

Blue Sky News



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Blue Sky Tourism Economic Impact Study Released!!!

The Blue Sky Region attracts an estimated 1.35 million person-visits from tourists who spend \$197 million in the Region. While this spending makes tourism a significant contributor to the Blue Sky Region's economy, the Region itself cannot be considered a major tourism destination as it only has a 1.2% share of the Ontario travel market and only a 4.4% share of the Central and Northern Ontario travel market.

This is what nearly 100 tourism stakeholders heard on Tuesday February 1st at the Best Western, North Bay. Chris Setchell of Impagination Inc. the consultant hired to undertake the study provided a snapshot of the study results. His presentation was an overview of the tourism trends that this Region has been exposed to, who our market is and why they are coming here. As a gem amidst the numerous destination locations in the province, our area has much to offer, without building anything, without actually having a multi-million dollar facility with all of the glitz and glamour the big cities have. What we have is nature... waterways and trails... an outdoors playground.



Chris Setchell, Impagination

Feedback from the report has been very positive and well recognized by many.

"This is one of the better reports I have seen on development/marketing strategies and I think Chris did an excellent job in using and translating CTS, ITS and economic impact data into actionable results. Actually, this is the only time where I saw a consultant making proper use of the economic impact analysis."

*-Alex Athanassakos, Team Leader of Research & Industry competitiveness
Ministry of Tourism & Recreation, Government of Ontario*

Here are some highlights of the study:

- Visitors perceive the Blue Sky Region as an overnight (as opposed to same-day) recreational travel destination.
- The Region holds 2.6% share of the Ontario overnight recreational travel market.
- When compared to the rest of Ontario, the Region is 17% more effective in attracting recreational visitors, but under performs the rest of Ontario by more than 10% in other types of travel (business, visiting friends and relatives and travel for personal reasons.)
- Recreational travel is the most important economically for the Region and should be the focus of Regional marketing efforts. Recreational travel accounts for 47% of all person-visits to the Region and 57% of all tourism revenues.
- Overnight travel accounts for 77% of all person-visits but 90% of all tourism revenues in the Region. In combination, overnight recreational travel accounts for 38% of all person-visits and 49% of all tourism revenues. In contrast, business travel accounts for 7% of person-visits and 14% of revenues.
- The Region is most effective at attracting visitors from Ontario and from international origins other than the U.S.
- The Region's overall share of the Central and Northern Ontario tourism market is 4.4%, its share of overseas visitors to Central and Northern Ontario is 17%
- Ontario residents account for 85% of all person-visits and 76% of all the Region's tourism revenues.



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For more information , or a full copy of the Executive summary please visit: www.blueskyegc.ca

First Skywire customers log onto the WWW

The first Project Skywire customers are now surfing the web via high-speed wireless connections in the East Ferris area. Skywire is the name for the multi-phased project that is building an Internet Protocol network using wireless technology to deliver high-speed Internet to over 80% of residents and businesses within the region. Blue Sky Net, the community champion for the project, has received subsidy funding from both the provincial and federal governments that will help reduce the capital expense of network construction.

Blue Sky Net's vendor partner W3 Connex has completed the construction of 6 new towers for the network located in Astorville, Feronia, Eau Claire, Bear Valley, St. Charles and Lavigne. The largest of the new towers is in Astorville and it plays a dual role of providing high-speed broadband service plus providing service for the local Fire Department to improve emergency communications. The remainder of the 23-tower network will utilize towers owned by other Telecommunication companies.



The initial stage in the network build is a complete testing of signal strength and verification of RF coverage in a radius around each tower to determine how to optimize our network, basically to ensure that the signal provides service to the highest number of people. Once testing is complete, the full commercial service will be launched, and moving on to the next phase of the process which will establish repeater points to re-transmit into populated areas behind hills or in low valleys.

Brian Walters, President and CEO of W3 Connex believes that "Wireless has so many advantages. I firmly believe that it is the only way to service folks in rural areas at an affordable price."

Time to Surf with East Ferris

The Township of East Ferris is now ONLINE to better serve and inform it's residents and visitors, about activities, council meetings & minutes, events, contact numbers, new and old by-laws, their Strategic Plan, anything and everything about that neck of the woods.

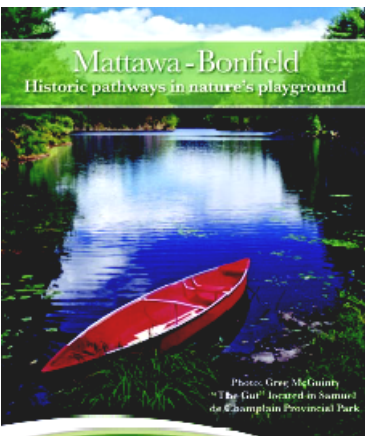
The website has everything you need and want to know about East Ferris. In addition, for those who may not know about the township and are looking to relocate to a new area, the site has important contact numbers, what activities you can get involved in, various committees and members, building regulations and the list goes on and on.



The Mattawa-Bonfield EDC and Chamber of Commerce

The newly renamed Mattawa-Bonfield and District Chamber of Commerce has partnered with the Mattawa-Bonfield Economic Development Corporation to form a unified network in promoting and growing the region.

At the 2005 Annual General meeting held on the evening of Thursday, February 10th at the Mattawa Town Hall, the membership voted amendments that changed the Chamber's name to better reflect the entire business community of the Mattawa-Bonfield area. As well, the new Chamber Board will act in an advisory capacity to David Thompson who has added the role of Executive Director to his current role of Economic Development Officer.



"We felt that the Chamber had to be a major part of the Mattawa-Bonfield growth and the best way of achieving this task was by partnering with the EDC. We have to better prepare our business community for the increased tourism and other industries to our area," commented Past Vice President Mary Lou Arrowsmith. The new partnership will strengthen the linkage between the business community and the five Municipalities of Bonfield, Calvin, Mattawa, Mattawan and Papinau-Cameron.

In today's globalization, local communities must work together to in order to continue growth within a very competitive world economy. This partnership is not unique, as many Chamber's of Commerce and EDO'S in larger US and Canadian Cities have partnered.

The Chamber will be located at the Mattawa-Bonfield EDC offices in Bonfield and can be reached at 776-2225.

For further info, please contact David Thompson at 776-2225 or mbedc@bellnet.ca

Top American Speaker made his mark on the Blue Sky Region

Ian Hill is on a mission, “To inspire change in individuals, neighbourhoods and communities across North America”. On Wednesday February 16th at the Best Western Hotel in North Bay, he brought that message to the 2nd annual Blue Sky Regional Summit.



Business leaders, educators, health care professionals, politicians, industry cluster groups and many more gathered to talk about change. Last year area municipal representatives gathered at a similar summit for elected officials. From that event, smaller groups like the Mayors Action Group were started.

“Ian Hill is one of North America’s Top speakers. In one of only three stops in Canada, he was here to help our regional communities jointly develop a common understanding of our community issues, opportunities, assets, challenges and goals.” said Susan Church, General Manager of the Blue Sky Economic Growth Corporation.

In looking forward to an action plan, Blue Sky EGC has agreed to act as a community liaison to plan the 2005 National Tour for “The Changing Point”, which will be a four-day event to be held in May, that will engage the entire region in an opportunity for success.

Prior to his next stop in North Bay in May, Ian Hill will be in the Niagara Falls region to conduct a similar event. According to Church, “in Niagara the outcomes they are looking for include uniting political leaders to speak with one voice, understanding the cost of high poverty and low health indicators, improving private/public sector understanding, increasing volunteer participation and improving awareness of the positive, impactful leadership opportunities for youth. We looked at these outcomes and saw an opportunity to realize some of the same outcomes here in our region.”

For more info regarding “4 Days in May”, visit www.blueskyegc.ca, or <http://www.thechangingpoint.com/2005/NorthBay.htm>

A Message from the GM

The Blue Sky Economic Growth Corporation recently held a regional summit, that brought together municipal leaders and public and private industry to better understand how we can all work together for the prosperity of our region. The first order of the day was to recap what the Blue Sky organization is all about. I gave a slide presentation that quite simply underlines our goal to provide a means of support to bring together both the public and private sector so that the groundwork is laid for municipalities, tourist organizations, businesses and others to build on.

I shared a story with those in attendance and I would like to elaborate that story further now. It’s a story about working together. We need to take a moment to understand “community” at a much deeper level than just its physical form in order to understand and to design for its survival. We have to understand our communities as essential living environments where people feel a sense of “shared future”, but are afraid of it at the same time.

We need to adapt to change. In the face of compelling global trends, we need to find new ways to preserve that essential contribution of smaller, more rural communities as “human scale” environments where people can find a sense of connectedness and relevance.

There is much that we can do in rural communities to respond to this process of change and to take a direct hand in shaping our future. That’s what Blue Sky is all about. There are many communities under this economic umbrella we call Blue Sky but what exactly does it mean. In rapidly urbanizing environments, the healthiest and most quickly growing communities are not the urban cores of large metropolitan areas, but rings of smaller communities surrounding those metropolitan areas. These communities that are growing up within circles of urban economic influence are very strong and independent. They are strong because of their ability to provide quality, human-scale, and social living environments for people.

When you analyze what attracts industry to an area now, you’ll find that its decision makers are not looking to locate their enterprise in communities. They are looking to locate in regional economies with strong supply chains than can provide the labour and resources they need. And so, astute communities are banding together into well-coordinated regional networks, which can offer the resources needed by footloose industry.

That is what Blue Sky is. We are here to band together our communities and to offer help to work together so that we can attract new industry, retain industry and grow our industry in whatever sector that may be.

Recently a municipal councillor asked me during a meeting, “what have you ever done to keep our business doors

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Blue Sky Economic Growth Corporation

222 McIntyre Street W. Suite 350

North Bay, Ontario

P1B 2Y8

Phone: 705-476-0874 ext 215

Fax: 705-495-6038

Email: uyen.nguyen@blueskyregion.ca

*Mobilizing the Region
with a shared
economic vision.*

We're on the Web!!
www.blueskyegc.ca



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The rest of the update

(Continued from page 3)

open?" In that same vein a number of municipal officials were quoted in a newspaper asking "what does Blue Sky do for our taxpayers...we just don't know". The director of a development corporation asked, "we don't see any benefit, you haven't given us anything". We can't *give* you anything; we are not a funding agency. We can however lay the groundwork for you to work together and prosper. Building our high-speed network across the region is one example. Providing information and studies like the agriculture, forestry, mining or tourism economic impact studies is another. It is for *all* of you. It is for our region.

At a national conference I attended recently with 350 other Canadians from rural Canada, we had the pleasure of receiving an address by the former Mayor of Red Deer Alberta, Gail Surkin. She said, and I quote,

"rural communities have traditionally practised participative decision-making. We make decisions together. People engage. People feel a sense of influence and importance. But we are increasingly influenced by systems which encourage us to pass responsibility to government or to non-government agencies or just generally, to somebody else. We have to guard against the weakening of participative decision-making and shared accountability in our rural communities. In other words, don't simply ask, "What have you done for us?". Be a part of the doing."

She further provided an example of what is happening in their area.

"What is interesting to me is the learning that took place as the communities of central Alberta learned to work together and the understanding we developed of the importance of our values to our survival.

We have an organization called the Central Alberta Economic Partnership. It is comprised of 45 communities in central Alberta which banded together originally to work on economic development strategies – the typical things, shared marketing, training, recruitment programs and so on. It is an eclectic group of communities – some big, such as the City of Red Deer, some very small. Some have emerging urban economies and some remain entirely dependant on rural industry. Some are close to the Highway 2 corridor – the fastest growing economic corridor in Canada. Then, there are those that are very remote from the corridor and struggle to understand how they'll benefit from that economic whirlwind. There are those that are growing and prospering. There are others that can see no prospect for growth. Originally a small group of communities came together to share some simple tasks. Others joined. The Province of Alberta lent its support. As participants we learned we could do many practical things together, but we also learned something more fundamental. We discovered that in order to advance the future of central Alberta and protect the communities of central Alberta, we had to learn to **trust one another**. We had to move from competitive behaviour, which caused each of us to focus exclusively on our own benefit regardless of what the cost might be to the adjoining community, to collaborative behaviour based on an ability to see our future as being shared. It meant trusting and sharing in an entirely new way.

That trust became a powerful enabler. Once the members of this eclectic group learned to share resources and decision-making; once they grasped the idea of a shared future; once they developed trust – they found they had a foundation for resolving issues and problem solving on many different fronts."

I shared this story with you in the hopes that the economic region of Blue Sky will come together and that we will find the common threads to use the tools that our corporation can provide to you with the help of our government partners and, that we can learn – to trust.

Let's all look forward to a sunny warm spring, filled with blue skies.

