

Harvest CEO leaving a legacy after 3.5 years

A look inside at an amazing job



In September 2021, after three and a half years at the helm, Keren Taylor-Hughes will step down as chief executive officer of Harvest Manitoba. You may not have heard or seen her in the media, but she has been a CEO such as Harvest has never had before.

Keren recently gave an interview about her experiences as Harvest CEO. The stories she told did not make the news, but they made a difference.

Here are three of those stories:

The clean sweep

"After three months of observing and assessing, I thought we needed to stop, pause operations and clean our entire building from top to bottom, together.

"And that's what we did. It's a 100,000-square-foot building — 85,000 of it warehouse. We all came in jeans, emptied our offices, swept, washed and reorganized. I wielded a broom. My husband helped build some walls. It was important for staff morale. They work so hard all the time, and their workplace had become worn out.

"It was important for the staff to know and understand early on that this new person, their new leader, had heard their concerns and was paying attention.

"It was a great way to start my tenure by saying, 'We're all in this together. Let's clean.' It took four days, and we were all the better for it."

Food for learning

"It's hard to imagine that there are lots of young children in Manitoba who don't go to school, but there are. And studies prove that if a child isn't committed to school by Grade 4... odds are they never get an education.

"But, if you can find a way to keep them engaged in primary school, the chances of them finishing high school are quite high.

"I wanted to start a weekend food program for children in need. I met a nurse practitioner who had an idea for a program called Breakfast2Go.

"The concept was to partner with schools that have modest-income families with high-risk primary grade kids and provide them with two child-friendly breakfasts and some

snack foods for the weekend. They would come back to school on Mondays better fed and ready to learn. And it really motivated them to be at school on Fridays to get those meals. That's how Breakfast2Go got started in my second year."

Notes of affirmation

"We didn't want the kids who took our Breakfast2Go kits home to feel 'less than' because they were poor or in a desperate situation.

"That's why every student in the school gets access to Breakfast2Go. They opt out if they wish, but so far in each of the four schools we support in our Breakfast2Go program every child takes home their package.

"Taking this idea one step farther, we started including notes of affirmation in each package. They are hand-written. They come from an actual person. They're like inspirational posters; 'You've got this,' 'You're awesome,' 'Eat well and have a great weekend!'

"We discovered right away that the kids all ate the food, but they really loved the affirmations.

"Now, once a week they're getting a new note. One of the moms that supports the program said, 'You're not only helping our kids get fueled for learning, you're feeding their souls, and making them feel valued.'

"We're feeding their souls.'

"I never expected to be able to do that. It means a lot to me."

Get more stories

Read the full interview with Keren to hear more moments that challenged her, raised her eyebrows, and a couple that gave her goosebumps. It's a nice glimpse at behind the scenes 'CEO stuff'. You can find the full story by visiting www.HarvestManitoba.ca and clicking 'Stories' in the banner.

For more information on Harvest Manitoba and its programs, visit www.harvestmanitoba.ca



Ruth Bonneville / Winnipeg Free Press

Keren Taylor-Hughes, Harvest Manitoba CEO, will be leaving the organization in September, but has taken time to share some of her favourite stories.

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