



## **Mennonite Heritage Village (Canada) Inc.**

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# **Media Release**

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**Contact:** Willie Peters, President and Board Chair (204-346-3018)

**Subject:** Executive Director Retirement - Dyck leaves museum after nine years as CEO

It doesn't take long to realize that Barry Dyck has a set of skills that would make him a valued manager of any organization. He has business acumen, keeps a meticulous office, deals fairly with employees and is personable to visitors who walk up off the street. He has another attribute that makes him a good fit for Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach where he has served as executive director for the last nine years. Dyck is passionate about Mennonite history and passing it on to the next generations.

Having handed in his retirement notice—he will leave his position at the end of 2018—it's time for reflection.

“I've had a very fine career here,” Dyck says. “It is gratifying for me to hear people out there have a good impression of MHV, and they feel a positive atmosphere when they visit.”

When Dyck took up the executive director role in February of 2009, he immediately felt it was “right.” He had volunteered with Mennonite Brethren Conference for many years—part of the time as moderator—when he became intrigued with Anabaptist history and began to read books along that line. His tenure with Loewen Windows for 32 years gave him business and people skills and the museum, which is essentially a replica of a rural village, put him back in touch with his agricultural roots.

“I'm a farm boy at heart,” he smiles, noting that the pioneer farming practices at MHV touched a nostalgic chord.

In thinking back over the years, Dyck feels the achievements under his tenure have been in line with the mission of MHV—to preserve and exhibit the experience and stories of Russian Mennonites.

“Restoring the Waldheim House has been one of the pinnacles of my time here,” he says, referring to the classic Mennonite house barn that is of great interest to visitors. The house—built in 1876, the oldest heritage building on site—was re-thatched and given a facelift last year.

The 17 heritage buildings on the grounds are examined each year and steps

taken to repair and paint them as needed, a never-ending job. Dyck also refers to the repair and addition of boardwalks around the village to make places accessible for visitors.

Another accomplishment is the construction of the Summer Pavilion completed last year near the Livery Barn Restaurant. With its spacious airy feel—two sides are open in fine weather—it serves as a perfect venue for concerts, weddings and family reunions, and replaces the large canvas tent which threatened collapse when winds blew.

Over the last decade, there has been a deliberate effort to engage younger generations. Dyck is constantly mulling over ideas to make the museum an attractive place for people of all ages. This has been obvious in the activities added for children on festival days over the last few years.

Dyck has only to recall how he and his wife Marty enjoyed bringing their young children here for playtime and food to realize the museum needs to constantly work at attracting young families. He's quite sure kids will be drawn back to the museum as adults if they had positive experiences here.

During his tenure, public relations has taken a dramatic turn by expanding the use of various social media including Facebook and Twitter. Dyck also writes a weekly column which goes into *The Carillon* and appears online and on the MHV website. No doubt, this is creating buzz about MHV, something he is proud of.

Dyck readily admits there have been challenges during his time at MHV—some of them ongoing. There are years when the museum is not able to meet its budget, which makes it difficult to plan capital projects.

“Who wants to fund-raise to pay off debt—that's no fun. Donors simply don't get very excited about paying off debt,” Dyck points out. The museum is currently in a three-year campaign to raise \$3 million, something he would dearly like to finish before he steps away at the end of the year.

Dyck is concerned that the heritage skills such as blacksmithing, operating the sawmill and threshing machine, separating milk and spinning wool will fade as older volunteers retire. Demonstrations of pioneer farm and home arts bring life to the museum and are part of the way history is preserved and taught to visitors. There have been some indications that schools in the area are becoming increasingly aware that MHV is a valuable resource in educating students about early settlement of Manitoba, and requests are coming in for courses on teaching old-time skills which Dyck feels would be a positive development.

Attracting youth and young families to the museum involves more than simply offering artifacts and displays to teach history, notes Dyck.

“Our mandate has to be broader than preserving old things,” he points out. “Why are we doing this? Our collection has a purpose in terms of the stories that accompany the individual artifacts. What can we learn from them?”

by Doris Penner