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Sears

"Everybody should be very proud of what you have here," he said. "It's the best thing Sears Canada has done in the past decade."

Hollister recalled how many people initially viewed the catalogue distribution centre as a "white elephant" not long after the company closed its Toronto operation in 1991 and moved it to Belleville.

"This is the pride of Sears Canada corporation ... nothing has performed better than this distribution centre," he said.

In an interview afterwards, Hollister said Sears Canada has been in the catalogue business for 50 years and the focus of the Belleville operation over the past decade has been to improve customer service.

"And it has exceeded every one of the measurements we put in place as far as customer measurement, in terms of satisfaction, in terms of operation and that sort of thing. That's what our customers are telling us. We see that time and time again."

That's why the company, he added, "is so delighted with everything that has happened and the

improvement we get in our service. It's improved our business and it's been good for the community.

"There is a lot of positive effect that this facility has had on the community, on the catalogue business and on the country, really," said Hollister.

Scott Marshall, group vice-president of online sales, was one of the key figures in making the Belleville catalogue distribution centre a reality more than a decade ago.

"Ten years have gone by so fast," he told the audience. "We worked so hard and it's not just the management team. It was all of the associates in this building. And we have touched so many people in this community."

He said the Belleville operation has grown by 50 per cent in terms of sales and volume of catalogue orders filled and has added new services, including a large call centre.

"And it's all because of the people. It's because of the quality and commitment and the excellence of the people who work here. It's very

humbling to be part of this."

Geoffrey Scott, general manager for online sales for eastern Canada, said the Belleville operation has come a long way when started with about 1,000 workers — 200 of whom transferred here from Toronto.

"We now have 2,400 associates which makes us the largest private sector employer in this year. And over those 10 years, we have spent \$320 million on payroll, which is quite the contribution to the local economy," he said.

The centre has also filled more than 281 million orders over the past decade and cut in half, to \$4 from \$8, the cost of filling an order at its catalogue distribution centre.

"That's quite a testament to the work our associates have put into making this a more efficient operation," said Scott, adding the associates have presented approximately 40,000 ideas to improve the operation of the Belleville catalogue distribution centre.

Scott said he's also proud of his associates' commitment to the community through their fundrais-

ing efforts.

The Belleville hospital, for example, has received \$800,000 through its Dream Auction event and Scott the goal Sept. 28 is to reach the \$1 million mark. The Children's Treatment Centre has received \$500,000 over the past five years.

And employees have raised \$600,000 over the past decade to support 40 different charities in the Quinte area.

"We really do have a commitment to this community," said Scott.

Belleville Mayor George Zegouras said the city is grateful for Sears' decision to open its catalogue distribution centre.

"This is indeed an historic event in the life of this community," said Zegouras who was a driving force behind getting Sears to open its catalogue operation in the late 1980s.

"This was a very special industry that came and located here and now it's the largest employer...we are very fortunate for your commitment and contributions to our community."

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