



MEDALTA
in the Historic Clay District

Vital People Biography submitted by Cody Weiss

I am 35 years old and was born and raised in Medicine Hat, Alberta. As a local school child, I was fortunate enough to take a field trip to Hycroft China to experience the Great Wall of China. I was enamored with the unique look of the historic building located within my city, but little did I know I would start my first day of legal work as a 15-year-old at this very factory.

Former Site Superintendent Darcey Howells approached me and asked if I would be interested in some labor tasks over the summer of 2001, as the first major rebuild at Medalta was taking place. Being a 15-year-old city boy, I didn't really know what physical labor was but happily agreed to get a chance to experience the old building located within the Historic Clay District. After the first week of cleaning out old rooms full of mold at Hycroft, I was asked to join the construction crew building roof trusses for what would be the new administration building at Medalta. For 8 hours per day, I hand-pounded 822 spikes per truss for an entire month. Each time we would get a new blister on our hands we would go to Darcey so he could tape over it with electrical tape. We made a competition out of it to see who could pound the most nails and get the most blisters. After the project was over my hammer hand was completely wrapped in electrical tape. To some this may seem like brutal child labor, but for me it instilled a hard work ethic from the onset of my "work life."

I continued to be asked back each summer and any day we were let out of school early to come down and help with anything Medalta was working on at the time. At the age of 18, I was enrolled at Medicine Hat College with aspirations of becoming a biology teacher. I reached a dilemma when I was informed that I was to become a young father who was living off part-time employment wages while attending school. I made the decision to forego my education and seek full-time employment. Fortunately, the Friends of Medalta Society had many projects going on in those days, and I was able to get hired on full-time, which is when I learned the basics of construction and maintenance. After about 3 years or so with Medalta, I was presented with the opportunity to take a position with a local building company. I spent the next 2 years framing condominiums, hotels, and homes of all sizes. This is where I was able to get an in-depth knowledge of building and construction projects. While more financially lucrative, most of the work was out of town so when Darcey called me in 2009 looking for construction foremen for a large project at Medalta I gladly accepted.

After the project completed, I took some time off and returned to Medalta after the flood/sewer backup of 2013 to assist with all the repairs Medalta needed to recover. I have been there ever since working with dozens of summer students, local work experience projects applicants, and volunteers. In 2017 Darcey fell ill, and I was asked to take over as Site Superintendent. This was always our plan but wasn't supposed to happen until Darcey's retirement which wasn't scheduled for another 3-5 years, so I was very unprepared and scared when presented the opportunity. Between 2017-present I have had to adapt my style of leadership as I have had the responsibility of being solely responsible for dozens more temporary workers/volunteers. Through grants, I have been able to take leadership courses at our local college which has helped me evolve in this role and has given me the ability to adapt to the person I am training to be able to teach them in a style that works best for them.



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The most rewarding part about my journey thus far, apart from being able to see how much Medalta has physically improved over the years, is receiving calls from former temporary workers who came to Medalta with little-to-no experience and have since been able to get jobs across Western Canada in the construction fields, thanks to time they were given to learn at Medalta. For me, Medalta was always a place where I could have fun learning while taking on new and exciting projects. Without being given the opportunity at 15 to learn a good work ethic, my life could have turned out much differently. I will be forever grateful to Darcey Howells, all past and present board members, executive directors, and fellow staff members for always supporting me through it all, and I look forward to many more years of being able to learn, teach, and grow with the Friends of Medalta Society. A special thank you to current Executive Director, Mike Onieu, for nominating me to receive the CFSEA Vital People's Award.