

Community involvement is key to United Safety's success, says Shayne McCallum, vice-president, North America.



STORY BY ALEX FRAZER-HARRISON | PHOTO BY SERGEI BELSKI

Company focus is local, global

When it comes to exploring and drilling for oil and gas, safety has to be paramount. It's a dangerous job, and keeping workers safe is a top priority.

Airdrie-based United Safety Ltd. started out in Calgary in 1987 to service the sour gas industry. It moved to Airdrie in 2000 and today its operations span 14 countries around the globe.

"Our prime focus is anything around IDLA – intrinsically dangerous to life and health," explains Shayne McCallum, vice-president, North America. "We started our business around sour gas drilling, and from there we branched out into a number of different territories, different service lines, and into industrial."

United Safety works with companies in the oil patch and throughout Alberta, and it has its Eastern Hemisphere headquarters in Dubai. Its global philosophy of hiring locally starts right here at home.

"Our founder, Lee Whittaker, was adamant about local content, about making sure we were providing value and service to the community," says McCallum. "That's our covenant worldwide. We promote that, while most of our business is international, we're almost completely nationalized."

Locally, United Safety recently held a hiring drive, and McCallum says the company is always looking for new faces.

"You can walk in here as a young man or a young woman and if you're motivated and disciplined and have the right character, the sky is really the limit," he says, noting that women in particular have been making inroads in the field. "Some of the biggest projects we've done this year were managed by women."

"Character is everything," he adds. "They can come with nothing and we'll provide them with everything: on-the-job training, coaching, mentoring and career pathways. We have some people local to Airdrie who are working around the globe today."

There's certainly no shortage of demand for United's Safety solutions, such as its own OSIMS (Operational Safety and Integrity Management Services) program. And the company provides incident emergency management services on average 50 times a year, worldwide.

"The demand [for safety solutions] is high," says McCallum. "Everyone's reading the news about Keystone, Kitimat, heavy oil ... expansion is everywhere. Being that the Canadian market is really only exporting to the U.S., opening up that market will only create more demand. As far as the focus on safety, with the massive amount of workers, [demand] will only grow."

Community involvement is also key to the company's success. Aside from supporting the Think Airdrie initiative, United Safety has also been a supporter of the Airdrie Pro Rodeo, the Boys and Girls Club of Airdrie and Airdrie Food Bank.

"We spent a lot of time and energy with the food bank," says McCallum. "We did a massive drive last Christmas and collected nine truckloads of food in a matter of two weeks."

"It was a shocker for us to realize [the need]," he adds. "The food bank told us how many they service in the surrounding communities, which was actually staggering."

Since relocating from Calgary to Airdrie 14 years ago, United Safety has built or purchased several facilities along East Lake Road on the city's eastern edge. McCallum says that diversifying is one way the company has managed to get through the "feast-or-famine," cyclical nature of the oil and gas industry – consider that United Safety was founded in the aftermath of the 1980s bust, but it survived, just as it continued to thrive during the most recent downturn.

"It was actually a great time for United Safety – a time of reflection, rebuilding and innovating, so when the market turned around, we were ready to go," says McCallum. "We are in a good position these days." *life*