

# Ready, Set, Action Swift Current!

To combat Swift Current's ailing economy, one that struggles with flat population growth, an aging community and lagging personal income growth, business leaders throughout the city have come together to form Action Swift Current.

In 2001 the City of Swift Current and the Swift Current Chamber of Commerce joined with concerned individuals in the community to discuss the Business Retention and Expansion Program (BR&E). Action Swift Current was formed as a result of these information sessions; a team of 21 people decided that something needed to be done to promote Swift Current as an economic centre. Along with the committee leaders, the organization is now comprised of 150 volunteers.

"We've always depended on the government to create opportunity," said Chuck Thomson, member of Action Swift Current and chartered accountant at Stark and Marsh.

"We know the opportunity has got to be created by businesses, and, if anything that's where the expansion is going to come. If we're going to have any expansion in Swift Current and region, it's going to come from the existing businesses."

A team from the University of Minnesota was hired to create a survey that would pin-point the problems local businesses were having and find out what businesses need in order to be successful. Action Swift Current sent out pairs of volunteers to survey 200 businesses in the region.

Last August, the committee was able to review the results of their survey, which gave an overview of population, employment and income trends in Swift Current. With the results, Action Swift Current was able to create a list of 10 projects that, once carried out, are designed

to boost Swift Currents image and economy.

The projects, now in the planning stage, embrace a wide variety of improvements that can be made in the city. Action Swift Current wants to reconnect with the city's youth and attract more young people to the community, expand the educational opportunities in the region, identify and respond to the senior community, and beautify the downtown area. Also on the agenda are plans to re-brand the city.

"We'll decide what is that statement or that word or that phrase that represents us, and then we tie that into everything, into our literature, into every business, letterheads, everything," said Thomson, adding that the brand will reflect not only Swift Current's appeal as a tourist destination, but as a town with excellent business potential.

"Our initial belief is that this is a good place to do business," he said, "We have extremely low property costs, and really our wage costs compared to Vancouver and places like that are very reasonable. Employers that are here love the labour force, we're very highly productive. We're not too many generations away from the farm, and that's a positive."

Other projects defined by the organization focus on agriculture, firm expansion, facility development and creating and sustainability of a regional health care centre.

Thomson said there are an unlimited number of opportunities for business expansion in the city that he has called home for almost 20 years.

"Companies are selling to customers world-wide, so why couldn't it be in Swift Current?" he said. "We're centrally located, we're 100 miles from the U.S. border, we're in the middle of Canada essentially. We're

on the Trans-Canada Highway. If you look at it that way, why not expand?"

Action Swift Current is designing ways to help new or veteran entrepreneurs access the help that is available from various economic organizations. They hope to set up a hotline for business owners and potential business owners to call with questions about business plans, tax breaks, or any other related concerns.

"If you are a new business just getting started and you call that number you'll be forwarded to the entrepreneurial

centre because they have a new entrepreneurial program, and they'll help you with everything to get started," he said.

"If you are an existing business we'll forward you to the Chamber (of Commerce). We're going to teach the Chamber and Entrepreneurial Centre what they need to know when businesses are asking about the resources the city has, where can they get money, who can they borrow it from, what are the rules and regulations, etc. We're creating the resources. We'll help you step by step to get what you need."

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