

The Northern Star Worker Co-op Story

Northern Star Worker Co-operative is owned and operated by a multi-cultural blend of artisans, including First Nations and Metis women, who sew traditional and contemporary Star Blankets of exceptional craftsmanship and remarkable beauty within the heart of Canada's largest urban Aboriginal community.

In the early nineties, a group of women began sewing together at a local resource centre. After honing their craft and developing their collaborative work culture, the reality of a commercially viable opportunity began to emerge. Incorporating in 2000, these women began what is now known as Northern Star Worker Co-op. The Co-op is located in the heart of Winnipeg's Core area, a neighbourhood with a rich history, but wrestling with a number of social and economic challenges. Contrasted against these challenges is Northern Star Worker Co-op – a proud example of hope and opportunity, where Aboriginal culture is preserved and promoted.

A proud member of the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation and the Community Development Business Association of Winnipeg, Northern Star Worker Co-op is dedicated to democratic ownership and decision-making, and committed to respecting co-workers, customers, suppliers, and the community in which Northern Star members live and work.



NORTHERN STAR
ORIGINALS

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Star Blanket History

The history of Star Blankets date back before European contact, with variations of the star design stretching across North and Central America. Here, in what has become Manitoba, the Aboriginal Plains People would decorate numerous objects with the eight-point star design, but none as sacred as the buffalo-hide robes worn during ceremonial events. The tradition of the Star Blanket stems from the honour, protection, and ceremony these robes represented.

From Hides to Fabric

Appreciating the precision that fine thread and steel needles, along with the rich, diverse colour palette that woven fabrics could provide, the Plains People began to replace their sinew, bone awls and animal hides with these imported materials. While the materials changed, the skills needed to create the ceremonial robes and blankets were retained. The same skills used to create the glorious ceremonial robes before European contact, and vibrant Star Blankets after contact, are now used to create each Northern Star Original.

From Fabric to a Northern Star Original

The women of Northern Star create Star Blankets in the Great Plains tradition, using skills passed down from generations. Northern Star Originals, all machine-sewn and hand-crafted, reflect not only the traditional expertise and values of the Canadian Great Plains Aboriginal Peoples, but the beauty of the Great Plains natural and cultural settings. Most Northern Star Blankets are made-to-order; custom designs that captures both the purchaser's vision and inspiration, with the designer's creativity, skill and experience.

Inspired by the Heavens

A symbol of the Morning Star, the Star Blanket heralds a new beginning – the dawning of a new day. Among the Great Plains People it was understood that if you saw the Morning Star, the creator had given you another day of life. The Milky Way, known as the “Pathway of the Departed Souls”, led the spirits of the deceased to the Southern Star. It was also believed that the Great Spirit gave stars power to watch over mortals on earth and impart to them spiritual blessings. Standing between darkness (ignorance) and light (knowledge), the Morning Star inspires not only understanding and life, but the women who create Northern Star Originals as well.

Designed by Nature

Reflecting elements of nature, the Star Blanket often tells a story through its diamonds – colourfully portraying themes of brilliant stars, sheltering trees, snowy mountains, vast plains, cool rivers and more. The traditional colours of yellow, red, black and white seen in many Star Blankets represent the four directions, races, and stages of life.

Given to Bless

For centuries, Plains People have used robes and Star Blankets to honour individuals at the time of life changing events such as births, deaths, graduations and marriages. While the Star Blanket has replaced the buffalo robe as a gift of honour; the tradition of generosity and blessing remains. To give a Star Blanket is to show utmost respect, honour; and admiration. To receive a Star Blanket indicates that the giver holds you in very high esteem for your generosity and accomplishments. It is also thought that Star Blankets result in good dreams and prosperity.