. His father rented a quarter section for him and Murray has continued to farm since that day. He is currently the 4th generation of Combs' to farm the land, who were also some of the earliest settlers in the Deloraine area. Murray and his wife Karen have 3 children: Lauren (23), Nicolas (17) and Joshua (15). Murray currently grain farms 6 quarters of land and has 1 quarter of pasture, a combined total of 5000 acres farmed with his brother Clark and his nephew Kyle. Murray commented, "My farm isn't very big by today's standards, but it's not as stressful either."

Murray has learned a lot from his parents who grew up in the 30's, about over extending oneself. He's kept the farm a size that he can enjoy doing what he does. Murray continues to export hay but no longer has cattle as he felt they took too much time away from the family. He admits that he hasn't always farmed in the most conservation minded way but has changed his farming practices significantly after his experiences working and learning from within the TMCD and the Conservation Districts program.

Murray is involved within the community as a trustee of the United Church and has been involved with Christmas Cheer for over 30 years.

Murray was approached in 2002 by the late Neil Hathaway to fill the role as Provincial Appointee. Prior to this, Murray had no previous involvement with the TMCD or the Conservation District program. As he puts it, "I was greener than grass" but decided to accept the role as Provincial Appointee and become involved due to his interest in the lack of surface water management at the time.

Murray felt that his 13 years as Provincial Appointee were fairly easy years, mostly due to those he worked with: members of Board, staff, and watershed planners because they did their job so well. Staff commented, "Murray always made the initiative to meet with staff and the watershed planner throughout the year. He took his position seriously and wanted to be well informed on Conservation District and Provincial matters."

"The one thing that surprised me the most when I joined the TMCD, is the size of the Lake Winnipeg watershed, that it includes parts of 4 provinces and 4 states. I'm sure most people don't realize this. As well as, why the lack of properly managed water should be a concern for everyone that lives in this province."

Murray was an active participant for the development and implementation of the East Souris River Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) in 2006, the first provincially approved plan and the same for the Pembina River IWMP in 2011. Throughout all his years as Provincial Appointee he always

made sure the funding was spent fairly and where it was supposed to be. He also initiated the Whitewater Lake Futures Group, looking into alternative solutions to the flooding issues affecting the lake. Murray commented, "The side effects of surface water management due to drainage with no forward planning has gotten far too expensive for Manitoba and we need to find a solution before another is provided that people in our area wouldn't be as receptive to. We cannot continue to alter the landscape without planning for the consequences of our actions."

Murray has always been a supporter of the sub-districts. "The members know their area and land best. So, we work together with government to come up with solutions to local problems."

Current Board Chair, Greg More commented, "Murray was invaluable to our board. As a provincial rep he was concerned about the whole district and the entire Province. He initiated a framework to address problems in drainage and put a lot of time and effort into his "manifesto", as the Board came to call it. Murray led elections during our January sub-district meetings and learned about issues around the District. He was quiet during our board meetings, but when he spoke it was worth the listen. He knew a lot of people and was able to relate to most - if not all of them."

Former Board Chair and board member, Richard Sexton commented, "What I found with Murray, was that any of his comments or his questions were always well thought out and had merit. His knowledge and commitment to the CD program led to the continued success of the District."

There's always a little humor at the TMCD Board Table. Murray is known to be on "Combs Time" – just running a little behind schedule. So, when it came time to decide on a retirement gift, it was fitting that an engraved wrist watch be presented in recognition of his 13 years of service with the TMCD.

Murray's role as Provincial Appointee for Turtle Mountain was an interesting part of his life. He got to work with many great and interesting people and organizations. "I will have fond memories of all the good people I've met and worked closely with as well as how receptive they were to me as someone who probably spent too much time thinking "outside the box". He is very grateful for the role he had at the TMCD and was very humbled that the TMCD and the MCDA chose him as their nominee and award recipient for the 2017 CD Builder Award.