

Tallying the gifts of the season

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COMMENTARY

Now that the holiday season is upon us, and with this last column of the year, I'd like to share why our Chamber believes 2022 is ending on a high note and the future holds much promise. So, to start, here's my short list of the gifts that we have received this year.

Top of the list is Family. Thanks to unprecedented immigration, our region is ending 2022 with a significantly larger population and growing communities. Immigration makes our family of businesses larger and more diverse. It brings new ideas, new capital, new talent, and new momentum – all essential elements to economic growth.

As a Chamber, we've seen our membership grow by more than 10 per cent over the past year. There is a growing resolve among business owners to work together, as a community, to create a policy environment that is conducive to economic growth and prosperity. I'm proud to be part of this big, happy family.

The next-largest gift, as far as I am concerned, is Stability. Sure, it's been a year of ups and downs, with the ups, more often than not, being inflation. It has been a tempestuous year with a lot for our businesses to weather. But weather the storm they have, and the majority of businesses in the Saint John region are still with us, joined by a host of new enterprises.

Our large businesses are established international traders and our small and medium businesses are the backbone of commerce in our community. This core stability is a source of strength that provides a foundation for investment, strategic innovation and future success. This dynamic mix of businesses contributes significantly to the economic and cultural mosaic that our region is becoming.

Speaking of success, let's take a moment to celebrate Abundance, particularly the abundance of emerging opportunities that businesses in our region are mobilizing to address. If 2020 and 2021 were characterized by survival, 2022 was the year local businesses experienced the first buoyant wave of recovery.

Saint John is New Brunswick's point of intersection with the world, and growth in the port, rail hub and intermodal freight transport and the resurgence of the cruise ship industry are opening up new opportunities every month. If the communities and businesses of our region can harness even a portion of the economic opportunities that exist in Saint John, 2023 will be the year in which surviving turns to thriving.

This holiday season is also a time for Gratitude and a chance to celebrate businesses of all sizes. I think many people now have a greater appreciation of how important businesses are to the fabric of our community. Small businesses bring diversity and innovation coupled with resilience and a high degree of adaptability. I also want to give a shout-out to our medium and large-scale businesses. They keep our economy and infrastructure going, they foster efficiency, and they create economies of scale that benefit consumers and smaller businesses alike. Let's be grateful for these advantages, even as we strive to do more.

This brings me to a gift that is all too easily overlooked, but absolutely critical to achieving success: Optimism. Optimism is like the pack of batteries that makes sure everything else will run smoothly, and our business community has an abundant supply. Optimism is very much a part of everything that our Chamber does.

Population growth, business growth, new building starts, volume of visitors, volume of trade: the economic indicators for our region are positive and give reason to believe the coming year will bring more good news. Even in areas where there are significant challenges, such as human resourcing, there are lines of sight to opportunities that can address these issues and put us in a more positive place, provided we work together as a community to achieve them.

Our Chamber exists to give the businesses of this region a collective voice in developing informed economic policy. It is a pleasure and privilege to be able to share our efforts with you, through this forum, as we strive to create a business ecosystem where everyone can thrive.

Happy holidays everyone.

David Duplisea is Chief Executive Officer of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce. His commentary appears monthly.