

MAY 2009

the pulse

SAULT STE. MARIE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEWS

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All aboard! Train Tour gets new coaches

One of the most significant tourism attractions in Northern Ontario is getting a face-lift.

A deal has been reached to provide the Agawa Canyon Train Tour with upgraded coaches. Spearheaded by Tourism Sault Ste. Marie, the venture involves Canadian National Railway, which owns the attraction, and the provincial government's Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation.

"This project came about because of a strong partnership between the province, CN Rail and the local tourism industry," said Ian McMillan, Executive Director of Tourism Sault Ste. Marie, a division of the SSM Economic Development Corporation.

"Once complete, the new-and-improved coaches will attract more riders and, as a result, more visitors to Sault Ste. Marie. We're entering a new era for Northern Ontario tourism."

At a press conference May 15, it was announced that the train tour will receive eight coaches, three locomotives, two café/lounge cars, three club cars and a presentation coach. Some of the upgraded equipment is expected to be ready for riders this summer with the full fleet in operation

for the 2010 season.

At one point, the Agawa Canyon Train Tour drew around 100,000 passengers annually. However, ridership levels have declined in recent years.

The upgraded coaches are expected to reverse this trend and bring passenger levels back up. As more visitors are attracted to Sault Ste. Marie, other businesses – particularly those in the tourism industry – will also benefit from the economic spinoff.

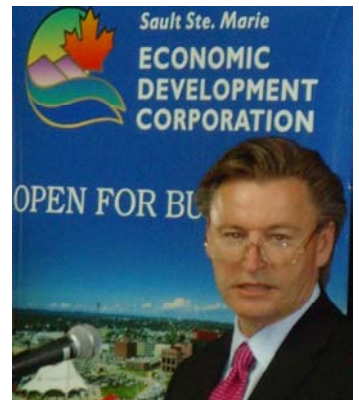
"The tour train excursion is a unique attraction in North America giving us a distinct competitive advantage in the marketplace," said Donna Hilsinger, who became Chair of Tourism Sault Ste. Marie late last year.

"The rebuilding of the product and the experience for the leisure traveller is key to growing our opportunities to build tourism and its impact on our economy."

The \$10 million project is funded equally by CN Rail and the Province of Ontario.

"This investment in modern rail cars will provide a boost to the local economy

by playing a major role in helping to rejuvenate tourism in Sault Ste. Marie," said local MPP David Orazietti.



WORKING TOGETHER (T to B): Canadian National Railway Senior Manager Dennis Broshko, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Executive Director Ian McMillan, and local MPP David Orazietti.

Sault Ste. Marie declared ‘Youth Friendly’

Sault Ste. Marie can certainly be called environmentally friendly. One look at its clean energy projects is all it takes.

Earlier this month, the community was given another welcoming title: Youth Friendly.

The distinction came from the Play Works Partnership Committee, which ranks city’s based on a set of criteria. Sault Ste. Marie met 15 of 16 measures of success, including recreation, youth activism, volunteerism and civic engagement.

As a result, the city was given the title of Gold Youth Friendly Community Builder.

“I am absolutely delighted that our city achieved this rating,” said Ward 2 Councillor Terry Sheehan, who’s also Chair of the Youth Resources Committee. “It demonstrates that the funding for youth that Council made last year was well worth it. The designation will definitely be an asset when we market our city for the purpose of attracting businesses, health professionals and students.”

The Youth Friendly designation was coordinated by the Sault Youth Association.

Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie also provided support for

the declaration. The division of the SSM Economic Development Corporation services the local and regional small business community. Encouraging youth entrepreneurship is one of its main functions.

“There are many small business opportunities for our city’s youth,” said Zoltan Virag, ECSSM’s Youth Business Development Coordinator. “From Summer Company to the High School Business Plan Competition, we’re giving them the skills to allow them to start their own business and remain in Northern Ontario.”



Industrial marketing: putting the Sault on the map

Development Sault Ste. Marie’s industrial marketing continues to bear fruit.

Here’s the scoop: Compared to larger centres, industrial land — even when fully serviced — is considerably cheap in Sault Ste. Marie. Also unique is the city’s strategic location at the heart of the Great Lakes and on the U.S. border, its high-quality workforce, and assistance from SSMEDC. Together, these distinctions create a low cost of doing business.

Simply put, Sault Ste. Marie is a prime location for almost any company, and industrial marketing is used to spread this message to the masses.

It’s accomplished by attending trade shows, placing ads in publications across North America, performing face-to-face business pitches, outreach marketing efforts, and develop-

ing international trade missions.

People around the world are getting the message: Sault Ste. Marie is open for businesses and can offer incentives, logistics and expertise that no other place can match.

“We’re continuing to put Sault Ste. Marie on the map,” said John Febbraro, Director of Industrial Marketing for Development SSM. “Once businesses learn about our competitive advantages, many of them decide to set up shop.”

Elementa Group, formerly EnQuest Power, is a prime example of this trend. The alternative energy company heard great things about Sault Ste. Marie and the length that people will go to help them establish here.

“We are very encouraged with the support we’ve received from Development Sault

Ste. Marie, City Council and City staff,” said Elementa President and CEO Jay Zwierschke.

For Development SSM, this support includes aiding with business planning and other start-up activities.

“Companies contact us, and we tell them what we can do to help,” said Febbraro. “That’s what we’re here for. The results speak for themselves.”

With a business-friendly reputation, Sault Ste. Marie’s industrial land has been selling rapidly over the past few years.

Development SSM works with the City’s Engineering/ Planning and Legal departments on industrial land activities.

“Our goal is to review the 2001 Industrial Land Strategy and find other areas where we can continue to expand local businesses and attract external ones,” said Febbraro.

“We’re continuing to put Sault Ste. Marie on the map. Once businesses learn about our competitive advantages, many of them decide to set up shop.”
- John Febbraro, Development Sault Ste. Marie

Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie's

Business Profile: Precise Ecomatics

To showcase the ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit in Sault Ste. Marie and the Algoma District, look no further than Precise Ecomatics. The local venture is as unique as it is innovative.

Studying and processing digital aerial imagery, owner Gerry Lavoie interprets and extracts information for his clients. The information is used to create extremely accurate mapping products. The process involves his years of experience and state-of-the-art computer programs.

In its infancy, Precise Ecomatics is already producing great results. The business has secured a large volume of work from a Northern Ontario contractor working for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Forest Resource Inventory branch.

Being one of the few companies in the province capable of carrying out this type of work efficiently, its future looks bright.

"It has been going great so far," said Lavoie. "It's really a unique process. We're in a bit of a niche for now."

Within the next year or so,

Lavoie, who operates the business with wife Deanna Croteau, plans on opening an office and hiring at least two employees. After that, more growth is likely to follow.

Future plans for Precise Ecomatics involve creating strong partnerships with Algoma University, Sault College, Lake Superior State University and the OMNR.

"Our goal is to assist in creating a bridge between educators and the industry and to address the current need for certified photo interpreters and field staff who also have GIS and remote-sensing training," said Lavoie.

The couple came up with the idea for their business by spotting a gap in the industry.

"We noticed that there were other companies that didn't have staff with the experience needed for working with this unique type of imagery," said Lavoie. "They are going to have growing pains in acquiring the resources and staff to accommodate new industry specifications."

Seeing the opportunity that existed, Precise Ecomatics was born. But before things fully took shape,

they first took a trip to Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie.

"They went through our business plan and provided support," said Lavoie. "They were very helpful in providing resources and start-up information."

Precise Ecomatics is just one of many success stories. In the 2008 fiscal year, Enterprise Centre SSM helped 63 businesses start up.

"Advancing the small business community will help position the city and region for long-term growth and prosperity," said ECSSM Small Business Advisor Terri Chiarello. "Precise Ecomatics is a perfect example of the ingenuity found in Sault Ste. Marie and the Algoma District."



Above: An excerpt from a high-resolution water layer currently being produced through automated feature extraction techniques.

Image source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources © 2009 Queens Printer for Ontario.

New portable outdoor scoreboard on its way

A recent investment will make it easier to attract major outdoor sporting events to the city.

In partnership with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie, the Sault Amateur Soccer Association received funding for a new portable scoreboard with money secured from the Community Development Corporation of Sault Ste. Marie & Area.

"This wouldn't be possible without the support of the CDC," said Steve Hollingshead, Coordinator of Special Projects and Sport Tourism for Tourism Sault Ste. Marie. "The new

scoreboard will allow us to host even higher-calibre tournaments."

Sault Ste. Marie will be home to the Ontario Cup Soccer Semi-Finals in late-August, the highest level matches since the city hosted the men's finals in 1982. The new scoreboard will be used for additional soccer tournaments and possibly other sporting events as deemed necessary.

The initiative also involved the City's Community Services Department, which agreed to assist SASA with installation and other logistics.

"The Community Services Depart-

ment was instrumental in securing the scoreboard," said Hollingshead. "This was truly a group effort that resulted in a significant asset for the future of sporting events in Sault Ste. Marie."

The new clock will be stationed at Tom Tipton and Strathclair fields.



CDC Community Development Corporation OF SAULT STE. MARIE & AREA A Community Future Development Corporation

Israeli delegation visits Sault Ste. Marie

Add one more to the list.

Earlier this month, Sault Ste. Marie was home to another international delegation.

Amir Gissin, Israel's Consul General for Toronto and Western Canada, and Franklin Simkevitz, Executive Director of the Regional Ontario Jewish National Fund of Canada, arrived May 19. They met with Mayor John Rowswell, Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation CEO Bruce Strapp, MPP David Oraziotti and MP Tony Martin. The delegation also toured various local

sites, including St. Marys Paper.

Israel follows a long list of countries from around the world that are showing interest in Sault Ste. Marie's unique economic activity and innovation.

"From our alternative energy projects, including wind, solar and waste-to-energy, to our low cost of doing business and natural beauty, we are gaining a reputation as a great place to live and do business," said Randy Tallon, Director of International Relations & Global Logistics for Development SSM.

In April, Development Sault

Ste. Marie released its updated International Relations & Global Logistics Strategy. It was shared with Gissin, who quickly confirmed that his office would support any future Sault Ste. Marie mission to or from Israel. He was also pleased to find his country specifically noted and named in the strategy as a future trade mission opportunity.

The IRGL Strategy aims to create inbound and outbound markets for Sault Ste. Marie's businesses and products while promoting the community around the world.



PHOTO: Israeli Consul General for Toronto and Western Canada Amir Gissin (right) with Sault Mayor John Rowswell.

New gov't program funds small business

The entrepreneurial spirit of the Algoma region just got a jolt to the system.

A new initiative from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation promises to stimulate the small business community. The Northern Ontario Entrepreneur Program will provide up to \$125,000 in conditional grant funding to those wanting to start a business.

"Small business is the backbone of our economy," said Andrew Ross, General Manager of Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie. "This new program from the provincial government is a critical leap forward in small business financing for Northern Ontario. Expending this sector is vital, especially during these economically-tumultuous times."

To go along with the new

program, criteria for existing NOHFC small business initiatives are being enhanced. On this front, 50 per cent of funding from the Enterprise North Job Creation Program and Private Sector Emerging Technology Program may now qualify as a conditional grant.

For more information on the programs, call Enterprise Centre SSM at 705-759-2616.



"Bringing this type of event

to our city really takes a team effort. Having the local tourism industry on board definitely helps..."

-Steve Hollingshead, Tourism SSM

Sault Ste. Marie hosts 2009 Franco-Ontario Games

The French Youth Association of Ontario (FESFO) made Sault Ste. Marie its home earlier this month when the city hosted the 2009 Franco-Ontario Games.

The games brought about 570 Franco-Ontarians to Sault Ste. Marie for an action-packed series of competitions. Many of the participants' families and friends also made the trek.

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie

provided organizational support to FESFO during its initial planning stages.

"Bringing this type of event to our city really takes a team effort," said Steve Hollingshead, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's Coordinator of Special Projects and Sport Tourism. "Having



the local tourism industry on board definitely helps to attract these events. And attracting this caliber of event generates significant revenue for the local economy, which, in turn, benefits the community at large"

The Franco-Ontario Games has been the biggest annual and provincial gathering of Franco-Ontario youth since 1994.

For more information, visit www.fesfo.ca.

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The Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation recognizes the financial support it receives from the City of Sault Ste. Marie. As well, it recognizes the strong backing it receives from the Mayor, Council and City staff. The SSMEDC also thanks the federal and provincial governments, and its many other partners, for their financial support.

The Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation is a non-profit organization, funded by public and private partners, whose goal is to be the community's leader in supporting and promoting an environment that generates sustainable employment in a healthy, growing and diversified economy.

ECSSM welcomes Youth Business Development Coordinator

Youths in Sault Ste. Marie and the Algoma region have another champion to support their small business endeavours.

Zoltan Virag was hired by Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie earlier this month as its Youth Business Development Coordinator.

Virag holds a degree in Business Administration from Algoma University and an Audio Visual & Multi-media diploma from Seneca College. He also has experience in media production, student advisement and managerial roles in retail.

"Giving the youth of Sault Ste. Marie and region entrepreneurial skills will allow many of them to remain in Northern Ontario," said Andrew Ross, ECSSM General Manager. "In this respect, Zoltan Virag will play a vital role in the economic development of the city and region."

Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie, a division of the SSM Economic Development Corporation, provides support for the local and regional small business community.

In the 2008 fiscal year, the division helped 63 companies

start up.

"The track record of Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie speaks for itself," said Virag. "I look forward to working with the team to develop the spirit of youth entrepreneurship in the city and region."



Zoltan Virag takes the position of Youth Business Development Coordinator at Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie, a division of the SSMEDC.