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Economic Forum identifies actions to help boost Niagara's economy

Business and community leaders from across Niagara gathered recently to identify some immediate actions Niagara can take to boost its economic future and secure long-term prosperity. Hosted by the Niagara Region and the Niagara Economic Development Corporation (NEDC), the Niagara Economic Forum provided the opportunity for more than 200 local business people, politicians, and community leaders to share their ideas and opinions on how Niagara can grow its economy. The results from the day-long think tank included recommendations such as improved transportation linkages (road, rail and shipping); a region-wide transit system; forging partnerships with other Ontario regions to bring in new trade and businesses; developing a strategy to keep young graduates from leaving the region; and aggressively promoting a new Niagara brand in a focused and unified manner.

"We need to be proactive and we need to be aggressive and we need to do it now," said St. Catharines Mayor Brian McMullan, who first called for an economic summit in January after a series of local plant closures. McMullan was encouraged by the number of suggestions and actions that were put forth during the participant feedback session of the forum. "What I believe will come out of this summit is a detailed, action oriented strategy that we can put into action as soon as possible," he added.

The forum was organized around a review and update of Niagara's current economic-growth strategy. NEDC Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Gedge welcomed the broad range of actionable ideas that will be integrated into the update of Navigating Our Future, which was first introduced in 2005. "As Niagara moves forward in this transitional economy, it is important for us to be aware of new growth opportunities and be able to capitalize on them



(l to r) Peter Partington, Chair, Niagara Region; Michael MacDonald, Partner, Aird Associates; Jayson Myers, President, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters; Paul Knafelc, President, Community Benchmarks; Dennis Parass, Chair, NEDC; Patrick Gedge, CEO, NEDC.

when they present themselves. The participants in today's forum have identified their priority needs and we, as a region, must be ready to help them achieve the greatest success possible."

In addition to sharing their ideas and priorities for economic renewal, attendees also heard presentations from experts in trade development and manufacturing and received an update on Niagara's economy — job gains and losses from Paul Knafelc of research firm Community Benchmarks.

According to Michael MacDonald, a Canadian consulting expert in trade development and public-private partnerships, local politicians must push for intermodal shipping facilities. Facilities to link rail, truck and ship traffic in southern Ontario are few to non-existent and MacDonald warned against turning new and existing trade corridors into "nothing but



Participants discuss ideas and strategies for boosting Niagara's economy at one of several brainstorming sessions during the recent Niagara Economic Forum.

a pipeline from Toronto to the border." MacDonald stressed the importance that Niagara being ready and able to capitalize on the inevitable increase in trade traffic that will flow through the region in the coming years.

"Where you move goods from truck to rail, or vice versa, that's where big bucks, big jobs are created," said MacDondald.

Jayson Myers, president of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, noted that while manufacturers across Canada are suffering through the "perfect storm" of the high dollar, U.S. recession and overseas competition, Niagara has the enviable border location and adaptable skilled labour to be able to take advantage of the new, "cutting-edge" industrial environment. "Niagara can be a logistical hub for North America," he said.

Niagara Region Chairman Peter Partington emphasized the need to work together towards common goals. "The one-voice strategy is key to our success," he said. "We're on the verge of great things, of turning the corner on this transitional economy."

The Niagara Economic Development Corp. will take the ideas and feedback gathered during the April 4th event and consult with local economic development staff. An updated economic growth strategy that incorporates the forum suggestions will be presented to regional council later this spring.

A list of specific suggestions and workshop summaries has been posted at www.niagaracanada.com.

Multi-million dollar acquisition for Stanpac creates 100 jobs

A multi-million dollar expansion into the ice cream packaging industry will see Stanpac double its employee base in Smithville and add a sister location in Texas. The transaction between the West Lincoln packaging business and U.S.-based packaging firm Solo Cup Company was completed in early March. The American company had been a competitor for years. The deal will also see Stanpac's sales almost triple, while the work force will double to 200 employees from the current 100.

www.stanpacnet.com

FCM selects Niagara Falls for its 2014 conference

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has selected Niagara Falls to host its annual conference in 2014. Niagara Falls Mayor Ted Salci, along with Joyce Morocco from Niagara Falls Tourism, and Patrick Gedge, CEO of Niagara Economic Development Corporation had previously made a presentation to the FCM Board in Brandon, Manitoba. This will be the first major convention to book its event at the Niagara Convention and Civic Centre, the \$100 million

KPMG study highlights Niagara region as cost competitive border business location

Canadian locations – including the Niagara Region – have retained their overall level of competitiveness against the average of a range of US locations, according to the new Competitive Alternatives Study by KPMG. This competitiveness has been sustained in the face of marked weakness in the US dollar since the previous survey two years ago.

The weakening U.S. dollar against all currencies has been the major factor influencing results since the last analysis by KPMG in 2006. Canada – including the St. Catharines-Niagara Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) – has seen an erosion of previous cost advantages vis-à-vis the US over the past two years.

Cost factors are not always the main or even the principal consideration, as acknowledged by the KPMG. Strength in non-cost factors such as a skilled labour market, education attainment, housing affordability, energy availability, and environmental regulation have helped the Canadian marketplace retain its strong global competitiveness ranking.

"Communities such as the Niagara Region must continue to present clear value propositions to businesses, and build upon our competitive strengths," said Dennis Parass, chair of the Niagara Economic Development Corporation, who participated in the international study. "This includes building upon Niagara's central location and close proximity to the US market – key advantages that were identified in the study." According to KPMG, Ontario's border regions such as St. Catharines-

Niagara, have a cost advantage over their U.S. counterparts.

"The findings contained in this KPMG study are valuable to Niagara," stated Peter Partington, chair, Niagara Region. "It is important to have objective, independent third-party verification of Niagara's competitiveness as a business location

within Ontario and North America. This cost-competitive information is extremely relevant as we move forward in our efforts to promote Niagara's traditional and new growth sectors to the domestic and international investment community."

"Niagara will continue to promote its outstanding

institutions of learning and highlight their ability to work in partnership with business to strengthen the local economy," added Partington.

"The Niagara Economic Development Corporation and its business development partners will be able to use this comparative information to support the expansion of existing businesses and the attraction of new business to Niagara," stated Patrick Gedge, CEO, Niagara Economic Development Corporation.

KPMG's 2008 Competitive Alternatives study provides an independent comparison of international business location costs in over 100 cities in 10 countries around the world. The study enables businesses and executives to take a quick look at how business costs compare among a variety of cities in leading countries.

www.CompetitiveAlternatives.com.



facility to be built on Stanley Avenue near Dunn Street. The FCM conference brings in on average between 3,000 and 4,000 delegates, including mayors, city councillors, and other government representatives. The conference, scheduled to come to Niagara from May 30 to June 2, 2014, will generate at least 12,000 room-nights at local hotels.

The news of the FCM conference comes

on the heels of the hiring Kerry Painter as the Niagara Convention and Civic Centre's new general manager and president. Painter was hired to manage the \$100 million centre, scheduled to open in 2011 and comes to Niagara Falls from the Northshore Harbor Center in Slidell, Louisiana.

www.fallsconventions.com

J. Oskam Steel Fabricators' expansion to create 15 new jobs

J. Oskam Steel Fabricators Ltd., a leading metal fabrication shop in Port Colborne, recently celebrated the expansion of its operations and the addition of 15 new jobs. Many of the new employees were hired as part of the company's 7,000 square foot building expansion, but the company will be recruiting to fill several more positions.



J. OSKAM
STEEL FABRICATORS

J. Oskam has experienced steady growth over the past number of years and credits its strong workforce and expansion in the oil and gas and food processing sectors as keys to their success.

"Port Colborne's strategic location in close proximity to the U.S. and with strong multi modal transportation access is a benefit to manufacturers in Port Colborne,"

states Oskam Plant Manager Kevin Lang-erak.

Another key to the success of J. Oskam is its strong workforce. Its experienced team has enabled the company to diversify its operations in recent years through the growth of its plant services division which assists a number of local manufacturers.

"The City of Port Colborne is extremely pleased that J. Oskam has chosen our community for its expansion," said Port Colborne Mayor Vance Badawey. "This expansion is another indicator of the strength of the manufacturing cluster in our city."

"The investment by J. Oskam is another example of how existing businesses are vital to our local economy," added Stephen

Thompson, general manager of Port Colborne Economic Development. "We look forward to working with the company as it grows in the future."

Founded in Port Colborne in 1970, the team at J. Oskam Steel Fabricators Ltd. combines many years of fabricating experience. The company has consistently invested in the latest technology to adapt customers' ever-changing needs in the most cost-effective and efficient ways. Products produced by J. Oskam are found in major industries including oil and gas, power generation, mining, food processing and general fabrication and are delivered to customers from coast-to-coast in Canada and also in Europe, Asia, South America, the Middle East and the United States.
www.oskam.com

Province commits \$33.5 million to health and biosciences research complex

The Province of Ontario is committing \$33.5 million for Brock University's health and biosciences research complex. The grant, covering one-third of the facility's \$90 million cost, is part of the government's \$1.4 billion investment in Ontario's strategic infrastructure. The 16,700 square-metre building will include research labs, classrooms, and an incubator to nurture new health and biomanufacturing businesses. The complex will include animal care facilities, greenhouse and growth chambers, a particle gun room, and additional meeting and office space, and will enable researchers to develop healthier food crop varieties and study advances in human health. The centre is planned to be up and running by fall 2012 and will employ approximately 400 researchers.

www.brocku.ca

Chamber of Marine Commerce to sponsor Port Colborne Canal Days Festival

Ottawa-based Chamber of Marine Commerce will be a lead sponsor for the 2008 Canal Days Marine Heritage Festival to be held in Port Colborne from August 1 to 4. The chamber is a non-profit organization comprised of about 150 North American companies that rely on marine transportation.

www.canaldays.ca

1812 Bicentennial Legacy Corp. budget approved

Niagara's 1812 Bicentennial Legacy Corp. now has \$200,000 in their budget from Regional Council of Niagara and will be hiring a full-time manager. The Corporation plans to support and market the area's 2012-2014 celebrations and commemoration of the anniversary of the War of 1812.

www.visit1812.com

Province grants \$300,000 to Niagara Grape and Wine Festival

The Ontario Government announced a \$300,000 grant to the Niagara Grape and Wine Festival. The group runs several events throughout the year including the Niagara Icewine Festival and the flagship Niagara Wine Festival. The provincial funds will support extra programming, including the addition of a weekday headline concert, an enhanced Grande Parade, and more icewine festival programs.

www.niagaragrapeandwinefestival.com

Niagara Parks highlighted by Canada Geographic Travel magazine

The Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens was among the list of floral attractions highlighted by Canadian Geographic Travel magazine. The Niagara Falls 40-hectare site is maintained by students at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture.

www.niagaraparks.com

Two new doctors for Welland

The City of Welland has recruited two new family physicians. Drs. Joanne Barker and Christoffel Frederik DeWit are expected to arrive in late summer. Residents who need a family doctor can add their names to a list of prospective patients in April.

www.city.welland.on.ca

Cuvée Awards handed out a gala celebration

The annual Cuvée Awards were handed out at a gala celebration at Fallsview Casino Resort in Niagara Falls. The awards are given based on peer-assessment by principal winemakers from participating wineries, and the winning wines are all available for sale right now. The Cuvée Gold designation is presented to wines that meet international standards for winemaking excellence.

www.cuvee.ca

Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards

The Niagara Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, held at the Sheraton Fallsview Hotel and Conference Centre in Niagara Falls, recognized qualities associated with the spirit of entrepreneurship: innovation, creativity and determination. George Dart Funeral Chapel in St. Catharines was this year's recipient of the Community Contribution Awards. Dave Mooradian, Davo Inc., took home the Emerging Entrepreneur Award; his company specializes in providing specialty parts to the automotive industry. Other winners included Niagara Inflatables & Games Inc. - Innovative Small Business Award; Royal LePage - Established Enterprise Award; Silicon Knights - Technological Innovation Award; Whirlpool Jet Boat Tours - Tourism Enterprise Award; Riverbend Inn & Vineyard - Family Enterprise Award; and John Howard - Lifetime Achievement Award.

www.niagaraentrepreneur.com

College dean inducted into festivals hall of fame

Niagara College's dean of hospitality and tourism, David Veres was inducted into the Festivals and Events Ontario Hall of Fame at a recent conference in London. The head of the

college's hospitality and tourism division was praised for his "above and beyond" achievements, said a media release from the non-profit association of festival and event organizers. Veres co-ordinates the school's event management graduate certificate program and is an expert in recreation and leisure, tourism, and event planning. He has taught at the college for more than 10 years.

Veres was inducted at the same time as Larry Blundell, executive director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest. Inductees are chosen by a committee for longtime dedication to the industry, said executive director Gary Masters.

www.niagaracollege.ca

Rob DePetris of Silicon Knights appointed as Chair of Prosperity Council

Rob DePetris, vice president of Silicon Knights, a St. Catharines video game developer, has been appointed Chair of the St. Catharines-Thorold Prosperity Council. The council, formed in June 2007, is composed of leaders in academics, business, and the community, and its aim is to establish task force committees for five "pathways to prosperity," which are interactive media development, commercialization and incubation of innovation, growing the green market, capitalizing on tourism and culture, and building health and wellness opportunities.

nGen set to move into new office in St. Catharines

The Niagara Interactive Media Generator (nGen) will be ready to move into a 280-square-metre space in the bottom floor of a building at 1 St. Paul Street in the spring. The office will be shared with the St. Catharines Enterprise Centre, which currently operates out of St. Catharines City Hall. nGen's budget is about \$600,000 for the next two years, with the province contributing \$245,000, the city \$90,000, and the rest coming from partners including the Niagara Economic Development Corporation.

www.stcatharines.ca

Silicon Knights receives \$500,000 grant for new game prototype

Video game developer Silicon Knights, located in St. Catharines, has received a \$500,000 grant from the Ontario Media Development Corp. Silicon Knights will invest their funding toward the creation of a new game prototype. The money comes from an OMDC pilot program geared to helping Ontario video game companies keep workers and profits at home and retain a greater share of their intellectual property.

www.siliconknights.com

Whirlpool Jet Boat Tours receives new lease from Niagara-on-the-Lake

Niagara-on-the-Lake has renewed the lease with Whirlpool Jet Boat Tours for use of the Melville Street dock. The new five-year licence agreement began on April 1. More than 1.5 million people have taken jet boat rides.

www.whirlpooljet.com

Mission to Carolinas opens up new opportunities

The Niagara Economic Development Corporation, City of Niagara Falls, City of St. Catharines, City of Welland, Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation and Port Colborne Economic Development and Tourism Corporation recently completed a four-day trade mission in the Carolinas. The mission included meetings with state representatives as well as numerous manufacturing companies including Daimler AG, BMW, Boeing, and Freightliner. The team's follow-up work will now involve matching up the need for products in the Carolinas with local manufacturers that can produce them.

www.niagaracanada.com

Fort Erie approves \$4 million restoration project

Fort Erie Town Council has approved a \$4 million restoration of the roadway along its entire 700 metre length from Central Avenue to Niagara Parkway. The Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority will contribute \$2.4 million to the project and the town will pay

about \$1.6 million for underground services. PBA's contribution will pay for major improvements such as extensive landscaping, burying hydro lines, creating wider sidewalks, a new neighbourhood parkette, decorative street lighting, and a roundabout at the intersection of Goderich and Queen Streets.
www.town.forterrie.ca

Construction in Niagara Falls reaches almost \$200 million in 2007

The value of new construction in Niagara Falls last year was \$199 million, which benefitted the city from new commercial and residential construction work.
www.niagarafalls.ca

Fort Erie boasts highest number of home starts since 1993

Last year, Fort Erie experienced the highest number of new home starts since 1993. In

2007, 163 units were built, up from 142 in 2006. Fort Erie's cost of housing has been recognized as being one of the most affordable in the region. The 163 homes represents a \$30 million investment in the local economy, and new home starts generated \$958,000 in development charges.
www.town.forterrie.ca

VIA Bike Train returns to Niagara with an extra stop

Last summer, Via Rail began making space on trains for cyclists to travel back and forth from Toronto to Niagara with their bicycles. Close to 300 cycling tourists took the trains over four weekends, but they could only get on and off in Toronto and Niagara Falls. This summer, thanks to rider demand, the Bike Train will make a stop in St. Catharines on a limited number of Fridays. The Bike Train's first-year success also convinced Via to triple the number of trips in 2008 and extend the schedule into September to allow people to visit Niagara and take in wine festival events.

This year's schedule gives cyclists the flexibility to plan day trips or longer, multi-day rides around the peninsula. A summer schedule is available on the Bike Train website at www.biketrain.ca. Tickets went on sale April 15.

Province gives \$4.5 million for new aquatics centre

A \$4.5 million boost from Queen's Park will allow the City of St. Catharines to move forward on its new aquatics centre project. The provincial grant covers about a third of the cost of the proposed indoor pool project, which is expected to cost between \$12 million and \$15 million. The aquatics facility, expected to be completed by August 2010, will be built at Lester B. Pearson Park and will replace the 41 year old West Park Pool.
www.stcatharines.ca

The Niagara Economic Development Corporation thanks the following community sponsors for their ongoing support.



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