

# The Centre of Excellence for Municipal Infrastructure

By Steve McLellan

**C**ommunities of Tomorrow is a unique organization with a great opportunity to help position Saskatchewan as a leader in the areas of municipal infrastructure renewal and innovation.

Fact – all cities have aging and over-used infrastructure, and there is no leading-edge centre of excellence.

No place that when London, Ontario and/or London, England city officials have an issue, they can say “Let’s go ask them!” In the near future these city officials will be saying “Let’s go ask Saskatchewan and see what the folks at Communities of Tomorrow or their partners can tell us about our problem!”

The role of Communities of Tomorrow is not to be the experts, but rather to bring together the private sector, researchers and municipalities in Saskatchewan to develop new, innovative infrastructure solutions.

They are interested in talking to companies who are developing those new solutions, but who may not have had the chance to display them through prototypes and field-testing, or who might require assistance in market research.

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The fact that Saskatchewan cities, like Regina, act as a living laboratory for this research means that they will gain from it first hand, while the city staffers play a leading role in the process.

By using the expertise and experience of people who fix pavement, design road ways or repair sewer lines, the researchers who work with Communities of Tomorrow can gain a much greater depth of knowledge. Of course, the fact that so many people are interested in a positive outcome, makes these people more engaged, and the result is a shared success.

Communities of Tomorrow began as a partnership between Western Economic Diversification Canada, the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, the National Research Council, University of Regina and the City of Regina.

New strategic alliances have also been established with several organizations including the University of Saskatchewan and the City of Saskatoon.

Communities of Tomorrow began in 2003 with total funding of \$10 million, and has leveraged more than \$20 million since then, which has been invested into several key innovative projects in a range of sectors.

In late 2007, the Board adopted, at the recommendation of CEO John Lee, a more focused direction. They agreed that a centre of excellence for municipal infrastructure was required and because one did not exist, it left a great opportunity available for Saskatchewan.

This “Centre of Excellence” is not a specific building, but rather researchers, corporations and municipalities throughout Saskatchewan, all working on projects that revolve, and in fact evolve, around the Communities of Tomorrow hub. This means a greater flexibility on who does the research and who is a product tester, advisor or developer. Clearly this model is working.

One early and very positive sign of success was with Ground Effects Environmental Services (GEE). They wanted to develop a new technology that removed salt contaminants from soil. Communities of Tomorrow provided some research funds, and

