



Business champions benefit community

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COMMENTARY

This past month brought a couple of milestones which have underlined how important economic leadership and representation are to the future prosperity of our community.

The first of these events was a celebration of everything that our community has become and is in the process of becoming: the Saint John Region Chamber's 2023 Outstanding Business Achievement Awards. This annual gala recognizes firms and entrepreneurs who are contributing to the growth of greater Saint John. It attracts 400 to 500 of our region's business and community leaders.

I challenge anyone to stand in the midst of all that talent and not be impressed by the tremendous potential we have in our community. We have established a trajectory for growth, and we are on our way to achieving it for the betterment of the entire region.

The Saint John Region Chamber is the embodiment of the positive energy that is driving growth in our community. As champions for business, we provide a forum that helps people to focus on issues that are critical to creating and sustaining economic growth. We provide a voice for the community that amplifies its strengths, draws the attention of policymakers to common challenges, and helps people advocate for policy solutions that will improve quality of life across greater Saint John.

From employment to immigration, energy to air travel and housing to health care, we have been making progress because the Chamber's success and greater Saint John's success are driven by talented and committed champions.

That brings me to this month's other notable milestone: as a Chamber, we are saying goodbye to one champion, and welcoming the elevation of another.

On Nov. 8, the day after our annual awards gala, David Duplisea retired as the Chamber's CEO. If you've read David's columns in this space, you know what a tireless advocate he has been for the people and businesses of our region.

David has contributed significantly to the Chamber since he joined our organization's leadership team more than a decade ago. Under his management, the Chamber pushed many key initiatives that have advanced the interests of local businesses. The successes that stand out for me include David's advocacy for better air service with Air Canada, the support he provided

for Sunday shopping, and his championing of strategic government investment of budget surpluses to address pressing issues such as housing, health care and post-secondary education.

David was one of the first CEOs in our region to raise awareness of the positive link between skilled immigration and population growth and the necessity of scaling up public services to support growth at the community level.

Under David's tenure, the Chamber grew by about 150 new members and established itself as a truly regional organization. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce recognized the success of David's regionalization efforts with a national award for our organization.

A performance like that is no small act to follow, which is why I am very pleased that our Chamber will be led in the months ahead by an outstanding interim CEO, Carole Cunningham. Carole has more than 30 years' experience working with the Chamber and the Saint John Board of Trade, most recently as our Director of Events and Administration.

Before coming to Saint John, Carole served 15 years on the Montreal Board of Trade. In 2013, the Saint John Board of Trade awarded her its prestigious Chair's Award in recognition of her contribution to the economic development of our region.

The wealth of expertise and experience that Carole brings to the Chamber will be instrumental in continuing to drive our mission forward as she works with partners across our region to build a strong, sustainable and prosperous economy.

David, congratulations for a job well done. Carole, welcome to your new role. There are so many opportunities ahead, and at the same time, so many challenges to overcome.

I am confident that we will get there, together, because I have seen the talent that is making greater Saint John one of the fastest growing economies in Atlantic Canada.

A growing city never sleeps, and neither do its champions.

Mohamed Bagha is Chair of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber's commentary appears monthly.