

Worldly award for ASC

When it comes to efforts in keeping businesses alive in the community and encouraging them to expand, Swift Current is the best in the world, and they've got an award to prove it.

Representatives from Action Swift Current, an organization of volunteers striving toward economic growth and development in the city of Swift Current were presented with the "Best in the World" honours last weekend at the 6th Annual Business Retention and Expansion International awards ceremony in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Business Retention and Expansion International (BREI) is a non-profit association committed to the advancement of business retention and expansion as an economic development strategy around the world.

Action Swift Current was the winner of the "Outstanding Small Community Business Retention and Expansion Program" category, a category which recognizes the business retention and expansion efforts that affect a city or region with a population of less than 50,000.

"Receiving this award tells us that we're going in the right direction and that our plan to increase the value of living in Swift Current is being recognized by other people," said Action Swift Current Chairman Chuck Thomson.

It's a proud accomplishment for an organization that is still very young. Action Swift Current was launched in January of 2002 to implement a business expansion and retention program in the area and to help set the stage for economic growth. This is not the first time the group has been recognized for its efforts.

In January 2004, Action Swift Current was also presented with the Economic Development Initiative of the Year Award for the Province of Saskatchewan by the Saskatchewan Economic Developers Association.

Currently the group is working on a dozen different projects directed toward making life easier for local businesses. One of the biggest ones, according to Thomson, is promoting the development of a casino in Swift Current. Another is the Expanding Firms committee, a group within action Swift Current that tries to accommodate local businesses thinking about expansion.

Action Swift Current also has recently developed a toll-free number specifically to provide information to new or expanding business.

Thomson said that keeping existing businesses prospering is even more important to a community than trying to recruit outsiders to start up new ventures, and is the first step in a healthy economy.

"The first thing we decided was that if we are going to expand and make this a great place to live, we need to focus on what it's going to take to help the existing enterprises, the people who are living here now, create jobs. We know that most of the jobs created in economic activity are from existing enterprises," Thomson said. "We survey people who are already living here and find out what it will take for them to be able to expand their businesses, and then we help them make it happen... If we're all successful here and making a good living here, then those people from outside the city will want to come her too."

Al Chilton, Vice-Chair of Action Swift Current and member of the organization's Brandon Committee, said that receiving world-wide recognition is the result of years of hard work by all of the residents of Swift Current and area.

"This is what happens when the people of the southwest all work together," Chilton said simply. "We're world class and we've been recognized."

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