



With core values that have never gone out of style, Kemway continues to thrive
by Nerissa McNaughton

Kemway Builders Inc. is a locally owned and operated construction company, based on family values and headquartered in Edmonton. It launched in 1990 and has steadily grown despite the ups and downs of Alberta's economy. With integrity at the heart of everything they do and by diversifying across industrial, commercial, institutional, renovation, and interior improvement projects, Kemway has built a brand that is highly respected by employees, clients, and strategic partners.

Business in Edmonton magazine first sat down with Kemway in 2015, where we learned how never wavering from a set of core values was an integral part of the company's success. Now Business in Edmonton returns to Kemway in 2020 in celebration of their 30th year.

"Since our last interview, we have added some new people. Our team has changed and is stronger than ever," says Terry Kemp, president and CEO.

"Over the last five years Kemway has attracted employees that align with our values and culture, and that means our future is as powerful as our history," adds John Maysky, the chief operating officer who most recently joined the ownership group, which includes Terry, Karoline, and Glen Kemp.

"Terry and I look like rock stars for hiring him," laughs Karoline Kemp, vice president, finance & human resources. "We were very blessed to be given the opportunity to have John join our team."

Since 2015, Kemway has experienced both challenges and rewards, setbacks and opportunities, and they are frank about all of them.



"Our most challenging years were 2016 and 2017 due to the economy," Terry admits. "But through the hard work of our team, we rebounded in 2018. We learned a lot during these times and will apply those lessons, our experience, our vision and continued diversification efforts as we move forward."

Those lessons are more important than ever. In the space of just a few short weeks, and right after their 2020 Business in Edmonton magazine interview, the world changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time Kemway's focus returns to what carried them through other tough economic periods.

"During the challenge of 2016/2017, Kemway refocused," John explains. "They took their best-in-class model and explored how to offer it in other segments."

Terry adds, "We looked at our team, which we value so much, and made the decision to put extra effort into continuing to grow."

The refocus paid off.



John Maysky, chief operating officer.
Photo by KJC Photography.



Terry Kemp, president and CEO.
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Karoline Kemp, vice president, finance & human resources.
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Glen Kemp, project manager.
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“The team rallied!” John smiles. “They care about Kemway; they care about their jobs. They wanted to help us find a way. As a result, we came out of 2018 stronger than ever. That is the result of the entire team’s efforts.”

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Those efforts will continue through thick and thin.

“Kemway loves to focus on partnerships,” John says. “We don’t seek transactional relationships; we seek partnerships with our customers, community, and staff. This is why we have such long-term staff, and this is why Kemway continues to grow and evolve.”

One of the ways Kemway is evolving is its movement into new construction segments. Over the last five years Kemway has successfully secured projects in seniors housing, post secondary education, landfill and environmental sectors. The management team has learned that their existing models and best-in-class service and procedures are very compatible with building projects across the board.

Some of their newest projects include:

The QEMT I building in Nisku: The client needed an economically viable building in 2017, in the midst of a downturn. Kemway signed a contract that put them at risk if they didn’t deliver on the set budget.



Kemway finished the project on time and under budget. The client’s 80,000 square foot building was a success and quickly attracted tenants. As of March 2020, it was nearly fully leased with just one bay remaining.

Tree Time Services: This company puts seedlings in cold storage and ships them out for restoration projects in the spring. Kemway needed to retrofit the building by creating an 8,000 square foot freezer for the seedlings. This had to be done during a very narrow window – take too long and the seedlings would not have a place to live after being harvested. Despite long delivery times on equipment, Kemway expertly scheduled and coordinated the project and finished it in time for harvest. The project was completed in an astonishing 30 days.



The QEMT I building in Nisku.

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The Yellowhead Regional Library in Spruce Grove: When Kemway learned the library was looking to renovate to suit the library's needs, they created a design/build proposal. Kemway embarked on an extensive retrofit that saved the library \$250,000 in their budget, and also included further value in energy upgrades in the facility and an external garage for their shipping vehicles. Out-of-the-box thinking created a satisfied customer and the Yellowhead Regional Library is now a valued client.

The Leduc and District Regional Landfill: When an opportunity to bid on a landfill and recycling facility became available, leadership from a Kemway team member suggested Kemway could apply its model of construction to a project outside of its usual scope. Despite this being a completely new venture to Kemway, this employee is leading the successful execution of this expansion.

GEF Seniors Housing: The last five years have also brought Kemway its first seniors housing project, which was completed while the facility was occupied with residents. The leadership team says it was "rewarding and exciting to positively impact and bring a better quality of life to the residents." The project required a lot of innovation as it started without a design. This enabled Kemway to come up with new, creative solutions that have now become part of the company's model for senior housing projects going forward.

From embracing employee suggestions for projects to doing the near impossible for clients, it all starts with having the best team in place.

"Kemway's leadership," John says, "has been in the business for decades with a steady hand on the rudder. That is also part of Kemway's success. Yes, you will have ups and downs. There will



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always be dramatic moments, but Terry and Karoline stay calm in the face of adversity. They stay true to their values. They always have a vision for the future. Even in these challenging times, if you focus on your people and deliver to your partners and staff, you will come out stronger on the other end. That is what Kemway has done for 30 years."

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“The next generation is improving on what Kemway has always stood for. They are taking our company to a new level and a better standard based on the core values we set,” she says. “The values that were relevant 30 years ago are still relevant today.”

Terry nods, adding, “You have to treat everyone with professional respect, even when you need to have some very difficult conversations. What sets us apart is that we are fair in our decisions. As a result, we have very little internal strife. The entire team works cohesively, and everyone is pulling on the oars, going in the same direction.”

The team and projects have helped ensure Kemway’s success, and Karoline, as the head of the finance department, also credits their clients.

“We have great customers that have always paid,” she says. “That cycles back to our values and how we connect with people. We align with those that have similar values.

“There is great financial stewardship,” John points out. “From day one Terry and Karoline have made sure the finances are taken care of so Kemway can quickly execute on projects of all sizes. Customers know that they can rely on us and that we are here for the long term.

Although Kemway has been recognised and awarded many times over the years for their work, the leadership team is more interested

in recognizing the hard work of others. In 2019 they created the Terry Kemp Strategic Partner Award, which is awarded to recognize strategic partners whose values align with the organization’s values. The inaugural winner was AltaPro Electric Ltd.

Just in case you have mistaken Kemway for an extremely somber and rather staid organization, what happened next will change your mind. Kemway does focus on partnerships, good stewardship, and outstanding results, but they also know how to have fun. Instead of calling up AltaPro and organizing a formal awards presentation, the staff showed up in AltaPro’s reception area unannounced and flash mobbed them.

“We surprised the heck out of them!” laughs John. “It was such a wonderful moment!”

For Karoline, seeing the long-term and the newer employees working together and helping the company innovate is a source of satisfaction.

“The next generation is improving on what Kemway has always stood for. They are taking our company to a new level and a better standard based on the core values we set,” she says. “The values that were relevant 30 years ago are still relevant today.”

They can prove that.

Over the last couple of years, the question came up: were the core values Kemway had always touted still relevant 30 years later? To see if they were, the leadership team hired an independent consulting service, then stepped back to ensure a completely unbiased review. The consultant facilitated a high-performance



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team from within the employee base to help examine, in exacting detail, each core value. While some minor tweaks were made to the wording, the values held up, were proven to be still relevant and were determined to be a great foundation to continue to move the business forward.

So, where does Kemway Builders go from here? While economic ups and downs in Alberta's economy are expected, a global pandemic was certainly not. What does the future hold? As always, Kemway's unshakeable past enables its bright future.

"The easy thing to do is to look at the team as numbers and to downsize – or what do they call it these days... 'rightsizing,'" muses John, "but that word has never existed in this organization."

"We have done a good job of doing what we do while remaining humble," Terry adds. "We will continue to seek out a wide range of projects and ensure the same level of care from our smallest to our largest ventures. We do have a blueprint in place for Kemway to help us continue to grow."

Focus will also remain on the team and the clients.

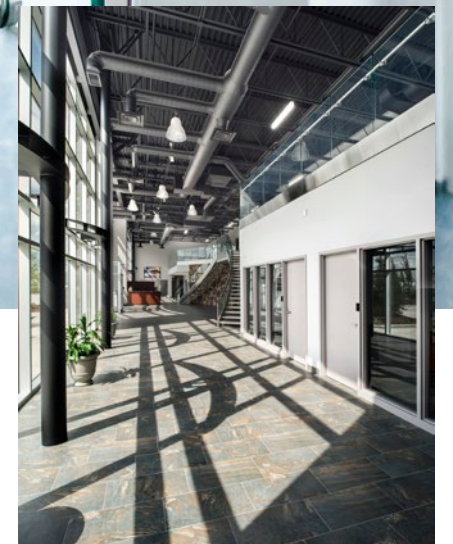
"We really appreciate the trust our many clients have put in us throughout the years. Trust is a huge foundation for success and we appreciate the opportunity to earn that trust. We have worked very hard to earn it," says Terry.

The management team also enjoys a quarterly celebration breakfast for the team that sees the staff coming together to celebrate internal and external successes. These events have been a big part of the company's team building and corporate culture. They



look forward to the breakfasts resuming once physical distancing measures are eased.

"Kemway has grown for 30 years due to great leadership," John concludes. "They have taken steps to grow the company in the right ways. We have a passionate group of caring people that are committed to continued growth and to making Terry and Karoline



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proud. The plan forward is to keep doing the right things and keep celebrating those core values, all day, every day. There is a relentless drive in our organization. You simply can't be in construction for over 30 years and not expect some challenging times. Even when we should have walked away sometimes, we never have. Across our whole organization, our people do not give up. That is the most wonderful component of Kemway. There is no 'quit.'

Terry agrees, saying, "The current environment, the economy, government policies – those are definitely big challenges, but we will continue to overcome. Working hard is part of the DNA of Kemway. We have a no-quit attitude and we adapt well to whatever is happening around us.

All over the world things are changing but it is important to remember that what holds people, organizations, and communities together at a time like this are the core values and foundations that were set in place long before unpredictable changes swing into motion. Kemway's roots go deep and include the branches of outstanding financial stewardship, community engagement, building partnerships, innovating, diversifying and always putting people before profits. Even in the eye of the storm, Kemway has, and always will, endure. Just like the buildings they create for clients, Kemway will remain active, viable, operational and be contributing to the community for the long-term.



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