

Building the St. John's Region as a great place to live and work

It is a great pleasure to be able to represent the business community in St. John's and to write about the strong foundation we have in this city, about ways we can improve our home for all people, and the good things that business people do each day. The St. John's Board of Trade is made up of many members – over 700 – and represents many thousands of employees. But looking strictly at numbers, we miss a key point. Our members are neighbours, family, friends, volunteers and ambassadors for St. John's, the region and the province.

I ask myself when listening to a speech or reading something 'what does this mean for me and why should I care?' I want to answer that question for you: what does a strong business community mean for me and why should I care. Well, I think that a strong business base brings decision making abilities to the local community, and that when we have a greater say, we get a flourishing arts community, strong service clubs and charities, and generally a great place to live.

There are many strengths in this city, and the future of this region is very bright. In fact, recently the federal, provincial and municipal governments came together to make it easier to get businesses up and running in St. John's. The BizPal website is an online business permit and licence service that saves time spent on paperwork and helps entrepreneurs start up faster. This positive step helps move business forward. It is initiatives like these that make this city more attractive to not only existing businesses but those businesses looking for a home.

Speaking of business attraction and retention, the Board often advocates for competitive taxation and cost structures because that is how many decisions are made in the private sector. A business looking to locate in Atlantic Canada will select a place that has advantageous taxation and a strong economic base. I think that St. John's has a very strong case for being a destination of choice for businesses. If we continually improve on infrastructure, taxation, culture and other things that make a community a desirable place, we will continue to see business, employment and personal earnings grow in St. John's.

Now, a challenge to the business community, the provincial government and the City: let's really focus our efforts on drawing head offices here. Halifax – their business community, their municipality and their province – are aggressively doing it, right this minute. We can and should work together to build the right climate. We need to. Taxation, quality of life, infrastructure, and labour development are all factors. The result of all this is a city of St. John's where more decisions on spending for hiring, employee development, charitable contributions, volunteer work and other important issues are made. So next time you talk to the Board, the City or the Province, ask about our efforts on this topic. It is important for St. John's and will pay dividends well into the future.