

What's the economic backbone in North Hastings?

To the Editor,

It's always seductive to try to think you can hit a grand slam as a municipal politician. A giant new warehouse for Wal-Mart, a Georgia-Pacific plant employing 200 highly paid workers, etc.

But it seldom happens over the long term.

I grew up in Wiarton at the base of the Bruce Peninsula. My family was in retail and I soon learned that tourism was the lifeblood of the community. Yes, you must cater to your year round residents but the real profits were made on the folks that came up during the summer to vacation in the Bruce Peninsula back in the '50s. And it wasn't just the tourists; it was the resort owners and many trades people who catered to the tourism community that swelled the economic activity from May to October.

We had many retail businesses that thrived on maintaining a folksy retro look and feel to their business even 60 years ago. But they provided excellent personal service because they knew that they could supply a service level unheard of in the urban areas.

Hard to believe? Not in my experience in North Hastings.

I note the recent closing of Allison's Small Engines after almost 50 years in the local community. I, for one, was very sorry to see this family business close. They provided excellent service and I purchased many products from them as a result.

I still recall buying a sofa from another local firm now part of a large national chain and asking when it would be delivered.

The salesperson asked (with a straight face), "When are you going to be back at the cottage?"

It blew us away. We have bought many more home furnishings there since that day.

Yes, price is important and you can't be way out of line. But I learned back in the '50s that treating the tourists well from a service standpoint is more important and will garner a lot of repeat business.

And unlike 60 years ago, there now is another whole class of "residents."

Recent studies by Hasting County, MPAC and Statscan confirm that our future is with the semi-retirement and retirement folks as well as tourism.

In Hastings Highlands we have seen our residential assessment more than double in the past 10 years to over \$1 billion, much of it on our waterfronts.

Our 2017 building permits and recent economic forecasts indicate a bright future for growth in North Hastings. And it's clearly tourism or retirement community related.

As the county said in their 2013 report, growth will be based "on the county's attractiveness to the 55+ age group as a destination for retirement/semi-retirement."

These folks spend a lot on their vacation or first/second homes and, in my experience, would like to support local businesses, but need to be assured that they have the social services of a community regional hub as well.

Local retailers and service providers to this growing opportunity (that includes a myriad of contractors and new home builders and ancillary services) who focus not on price only, but quality service and personal relationships know that folks from urban areas love it if you recognize them. More so if you relate well to or anticipate their needs.

A lot of retailers/suppliers in North Hastings get this....are you one of those?

Bill Cheshire

Baptiste Lake