

Community gathers to kick-off summer tourism season



By Nate Smelle

To help kick off the tourism season for the summer of 2015 Bancroft District Chamber of Commerce opened up its doors after hours welcoming in friends, supporters and other community partners to share in a celebration. At 6 p.m. guests were invited into the Bancroft Train Station for a tour of the new Artisans' Junction. The newly renovated space provides local artists with an opportunity to sell their work in the gallery throughout the year. The room features high ceilings with an ornate decor complimenting the art on display.

Following the tour of the new gallery space, BDCC general manager, Greg Webb explained to the group why he feels tourism is so important to the local economy. Recognized as the area's Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) the BDCC has been working hard to showcase the Bancroft district to the world. Webb said that living in a community where the local economy is so dependant on the tourism industry means that everyone needs to do their part to promote it.

"We are all tourism advocates in this room," said Webb.

"Every single person in our beautiful towns and areas are tourism advocates. If it wasn't for us promoting tourism within our own space and when I say that it could be your own store, it could be your own district, your own town, your own municipality if we all don't do this together we are not going to survive."

Webb said the main focus of the BDCC is to promote business throughout the entire Bancroft area. He believes that the best way to do this is to work together as a team in helping to promote your neighbours' businesses.

Working as the tourism development coordinator with Hastings County, Kasey Pollard is part of this team striving to make the tourism industry more prosperous and sustainable. By actively promoting tourism throughout the region, Pollard said Bancroft and other small towns located in the Ontario highlands all stand to gain. Accentuating the importance of tourism providers working together, Pollard pointed to a new initiative in the works from local tourism advocates Gord MacDonald and Cathy Trimble, called Earth's treasures: Minerals and Fossils.

"It's pretty cool because they brought together eight businesses from within Hastings County and six from Renfrew County," she said.

"They came together and created a three day package with two nights accommodation and they offer it twice throughout the summer. With this they are also working towards holding a FAM Tour in partnership with the Ottawa Valley Tourist Association and the Ontario Highlands Tourism Organization, our Regional Tourism Organization (RTO). What I find most exciting about it is that it shows how partnerships can transcend the local level to the regional and then even higher. They just came together and wanted to increase tourism to the area, and they wanted to showcase the beauty of this area, especially North Hastings, when you think about recreational geology and all we have to offer."

The celebration itself was an example of community partners in the business community coming together to support the tourism industry. For instance, the Granite Restaurant in Bancroft supplied a spread of food to be enjoyed at the party. Further adding to the friendly communal atmosphere was the music of John Foreman and his band Appalachian Celtic.

In his remarks to the group, Hastings County Warden Rick Phillips also stressed the importance of tourism industry to both the local and regional economy. Phillips said the County attracts more than 2.5 million visitors each year, who spend approximately \$260 million annually on tourism. Pointing out that the local tourism industry includes approximately 350 businesses he said there are many more that benefit from tourism.

?Tourism is very important to this area, and very important to the County of Hastings,? said Phillips.

?We work with the tourism industry and market our destination as an ideal place to visit. County Council is proud of the hard work that has been put into tourism development and is pleased to continue supporting our local destination marketing organizations such as the BDCC and the visitor information centre.?