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To

Small Business

Changing the landscape of business in Fort Erie

by Frank Marcella

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In recent years the Economic Development Corporation of Fort Erie has been actively working towards diversifying the local economic picture in an attempt to be less reliant upon one main industry or employer. It appears as though the long struggle and never-ending effort of the EDC is beginning to show signs of positive results.

In 1994, with the relocation of Freight Carriers of Canada to Fort Erie, a new era began of companies finally realizing the immense benefits our local municipality has to offer. Freight Carriers of Canada publishes freight rate tariffs for shipping across the border and prepares economic studies and traffic flow analysis for their combined membership of approximately 250 trucking firms. Freight Carriers of Canada's relocation to Fort Erie and later merging with a US firm to create 16 new positions, serves as a solid barometer to the tangible results being realized as a result of the lobbying efforts of the EDC and senior municipal staff to attract well-paying, white-collar type jobs to our area.

Since its inception the EDC has proactively targeted environmentally-based companies as the growth industry of the nineties and thus wanted to lure such operations to our area realizing that they would remain and prosper as Fort Erie tenants for quite some time. In 1995, with the relocation of Republic Environmental of Fort Erie, the efforts of the EDC have borne fruits that the entire community can enjoy. Republic Environmental has recently completed construction of their new \$3 million facility in the Fort Erie Business Park and has concurrently begun operations of treating liquid and solid industrial wastes, as well as recovering various heavy metals. The new facility in Fort Erie allows Republic to realize its long range plans of transforming its company from an intermediate product manufacturer towards producing finished recycled goods available for sale.

Also in 1995, First Delaware Creditors Alliance Limited began operations in Fort Erie with the immediate creation of 60 jobs, and the potential expansion to 500 jobs in the next few years. First Delaware is the sister company of Great Lakes Collection Bureau of Buffalo, the third largest collection agency in the United States. The expansion of First Delaware is significant because again the EDC has shown express interest in attracting companies from the vastly expanding call centre industry to our local area. With the future development of the Niagara International Teleport,

having First Delaware already located in Fort Erie can serve as catalyst to attract other call centre operators. First Delaware is a high-tech call centre that deals in collections and receivables management.

This past year did not see any decline in business arrivals into the Fort Erie area. Remacor of West Pittsburgh, PA selected Fort Erie as its newest location over two other Ontario municipalities to better serve the Canadian market with the various metallurgical products they produce. With the immediate creation of 11 new jobs, and potential growth to 15 jobs, Remacor's relocation results in an initial investment of over \$1 million in building renovations and equipment, that could increase to over \$3 million. The

significance of Remacor's movement into Fort Erie shows the strength of our municipality to continually attract a variety of high tech manufacturers. Remacor processes magnesium ingot that is shipped to the United States and also into Canadian desulfurisation markets.

To assume that the EDC rests on the laurels of four successive accomplishments is incorrect. The previous four examples were selected because they are representative of the diversity of businesses the Town of Fort Erie, the EDC and other community partners have been able to attract. Freight Carriers of Canada represents growth for Fort Erie in the trucking industry, Republic Environmental signifies Fort Erie's entry into the vastly profitable environmental

industry, while First Delaware shows Fort Erie's expansion into the call centre industry, and finally Remacor signifies the strength of our continually expanding manufacturing sector. In the last 24 months many other examples of business movement could have been discussed such as AeroSafe's and OxyChem Durez's expansion plans, Fatima Crusaders decision to centralize operations in Fort Erie, CI Sailboats move to Fort Erie from Pickering, as well as Border City Castings movement into the 10,600 square foot Metal Cladding building and Ronal Canada's decision not only to remain in Fort Erie but to proceed with a \$10 million dollar expansion and creation of 120 new jobs.

The future should produce even greater prosperity for our municipality as the EDC continues to support the local gaming industry and act as primary partner in the development of the Niagara International Teleport. With the recent announcement that Fort Erie Racetrack will be introducing Video Lottery Terminals to their site, the continued success of the pari-mutuel industry in Fort Erie should not be threatened by Casino Niagara. As well, with Fort Erie potentially receiving a permanent charity casino site, the gaming industry which represents over 5,500 jobs in our town should only continue to grow in the future. Fort Erie should continue to be recognized as a tourist destination with many more people selecting our municipality as a stop in their Ontario vacation plans. The Niagara International Teleport has created an unsurpassed excitement level in Fort Erie and the Greater Niagara Region for its potential to make our area a truly international business destination. With the support of the City of Buffalo, the Buffalo and Fort Erie Peace Bridge Authority, Bell Canada, and Nynex, and many others, the Teleport has the potential to elevate Fort Erie as an international business address. With millions of dollars in infrastructure and financial investment already in place, (and much more to come), many high tech companies have shown an active interest in relocating to Fort Erie to take advantage of the high tech telecommunication facilities the Teleport has to offer. The financial benefits of the Niagara International Teleport have not yet been determined, but the number and quality of jobs which will be moving to Fort Erie will be felt for many years into the future.

In a journey of one thousand miles there must always be a first step. The EDC has successfully completed the first part of the long journey and Fort Erie is now realizing the benefits of their many initiatives and efforts.

Self employment

Self employment, there has never been a more opportune time for individuals interested in exploring this option. A number of organizations in the Niagara Region are offering programs designed specifically for the needs of the aspiring entrepreneur. At the Business Development Centre of Greater Fort Erie (BDC), information on local programs, business start-up, financing and business plan preparation is available. The following is a list of some of the programs and courses offered.

The Port Colborne-Wainfleet Community Development Corporation is offering a one week "Orientation to Self Employment" training course. The course runs 5 consecutive days and is offered at no cost to interested parties. Targeted at individuals interested in exploring self employment, it includes a personal assessment and evaluation and a general overview of what's involved in starting and managing a small business. The course is offered at various locations in the region and is scheduled for Fort Erie from October 21-25, 1996, for Niagara Falls from November 18-22, 1996 and for St. Catharines from December 2-6, 1996. Additional dates have been scheduled for 1997. Enrolment is limited to 20 participants per session and is offered on a first come first served basis.

Niagara College Innovation Centre in St. Catharines offers a 3 week Business Fundamentals Course. Participants must be in receipt of employment insurance (formerly unemployment insurance) or have had their EI end within the last 3 years or 5 years if they have received maternity or parental benefits and have remained out of the labour market. Topics covered include business plan development, record keeping, business communication and legal issues for small

business. The program is offered on a rotating basis in Welland, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

The Niagara Peninsula Industry Education Council coordinates adult training programs such as "Focus on Small Business" which is a 20 week small business course.

The Institute for Enterprise Education offers short programs for youth and unemployed middle managers and senior executives who want to start their own business.

Small Business Club Niagara is a not for profit organization that offers educational and networking opportunities for business owners. Monthly meetings are held from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. the third Wednesday of each month at the Embassy Suites in Thorold. All local business owners are encouraged to attend these meetings that are offered at no cost.

Assistance is also available through the Self Employment Benefit program offered through Human Resources Development Canada. The program is open to individuals on employment insurance (formerly unemployment insurance) and those whose EI has ended within the last 3 years or 5 years if they have received maternity or parental benefits and have remained out of the labour market. With a duration of up to 52 weeks the program offers financial assistance, mentoring and training for participants. This program is coordinated in Fort Erie by the Business Development Centre of Greater Fort Erie.

For additional information on the BDC or any of the programs mentioned above, please contact the BDC at 45 Jarvis Street, Fort Erie, Ontario L2A 2S3. Telephone 905-871-7331, fax 905-871-5284.