

'If people play here, there's a good chance they'll stay here'



Andrew Redden, manager of economic development for the County of Hastings, meets with North Hastings residents at Community Futures in Bancroft to support their participation in economic development here. Photo by Jim Eadie

By Jim Eadie

Andrew Redden is the manager of Economic Development for the County of Hastings, and is deeply committed to the sustainable development and prosperity of the entrepreneurial spirit in North Hastings. He is one person at the county office who answers his phone, calls you back, and makes time and distance no object if you want to meet with him.

'I get to this area usually about once a week,' he said. 'I meet with people at Community Futures.' He also chairs the North Hastings Economic Development Committee, where municipal officials and county staff can come together, consult with each other, and give each other feedback.

Redden is particularly enthusiastic about their Small Business Coach program, now in its sixth year. To carry out this program, Mary Doyle has her office in her car, where she carries all the technology she needs, and meets with small business people in their town or at their business.

'This is one of the best things we have ever done,' said Redden with obvious passion. 'Entrepreneurial development is not just about creating new business; it's about assisting businesses to thrive and grow. Our belief is that you can't do it alone. Few successful entrepreneurs make it by themselves. Someone might have a craft brewery, and make the most beautiful beer, but they do not work well with other people. The death of the entrepreneur is solitude. Remember too, retaining present businesses is easier than chasing people down to come here.'

In North Hastings, there are no industrial lands, or industrial park. 'Infrastructure here is not so much about serviced land,' he said. 'It's about broadband and cell services.' He notes that Warden Phillips and Jim Pine have worked hard to bring upgraded technology to rural areas such as north Hastings.

'If people play in the area, there's a good chance they will stay here too,' he said. 'They come to a cottage, to visit someone, or through tourism. Nobody will buy a house without looking first.'

Redden believes the region needs to become a destination, much as Prince Edward County has capitalized on the winery tour concept. This gets the attention of national media, and they give it culture and travel space. Since visitors have no idea where county boundaries are, nor do they care, the approach to a more regional attraction requires the collaboration with neighbouring counties to get people coming this way.

The County GIS mapping program is pivotal in creating interactive mapping projects. Thus, the County of Hastings Cultural Portal solicits submission of photographs and local stories. These tie in to the mapping system so prospective travelers and visitors can learn about the area.

?Social media is a big thing now,? he said. ?We are working on getting writers and bloggers to follow us on social media. It is tough keeping up with the new technologies, but we have to get noticed among the crowd.?

He also mused about future podcasting possibilities. ?Many people don't have time to read a blog, or watch a video,? he said. ?But you can download a podcast, and listen to it while you are driving. People are doing very interesting things in this community, and we could capture that.?

Redden and his staff are committed to responding to the needs of north Hastings. ?Instead of competing, we need to work together in business,? he said. ?We are here to listen, to pick our brains, ask questions ? and we are accessible, including on social media.?