

Fort Erie welcomes a hundred new jobs

Manufacturer chooses Stevensville for new plant in emerging industry

DMI Industries to build towers for wind-energy turbines

Thanks to the energetic efforts of municipal officials, Fort Erie is now home to a major manufacturer of heavy components for electricity-from-wind producers — the first in Ontario.

DMI Industries announced in October its choice of Fort Erie as the location for its first fabrication facility outside the United States.

The North Dakota-based steel forming company has taken over the Ronal manufacturing plant in Stevensville and plans to hire 100 skilled and technical workers, management, clerical and support staff.

With renovations now underway and the first of more than 100 employees being hired, the plant will be in operation by early spring producing components for multi-megawatt generating wind turbines.

DMI president Lars Moller offers high praise for the professionalism and dedication of the local team that sold the company on Fort Erie.

“A lot of people know a lot of things but can’t put two and two together and get stuff done,” Mr. Moller said.

Fort Erie’s team really knows how to put things together. And they did.

The selection process began well over a year ago when DMI decided to expand its facilities into Ontario to strengthen its competitive edge on delivery of towers to the North American market.

The Ontario governments decision to commit to renewable energy sources was a major impetus for expansion into the province with a number of large wind farm

projects in development.

By the beginning of 2005, DMI’s project leaders had short listed three locations in southern Ontario and began an intensive comparative analysis of the sites.

They looked at the transportation issues, land site and available facilities, labour pool and the corporate climate.

All signs pointed to the Ronal property in Stevensville with a rail spur on site, two major highways nearby and an international border crossing at the Peace Bridge.

“They dotted all their I’s and crossed all their T’s,” said Economic Development and Tourism Corporation general manager Jim Thibert.

“They left no stone unturned, no corner was cut,” Mr. Thibert said. “They measured bridges, roads, located services, did all the numbers.”

DMI’s people had many questions. “We were able to find them the people who had the answers and who could work with them,” Mr. Thibert said.

“DMI has made a superior site location decision because of our strategic location in Ontario, proximity to the U.S. border and accessibility to the finest direct transportation routes,” said Fort Erie Mayor Wayne Redekop.

“We welcome DMI to a community that will work with the company to make it successful,” he said.

“This investment is great news for Fort Erie, the surrounding Niagara Region and all of Ontario,” said Joe Cordiano, the minister of economic development and trade.

“We are creating a brand new industry in the province, and the interest shown by companies such as DMI Industries demonstrates our potential for developing a strong renewable energy sector.”



Jim Thibert, general manager of the EDTC (left), Rainier Schliep, general manager of Ronal, Lars Moller, president DMI Industries, Steffen Hersboll, consultant, and Matt Cadow, chief operation officer, DMI Industries.

Mission to Asia attracts key industrial attention

Niagara is now on the Japanese radar screen as a manufacturing centre and a good place to set up shop.

A delegation of local business people along with regional and local economic development officials journeyed to Japan and South Korea to meet with key automotive industry leaders in October.

The mission quickly dispelled the myth among Asian industry heavyweights and even Canadian government representatives there, that Niagara is only a tourist destination — the Falls — and acted to showcase the regions competitive environment.

“We accomplished far more than we thought we could,” said Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation general manager Jim Thibert.

“We had a good team and we exceeded our goals,” during the 12-day fact-finding and investment mission.

Thibert accompanied Regional chairman Peter Partington along with staff and board members of the Niagara Economic Development Corporation (NEDC), City of Welland and private business people as they visited senior decisions makers at auto giants like Toyota, Hyundai/Kia and Lotte.

The trip dovetailed with the first week of the Tokyo Motor Show and the delegation was able to leverage the presence of federal government and Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association (APMA) representatives. The face-to-face meetings [that

resulted] are important in the development of business relationships, and especially so, between the diverse cultures of Canada and Asian countries.

“You’ve got to make the investment to meet the people or you’re seen as just one of many with their hands out,” said Mr. Thibert.

The mission to Asia — the first of its kind initiated by a regional government — was critical following the announcement that Toyota had chosen to locate its new North American plant in Woodstock, Ontario.

The plant, which will become operational in 2008, will multiply the market for parts and other primary, secondary and tertiary suppliers in Southern Ontario — a situation the Niagara delegation hopes to be able to tap into as a full 46 per cent of manufacturing in Niagara is automotive and transportation related and represents a logical sector to address.

There are other signals that Honda, Nissan and Hyundai/Kia will be increasing production and establishing production lines in North America, and while the Niagara strategy is to focus on attracting new parts manufacturers and to assist existing manufacturers to diversify and expand sales, it is hoped that the exposure gained through the mission will help Niagara better position itself as a potential investment destination.

The Asia mission is one facet of a



Asia mission participants were: Dennis Parass, president, Handling Specialty Manufacturing Ltd., Welland; Dan Degazio, manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Welland; Patrick Gedge, chief executive officer, Niagara Economic Development Corp.; Rudi Kroeker, president and CEO, Whiting Equipment Canada Inc.; Peter Partington, chairman, Regional Municipality of Niagara; Jim Thibert, general manager, Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corp.; Valerie Kuhns, senior market development officer Niagara Economic Development Corp.

multiple approach which included raising awareness of Niagara as an automotive and manufacturing centre, establish relationships in the automotive industry, gain market intelligence and explore new opportunities for manufacturers who historically relied on North American auto companies.

It was verified time and again that the new Toyota plant [in Woodstock] will attract new suppliers to Ontario, and leads were generated where Niagara had not previously been considered.

The participation and leadership of Regional chair Mr. Partington also gave the mission an “official” status because govern-

ment and industry are so intrinsically linked in Asia, and it was essential that the mission highlight and demonstrate the government support they had for the initiative.

Notice of the mission reached other municipalities who — while the Niagara delegation was still abroad — contacted the Canadian embassies to help establish meetings in Japan and follow Niagara’s lead.

The timing of the auto show, NEDC’s membership in APMA and critical preparatory work helped make the mission a resounding success, and set Niagara apart in establishing links with Asian manufacturers and Canadian embassy officials.

EDTC helps Rich Products add 70 jobs

Rich Products marked its 60th year of business with the second phase of a large expansion at its 43-year-old plant in Fort Erie.

The company is in the midst of a \$15-million investment just two years after a \$20-million expansion to build a 22,000-square-foot par-baking area to increase its product line.

All told, the expansions add 70 to its employee roles.

The investment is due in part to the work of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation helping secure a \$3.6-million grant from the provincial government.

“The EDTC facilitated with all levels of government to clear the way for easy expansion in Fort Erie,” said Howard Rich, president of Rich Products Canada.

“They’ve just been super in that respect. The leadership they’ve shown makes it a pleasure to do business in Fort Erie,” he said.

The current project to be completed in early 2006 builds on the company’s frozen dough production capacity to help Rich’s achieve an annual sales goal of \$3 billion globally.

“I’m really pleased with this,” said Jim Thibert, general manager of the EDTC. “The first project gave us 40 new jobs. Now we’re looking at another 30. This is a very big commitment to Fort Erie.”

Rich Products has 22 manufacturing facilities in North America and another eight internationally. Fort Erie is the only plant in Canada.

Fort Erie planners earn accolades for Gateway Urban Design Strategy

Local plan compares well with biggest Canadian cities

The Town of Fort Erie’s planning department earned national recognition this summer by capturing a major award for excellence in planning and urban design.

It is a very significant achievement, particularly for a relatively small town like Fort Erie. Other recipients this year included Montreal, Calgary, Toronto, Victoria and London.

At the centre of the recognition is the International Gateway Urban Design Strategy which was adopted by Fort Erie Town Council in June 2004, as the culmination of an evolving four-year process.

“This is a terrifically impressive achievement,” said Mayor Wayne Redekop. “Rino Mostacci, our director of community development services, and the entire planning staff should be congratulated.”

Economic Development and Tourism Corporation general manager Jim Thibert said the award has great significance.

“The prestige of this award is evident, but more importantly it sends out a clear message that Fort Erie has good planning and is creative in its approach to development,” he said. “This is a real honour for the Town.”

The strategy encompasses the Garrison Road corridor, the Peace Bridge Plaza and Fort Erie’s south-end neighbourhood and represents a transformation of the area from an “area of transit to a point of destination.”

Participants in the development and implementation of the strategy included the Niagara Parks Commission, the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, local community groups, residents and businesses.

Mr. Mostacci said the strategy “communicates a vision through a plan that weaves the area’s existing and potential

places into a positive urban setting that is coherent and authentic.”

The planning department set about in 2000 to realize a goal to create a “successful and beautiful entry to Canada and a world-class destination” with the assistance of stakeholders, architects and consultants.

The Gateway Masterplan was adopted in 2000, and in order to implement the Masterplan, a detailed Urban Design Strategy underwent development starting in February 2003.

Unveiled in June 2004, the International Gateway Urban Design Strategy was prepared by a consulting team led by Brook McIlroy Inc., and included The Planning Partnership, the MBTW Group, Poulos and Chung, and The Quartek Group.

The strategy details five key creation objectives:

- a spectacular urban gateway and world heritage site;
- an authentic neighbourhood and destination community;
- connectivity and wholeness
- a place focused on pedestrians;
- a plan that is accessible, widely supported, flexible and implementable.

The strategy also presents a framework of recommendations to consider during the approvals process for private and public development projects.

To set the tone for future development, the Town, in partnership with the Peace Bridge authority and the Niagara Parks Commission, designed and constructed Veteran’s Way at Mather Park. The project “repairs urban fragmentation by reconnecting Garrison Road with the Niagara Parkway and the Niagara River,” Mr. Mostacci said.

“It is spectacular, authentic, pedestrian and holistic,” he said. “It is a wonderful first step in creating a successful and beautiful entry to Canada and a world-class destination.”

Plaza improvements benefit economies locally and nationally

More milestones have been achieved in securing hassle-free international trade and travel over the Niagara River.

The second phase of \$42 million in Peace Bridge plaza improvements on both sides of the border was completed in November, and the first commercial vehicle broke a commemorative ribbon at the new commercial vehicle inspection center on the U.S. side of the Peace Bridge recently.

"No truck delays. No more dangerous back-ups onto the QEW. No more frustrated drivers missing deadlines," said John Lopinski, chairman of the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority.

"No more economic losses for companies [and local communities] attributable to border delays," he added.

New inspection booths in the U.S. plaza and the relocation of the duty-free store from the narrowest part of the plaza to the widest, are just part of the investment in Peace Bridge operations.

Toll booths were also relocated to the Canadian plaza in April to further free-up space in the U.S. plaza. Construction also began in September on new Canadian Border Services Agency facilities, a refugee reception centre and a new bridge administration building.

The addition of three new booths on the U.S. side and the relocation of five automobile booths allows U.S. Customs to operate up to 16 car lanes on busy weekends by converting five of the seven commercial lanes to automobile lanes.

"The end result is a 75 per cent increase in commercial vehicle throughput and flexibility," said Mr. Lopinski.

"This project has been an unqualified success," he said. "It has made the QEW safer as it has removed miles-long truck queues [through the heart of Fort Erie]. It is positive for the environment as it keeps traffic moving and facilitates the freer movement of billions of dollars in goods and millions of tourists so essential for our bi-national economy."

Improvements on the Canadian side of the bridge will be completed in late 2006 and will enhance the bridge's ability to move traffic into Canada.

Technological and security improvements were also made including intelligent transportation systems to better manage traffic and provide drivers with up-to-date information.

The improvements are funded 50-50 between the PBA and the Canadian government as part of its more than \$600-million Border Infrastructure Fund.



Construction began late this summer on new inspection booths, Customs and Immigration buildings and Peace Bridge administration offices. New toll booths were completed in early summer.

Border pilot project speeds Peace Bridge expansion efforts

Fort Erie will be the site of a pilot project to implement the Shared Border Management concept where the bulk of U.S. Customs commercial clearance will occur in Canada.

A reciprocal arrangement where Canadian Customs officers work in the U.S. will also be implemented at the Thousand Islands Bridge at Alexandria Bay, NY.

The Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority will include the land pre-clearance in its ongoing studies of facilities needs and environmental impact study.

"This is good news," said Paul Koessler, vice-chairman of the PBA.

"By studying the effects of the Shared Border Plan it will give us a much improved bridge

project by balancing land use on both sides of the border as well as minimizing environmental and social impacts," he said.

Canadian-side pre-clearance mitigates the need for expanded land-use in Buffalo which has been seen as an obstacle to the expedient completion of the Peace Bridge expansion project.

"It's worth noting the governments of both countries believe Peace Bridge expansion is imminent," said Jim Thibert, general manager of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation. "That's why they chose Fort Erie for the pilot project."

It is good for the economies of both countries and is particularly good for Fort Erie because the community is tied so closely to the U.S. and border traffic.

Bi-national efforts made to protect free flow of travellers

Border mayors from both sides of the Niagara River took their battle against stricter documentation requirements to the U.S. capital this fall.

Mayor Wayne Redekop joined his bordertown counterparts to lobby American legislators on the dangers of squeezing the border too tight.

Under new U.S. law, travellers will require a passport or other secure document to prove identity and citizenship — even Americans returning from a trip to Canada — by Jan. 1, 2008.

Fort Erie is particularly vulnerable with nearly \$4 million in funds for charities at risk from a loss of bingo and \$3.5 million paid directly to the municipality from revenues from the slots casino at Fort Erie Race Track.

The potential jobs losses in those industries and in the vibrant hospitality sector makes the issue one that requires urgent action.

"The bureaucrats in Ottawa and Washington don't understand the importance to both countries and the border region in particular the importance of freedom to travel across the border," said Jim Thibert, general manager of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

"This is vitally important to us and we have to drive it home to the decision makers."

They met with senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton and House representatives from New York.

Mr. Redekop said they were well-received and there is a good understanding of the issue from the border region perspective.

The mayors pressed the case that the negative impact must be minimized and that passports are not the only document that would achieve U.S. security goals.

Enhanced driver's licences being introduced in many states along with birth certificates may be satisfactory.

People who have gone through the process of NEXUS and FAST clearance should continue to be recognized and the programs expanded.

But whatever alternative documents are finally required, they must be easily accessible and affordable for travellers.

As well, governments will have to ensure that alternative documents can be produced and in the hands of prospective travellers before the Jan. 1, 2008 deadline.

"We don't take the Peace Bridge and our relationship with our neighbours for granted," Mr. Thibert said.

"Fort Erie is a strategic and critical tourism and industry artery into and out of the U.S."

Development partnership builds on strengths

A powerful partnership has been built among the municipalities that straddle the vital transportation and development corridor between Canada and the United States.

Fort Erie, St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls launched the Niagara Development Corridor Partnership this summer to maximize the potential of the "power of four [municipalities] working as one".

"We are building relationships," said Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation general manager Jim Thibert. "We enlist everyone in furthering our position and our cause. What's good for our partners is good for us."

The Queen Elizabeth Way and Highway 406 which represent a critical link between the economic powerhouses of Southern Ontario and Northeastern United States are what unite to four municipalities, along with a shared philosophy of collaborative development efforts as a key to development success.

The economic potential along the corridor is phenomenal with developable land, important transportation and telecommunications links and the proximity to the major business and consumer markets in Canada and the U.S.

"The four communities have parlayed their economic development services into a collaboration intended to take advantage of their synergies along the critically-important corridor," said Mayor Wayne Redekop.

"We have four international crossings between us," Mr. Redekop said. "The Peace Bridge is the second busiest in Canada and processes \$38 billion of trade annually. The importance therefore of our strategic geographic advantage is undeniable."

Encouraging economic development is no longer a "dog-eat-dog world," said Mr. Thibert. "Cooperation is the key. If someone calls Welland, let's say, and can't get all the pieces to fit, he [Welland] can call on one of the partners for support and to tap into resources of partner municipalities. I'll do the same."

Each community has different competitive advantages, different areas of potential to leverage and exploit, so "each of us can't be everything to everybody," Mr. Thibert said. "But together we can be 99.9 percent



Economic development professionals Brock Dickinson (St. Catharines), Jim Thibert (Fort Erie), Dan Degazio (Welland) and Serge Felicetti (Niagara Falls).

for 99.9 percent."

The economic development professionals in the Corridor Partnership have a significant arsenal to assist businesses with site selection, planning and development, investor, supplier and professional services, research, marketing and lobbying efforts.

"Like our partners, our municipal councils and board members understand business," Mr. Thibert said.

"While individually we can speak to and promote our respective strengths, by collaborating we maximize our synergies and guarantee that in the long-term, our economic wealth is ensured" he said.

Truk-King opens new terminal

Truk-King opened its Stevensville Industrial Park terminal this summer, the culmination of more than two years work with the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

The terminal represents a \$1.5-million capital investment in the Town of Fort Erie, supporting 50 professional drivers and 15 permanent staff.

Truk-King is the dry-freight division of Zavor Trucking Limited and owned by Kirk Zavitz, Terry Gilmore, Rob Kranyak and Richard Bacon who manages the Truk-King division.

Mr. Bacon said the Stevensville site is very good, with close proximity to the QEW and the Peace Bridge, the entry to a large segment of the company's market on the U.S. eastern seaboard.

"Zavor is an excellent example



Co-owners Kirk Zavitz and Richard Bacon with Mayor Wayne Redekop and EDTC general manager Jim Thibert.

of what companies are seeking when they come to Fort Erie, said EDTC general manager Jim Thibert.

"We have the closeness to vital transportation corridors, the pre-pro-

cessing facilities for trucks and greenfield and brownfield lands for development," he said. "Zavor is one example of a solid development that we are proud to have helped".

Meridian opens new branch in Fort Erie

In a resounding vote of confidence in the future, the largest credit union in Ontario opened its first new branch in Fort Erie in October.

Meridian Credit Union — born of the merger of Niagara Credit Union and HEPCOE Credit Union — became the largest in the province with \$3.5 billion in assets.

The branch is located at the prestigious International Gateway Centre on Garrison Road, and will soon be joined by its sister branch — formerly a Niagara Credit Union branch in Stevensville — in serving the Fort Erie community.

"We strongly believe in our communities and helping them grow," said Sean Jackson, president and chief executive officer of Meridian.

This "state-of-the-art" facility is another step toward re-inventing neighbourhood banking in Ontario, he said.

"We look forward to providing more convenient financial services and to better serving many new members in

the months and years ahead," Mr. Jackson said.

When asked about the merger, Jackson said "we wanted to merge so that we would have the resources we need to remain an employer of choice and dramatically improve the financial services we deliver to our members".

The 5,000-square foot branch is one of two new Meridian branches that will open in 2005. The other is in Scarborough and is in addition to 43 other branches and seven commercial banking centres with 900 employees in the province.

Meridian is also committed to increasing its financial support of worthy causes in the community it serves. It will donate four per cent of pre-tax profit to [local] causes, more than four times the national average of corporate support for charities.

The Fort Erie Public Library has already benefited, with Meridian contributing \$10,000 toward its [Fort Erie Public Library] Kids Quest program. This popular program offers after-



school help for children with homework, mentoring and tutoring and other various special events.

And with a new name comes a new logo, one that expresses "worry freedom."

"The logo is friendly, inviting and it brings a smile to people's faces," Mr. Jackson said. The 'Meridian line,' a feature of the logo, is the "line of service" that connects every aspect of our members' financial lives. That's what Meridian is all about."

Logo branding expands reach and awareness

Fort Erie is expanding its reach and increasing awareness in the local and international marketplace through a branding program using the distinctive "bridges" logo in third-party promotions.

The Peace Bridge Duty Free was the first to incorporate the concept in its million-dollar advertising campaign in Canada and the United States.

"It's a good way to partner ourselves with the Town," said Chuck Loewen, general manager of the largest duty free shop in North America.

Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation general manager Jim Thibert said the "branding linkage" among marketing partners is valuable for everyone.

"By marketing your business using the Fort Erie "bridges" logo, you're conveying the impact that a bi-national border destination has for your business and customers," he said.

"That adds value to your marketing message as well developing increased awareness of Fort Erie."

The partnership with Duty Free "drives home the message that Fort Erie is a critical link to the combined prosperity of Niagara, Ontario and Western New York," he said.

Most recently, Fort Erie's Comfort Inn incorporated the bridges logo on its QEW highway signage, an appealing and attention-getting location across from the Fort Erie Racetrack and Slots and just a few kilometres from the Peace Bridge.

"We are building partnerships because together we are stronger," Mr. Thibert said. "This branding initiative fosters that and collectively promotes all that Fort Erie has to offer."

The logo is available from the EDTC for use in marketing communications and on signage, and the EDTC encourages anyone interested in participating in the branding program to call the office directly at (905) 871-1332.



New sewer trunk main opens development opportunities in Fort Erie

A new Regional trunk sewer will open up development opportunities north of the QEW and relieve storm-related backup in Crescent Park.

The Frenchman's Creek sewer project and an associated Town of Fort Erie project will divert flows away from the Dominion Road pumping station and provide linkages in unserved areas.

Construction on the \$8-million project is scheduled to begin next year and signals further investment in Fort Erie's infrastructure and development potential.

The entire section of the Dominion Road force-main sewer which runs from Dominion Road along the old railway right of way and then over to Niagara Boulevard will be replaced.

A new force-main will be constructed up Kraft Road from Dominion Road to Garrison Road where a new Town sewer will connect.

The new trunk main will run northward under the QEW toward the Anger Avenue treatment plant

With the upgraded Garrison Road sewer connecting to the trunk north of Crescent Park, flows will no longer enter the Crescent Road sewer to Dominion before being

Eagle Street reconstruction improves growth potential

Fort Erie's Stevensville Industrial Park will become more attractive to potential industrial interests when reconstruction of Eagle Street is completed.

The road will be brought up to industrial standards to accommodate heavy trucks from Zavor/Truk-King, ACG Canada and soon, DMI Industries.

The Town of Fort Erie has committed more than \$600,000 for the rehabilitation of this important roadway to support future industrial expansion, development and job growth.

pumped uphill to the Niagara Boulevard.

As well as relieving flows in Crescent Park, the new trunk will address capacity issues on the Boulevard section of the existing trunk, said town director of infrastructure services Ron Tripp.

"Eagle Street is important for prospects in the industrial park," said Jim Thibert, general manager of the Fort Erie Economic Development and Tourism Corporation.

"This makes Stevensville a better investment location for industrial partners who want to establish or grow their business" he said.

Another signal that Fort Erie is open for business and willing to support investments, the Eagle Street project is critical to the support of development and prosperity in Stevensville and the rest of Fort Erie.