



Strengthening our community and economy

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COMMENTARY

Earlier this month, New Brunswick celebrated a striking accomplishment. In just three and a half years, our province has gained 51,000 new residents, predominantly from skilled immigration.

Businesses in our region are rising to meet the challenge of rapid population growth by ensuring that the values of diversity, equity and inclusion are honoured in the workplace.

The Chamber has been a proponent of immigration for more than a century, since adding it as a focus for our organization by 1913, because we've recognized how this strengthens our region and our economy.

More and more, we're seeing requests from our membership for information and guidance and we're making resources available to help businesses translate diversity, equity and inclusion principles into policies with the capacity to strengthen and transform a company's culture.

It's a transformation Saint John is ready to make.

From its earliest days, this has been a port community, powered by exports and international trade: the place where New Brunswick meets the wider world. This is a region of global businesses, infused with global talent and global ideas, and many residents can see how our community is changing rapidly, and for the better, as a result of population growth.

Over the past three years, immigration has boosted New Brunswick's real estate market and new business creation. It is helping to address the labour shortage that has limited productivity in the private sector. In the public sector, it is easing the strain on our health-care system by bringing new doctors and nurses to clinics and hospitals.

And it's not just the migration of people that is driving change in our city: international investment is transforming our skyline and significantly increasing the activity and output of the port itself.

If current trends continue, New Brunswick may well have a population of 1 million by 2040, with the vast majority of this growth made possible by skilled immigration to metropolitan areas like Greater Saint John.

What makes this particularly exciting is how the population is changing. In the words of demographer Michael Haan in a recent Telegraph-Journal story, New Brunswick's incoming population is "extremely

well-trained, young and ambitious. So not only is it new growth, but growth of part of the population that has yet to make a mark in the world and wants to change the place in which they live."

If we want to keep the population and economic growth we have been experiencing and build upon it, we need to ensure that newcomers are able to participate fully in the life of our businesses and community.

This is a challenge Mohamed Bagha, the new Chairperson for our Chamber, understands.

Mohamed holds a Master of Interdisciplinary Degree focusing on Community Economic Development from the University of New Brunswick. He has been involved in the newcomer settlement sector for more than 10 years and is the Managing Director of the Saint John Newcomers Centre.

He was recently named one of the "Most Inspiring Immigrants in the Maritimes" for his leadership and vision, and we're proud to have him at the helm of our organization, giving a voice to the growing diversity of our community.

To help the businesses of Greater Saint John become more inclusive, our Chamber will also be launching a speaker series this fall on race, inclusivity, and diversity for our members.

The objective of this series will be to equip organizations with the tools to successfully navigate significant inequities to inclusion and acceptance in the workplace. This can be achieved by integrating diversity, equity and inclusion considerations into the organization's business culture, policies, processes, people management, and performance evaluation criteria. The series will be led by Chamber members and partners.

We hope these conversations will assist organizations with creating more diverse, inclusive and equitable communities that nurture talent retention, collaboration and sustainable growth.

When newcomers have a voice and an opportunity to contribute to the socio-economic well-being of our region by fully contributing their talent, skills, and culture, their contributions will act as a catalyst to improve economic conditions, cultivate cultural understanding, and enrich the lives and living standards of everyone who calls Greater Saint John home.

Diversity is who we are, and equitable and inclusive is what we must be, if we are to prosper - because no business or community can reach its full potential until all of its members are seen, heard and appreciated for the unique strengths that they bring to the table.

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