



Background

The North Parkland Small Business Month Committee was established in June 2006 with the goal of streamlining coordination, planning and marketing efforts for October Business Development activities in the North Parkland region. The committee is comprised of Business Development Specialists from MAFRI, Economic Development Managers from Dauphin, Ste. Rose and Roblin, Community Futures Parkland representatives and Workplace Education Manitoba – Parkland Region. The regional approach to event coordination and planning has demonstrated a positive sharing of resources, solidified partnerships and successfully promoted youth entrepreneurship within the North Parkland. One of the regional needs identified as a result of October 2006 activities, was a concerted effort to support rural entrepreneurship in the Parkland. The conference idea emerged in response to regional needs for increased access to information and resources on entrepreneurship. A conference committee was struck to include municipal representation from local communities, in conjunction with the Business Development Month committee.

Through the Entrepreneurship Committee's efforts, it became apparent that the issue of fostering entrepreneurship is integral across rural communities throughout Manitoba. Rural communities are facing depopulation, aging populations, youth out migration, and there is an urgent need to grow current businesses/economic conditions and prosper to stay alive in the future. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, research has shown that about 70 per cent of current business owners are planning to retire in one way or another over the next 10 years.

To address these issues, economic development groups and business leaders have identified the need to attract youth back to our communities, to sustain our existing businesses and encourage succession planning and the need to ensure that our communities are welcoming and ready to attract business owners.

Manitoba Rural Entrepreneurship Conference

The first ever ***Manitoba Rural Entrepreneurship Conference*** was held Friday, October 26 and Saturday, October 27, 2007 at the Parkland Rec Complex in Dauphin, Manitoba. This two day event was successful in providing participants with the opportunity to learn from the experiences of rural entrepreneurs, share exciting success stories, discover tools to make our communities entrepreneur-friendly, and create a network of contacts from across rural Manitoba. There was a distinct effort at the conference to focus on both entrepreneurship and community. Ideas, resources and tools which would enable entrepreneurs to "take the leap" were explored. Fostering a welcoming entrepreneurship climate within communities and providing community leaders with the know-how to encourage business development was also a prevalent conference theme.



There were a total of 130 participants who attended the conference on Friday, October 26th and 90 participants who attended the conference on Saturday, October 27th. These figures indicate that attendance reached expectations of 87% for the first day of conference activities and 60% for the second day of the conference.

Participants who attended the conference came from across Manitoba. The participants represented the business sector, entrepreneurs, community leaders, youth, and government and service providers. This broad cross-section of representation indicates that objectives were achieved in reaching the desired audience of participants. Ensuring that the number of actual or prospective entrepreneurs at the conference exceeded the number of other attendees may have not been achieved at this first ever conference, however, it is important to stress that the conference timing and scheduling over the course of two days was flexible and accessible to rural entrepreneurs. It is realistic to assume that many business owners cannot afford the time away from their business for two consecutive days to attend a conference, particularly if it is in a different community.

The number of youth present at the first day of the conference exceeded original expectations. A number of high-school business students from Dauphin attended the first day of the conference. Their participation in the event is significant in instilling entrepreneurship values and creating a sense of opportunity in rural Manitoba.

Specific conference objectives, in terms of promoting tools to foster entrepreneurship were delivered through the conference. These capacity-building tools include:

- Community assessment tools on how welcoming the community's business climate is for entrepreneurship;
- A self-assessment tool on entrepreneur-readiness; and
- Business vitality index.

Manitoba's first ever **Rural Entrepreneurship Conference** met anticipated results.

There was an enhanced knowledge of entrepreneurship opportunities in rural Manitoba and tools available for communities to become entrepreneurship-friendly. Overall, conference participants were extremely satisfied with the event. According to feedback received, participants indicated that the content of the event was excellent. Participants indicated satisfaction with the variety of presentation formats, interactive activities, opportunity for small group discussion and visual presentations. Many participants especially valued guest speaker Dr. Jeffery Stamp at the event. Dr. Stamp generated a positive energy throughout the two days and provided an exceptional job at relating to the needs of participants. Dr. Stamp's humorous style and ability to explain theoretical approaches based on local entrepreneurship examples, provided value to participants' learning.



On the first day of the learning event, 40 students from the Dauphin High School attended the session. The students ranging in age from 15 to 18 years were impressed by Dr. Stamp's enlightening style and the high level of interaction which he facilitated in a product development and marketing demonstration. The students appreciated the opportunity to mix with entrepreneurs and community leaders in a professional learning environment. This mentoring opportunity for youth met the project's expected outcomes.

Twenty-five poster sized entrepreneur profiles dressed the walls of the main conference meeting room. The profile information had been collected from entrepreneurs and small and medium sized enterprises throughout Manitoba. A visual profile of the nature of the business, inspirations and intended market was conveyed through this attractive display of pictures and testimonials from the entrepreneur. The marketing power of this display resulted in an immense viewer opportunity. The conference planning committee intends to create a web-based booklet of these entrepreneur profiles and promote them through the www.getenergized.ca conference site which is devoted to business development activities in the North Parkland region.

The conference reinforced the significance which rural attributes play in the decision making process of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship development in rural communities is very unique to entrepreneurship in urban centres with larger population bases access. Entrepreneurs starting business in rural communities approach business start-up with a vested interest in the community and market base which they are serving. Accessibility to business information, resources and networking with other entrepreneurs and business leaders are critical determinants of an entrepreneurs' success in a rural community. Providing this learning environment and ensuring networking opportunities are available for entrepreneurs are key components to business development in rural Manitoba.

Manitoba's
Rural Entrepreneurship
Conference



Conference Partners

The ***Entrepreneurship Conference – Parkland Host Committee*** is comprised of a committed group keen to support entrepreneurial development and foster business spirit in rural Manitoba. The committee's efforts continue to ensure successful conference delivery and evaluation of the events' activities. The host partnership committee consists of representatives from the following organizations and communities:

- Manitoba Agriculture Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) – Parkland North Go Team
- Dauphin Economic Development
- Roblin & Shell River Economic Development
- Ste Rose Community Development Corporation
- Workplace Education Manitoba – Parkland Region
- Community Futures Parkland
- Parkland Young Entrepreneurship Program
- Dauphin & District Chamber of Commerce
- Assiniboine Community College – Parkland Campus