

Survey wouldn't have stopped closure

By Sarah Sobanski

Many questions about why the Maynooth Scotiabank is closing went unanswered at the Hastings Highlands Community Centre last Monday.

The Scotiabank closure public meeting with district vice president of Ontario central eastern Scotiabank Nick Toritto saw Hastings Highlands residents unimpressed at best. Toritto seemed to have no real answers for the seniors of the community repeating again and again that the bank's decision to close was final.

Many were concerned about transportation to the Bancroft Scotiabank, a commute that would take over an hour for previous bank customers coming from Barry's Bay. They asked how those who relied on banking in Maynooth would attend the bank in Bancroft without access to transportation.

Other concerns were how those who were not technologically savvy would continue to do their banking. Toritto suggested the bank would hold public seminars to help transition seniors to online banking, the popularity of which he said contributed to the decision for the closure.

'The people who are online banking are not those who are affected,' said one resident during the question period of the meeting.

'How about everyone gets free banking fees for a year?'

Toritto said he would take the suggestion to Scotiabank for consideration. He also said the bank would look into putting an ATM in the community.

At one point the meeting grew heated. One resident called the meeting a waste of time if the decision for the closure was final.

'It's a cold, bloodless corporate decision,' he said. 'If it's [a] firm [decision] why are we wasting our time? I have an appointment with the credit union tomorrow and it will end a 28-year relationship with your branch.'

He condemned Scotiabank for not hosting public consultation before deciding to close the bank and left abruptly. After a rumble of applause a group of attendees followed him.

Many residents stated their many decades of loyalty to the bank and considered the closure as an end to their partnerships. They suggested they would take their business elsewhere.

'If I have to go to Bancroft it likely won't be to go to Scotiabank,' said one resident during the question period.

'For you it was a simple financial decision, for us it is tearing out the soul of our community,' accused another.

Mayor Vivian Bloom explained that before Scotiabank changed its name, it was the Metropolitan Bank which started in Hastings Highlands in 1907. It's sad to see a partnership over 100 years old come to an end, especially when Maynooth is trying to grow economically.

'Last year, Scotiabank had a net income of \$7.213 billion,' stated Tracy Hagar, wondering why the bank couldn't afford to stay open.

She added after the meeting, 'We have 106 businesses [in the Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association] that do banking here, not including those who aren't members.'

Hagar, who doesn't use online banking for her local business wondered how she would bank with large sums of money with her

computer at the end of each business day. She said she would continue banking with Scotiabank at the Maynooth branch until the tellers she has come to cherish no longer worked with Scotiabank, then she would leave the bank.

Toritto suggested many of the tellers who worked with the Maynooth Scotiabank would transition to the Bancroft Scotiabank. He said that Scotiabank would create new jobs in Bancroft, but local residents wondered why the bank needed to create new jobs instead of supporting the current jobs in their community.

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith said the meeting took an unfortunate turn.

"It just seems like rural Ontario is under attack all the time," said Smith. "I know that because I've been through this for the third time, it's really frustrating for people. If [Toritto] had the information or not it wouldn't have changed [the attendees'] minds."

Smith agreed that it is blow to the community when it is doing so well and trying to grow.

When approached for comment after the meeting, media questions on if there was a deficit that contributed to the closure, or for an answer as to why there was not a public consultation held for the closure before the decision, were directed to the Scotiabank head office. It was suggested that Toritto would not have the answers, something concluded by the majority of attendees.

"It would have been nice to have a questionnaire before hand," said a local resident.

"A survey wouldn't have changed our decision," said Toritto.