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## Brownie badge

**By Ryan Flanagan**  
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For decades, the former Lang Tannery sat at the corner of Charles and Victoria streets, highly visible on the fringe of downtown Kitchener but unable to attract significant tenants.

It wasn't until the 410,000-square foot facility was purchased by Toronto-based Cadan Inc. in 2007 that signs of rejuvenation began to appear on the site.

Nobody in Kitchener needs a reminder of what happened next, of course, but the story is now spreading across the country, as evidenced by the Tannery picking up a 'Brownie' award from the Canadian Urban Institute.



**Photo courtesy Cindy Blazevic**

Perhaps nothing shows off the Tannery's aura of past-meets-present better than this boardroom — despite its large windows and old facade, the chairs around this table are frequently filled with people using and discussing the most cutting-edge technologies. The Lang Tannery recently won a Brownie award for brownfield redevelopment.

"Winning the Brownie is very humbling," said Cadan managing director Lana Sherman. "My name gets mentioned, but it's not me. Hundreds of people made this happen."

The Brownies are an annual awards gala designed to honour excellence in redevelopment of brownfields — former industrial sites that have become abandoned eyesores.

Brownies are awarded in many categories, but the Tannery was recognized as the best overall brownfield redevelopment project in Canada for 2011.

"We were fortunate to be chosen first overall, which is a very high compliment," said Roland Rom Colthoff, director of RAW, the architectural firm which worked on the rejuvenation.

Working on the Lang Tannery was a bit of a departure for Cadan. They'd handled brownfield cleanups before, but nothing approaching the size of the former leather plant.

"I don't think we quite understood how much was going to be involved when we first looked at it, and I'm not sure we had this scope in mind in terms of how much redevelopment we ended up doing," said Sherman.

"We were originally thinking maybe we'd just clean it up a bit. We didn't really know much about it, but we thought we could do better than what was there."

For Colthoff, the project came about at a fortuitous time. He had recently started his own practice with RAW, and the firm was looking for a feather in their cap.

The concept of renovating the Tannery not only fit that criteria, it also bore some similarities to brownfield redevelopment projects Colthoff had worked on in the past, most prominently in Toronto's distillery district.

"It was a fabulous building. It wasn't in too bad of a condition. You could strip away a lot of stuff and uncover the original structure," said Colthoff of his first impressions of the Tannery.

From the beginning, the developers planned to attract either high-tech or medical businesses to the site — it is across from the University of Waterloo's school of pharmacy, after all — and kept that in mind when planning their renovations.

"Kitchener-Waterloo is such a high-tech area where everybody's always looking for the best and brightest.

"We thought that we could create an environment where it would make it easier for employers to attract those employees," said Sherman.

It must have worked, as the Tannery now houses offices for Communitech, Google and Desire2Learn, attracting that technological niche that Cadan was hoping for when they purchased the property.