

Website welcomes newcomers

Attracting workers from outside of the province is one approach local business and community groups are taking to adjust to new labour market realities. Efforts to attract newcomers and ease their transition to the province can help businesses access the people and skills they require, resulting in vibrant and sustainable communities.

The Southern Labrador Website is a pilot project which has taken a regional approach in a rural area. The site provides newcomers to the area with a wealth of information to aid in their settlement process. This website will also assist with the attraction and retention of a skilled labour force in the region by giving businesses an information resource to complement their recruiting efforts.

This project was truly a collaborative effort, bringing together representatives of the two regional economic development boards (REDB's) in a project management capacity. An advisory group was also established which included representatives from Labrador Grenfell Health, SmartLabrador (a social enterprise which helps ensure effective utilization of information technologies in Labrador) and RCMP officers who were new to the region. They advised and identified the types of information and resources which would be useful to users of the site.

This regional resource builds on the provincial immigration portal, www.nimmigration.ca, which acts as a clearing house for information on all aspects of immigration, settlement and integration. Regional websites such as Southern Labrador's are valuable in giving communities the opportunity to market themselves and provide newcomers to the area with region-specific information.

Stelman Flynn, owner of Seaview Restaurant and Cabins in Forteau, Labrador, says the website is a great tool for local business owners who face challenges associated with attracting and retaining qualified workers.

"I think this really presents us an opportunity to bring people to these rural communities and to re-generate some of our communities," says Flynn. "When we approach this on a co-operative basis, it is a great benefit to the business community."

Established with funding from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, administered through the provincial Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism, the website is a joint initiative of the Southeastern Aurora Development Corporation and the Labrador Straits Development Corporation. The REDB's provided project management for the site development, as well as advisory and content collection support. The goal is to expand the project to other areas of the province as a valuable tool for newcomers to rural regions.

SmartLabrador has developed a content management system for this pilot project which can be utilized in other rural regions of the province. Barb Marshall of the Labrador Straits Development Corporation explains, "We needed a site that was different from an

individual municipal site. Our region functions as a region which means residents move to and from communities to access a variety of goods and services. SmartLabrador helped us reflect that and also provided us with a content management system that both REDB's can update with relative ease. We wanted something we could keep current ourselves given we have average technical skills...SmartLabrador gave us that."

Sheila Downer, Manager of SmartLabrador says this collaborative initiative enabled the REDBs to support SmartLabrador's operation as a social enterprise.

"Through the business arrangement, SmartLabrador was able to apply its experience in developing web-based solutions for rural and remote communities and was able to build knowledge and skills within the zone boards to maintain and update the website," said Downer.

This collaborative approach to welcoming and attracting newcomers is positioning the Southern Labrador region as an attractive place to live and work. The site can be viewed at www.southernlabrador.ca.