

2019 Annual Report
Atikokan Economic Development Corporation



“Nature, Taking Back What Once Was”

photo courtesy Cami Lind (Instagram: [camellia160](#))



APRIL 23, 2020





Atikokan

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
A Community Futures Development Corporation

April 17, 2020

Atikokan continues to see slow changes throughout the last year.

The Atikokan Economic Development Corporation continues to work with our colleagues at the Town of Atikokan to meet an ongoing aging population, and what that will look like in regards to demand for homes, education, senior services, and social services. Regional and international out-shopping continue to be a challenge when facing the growth of local small businesses, with the rise of online shopping and cross-border postal services. We also continue to further relationships with the First Nations and Upsala, which are located in our service area, through the partnerships with the Employment Centre, the hiring of an intern and community champions in those locations.

On the industrial front, Resolute Forest Products continues to employ over 100 at its Sapawe mill, though they continue to look for ways to attract new talent to the community. Similar results are seen at BioPower Sustainable Energy Corporation, as they continue to provide steady employment to the community and have expanded their operations and services by adding in a bagging line. We continue to cautiously watch and work with both them and Ontario Power Generation (OPG) as their operations and their roles in industry are evolving, especially in the face of ever-changing external forces such as political forces and demand in the global market. Atikokan's ability to show itself as a safe, desirable location to live makes it an attractive destination, and we continue to see new people relocating in the community from near and far.

OPG's Atikokan station continues to operate with clean burning biomass fuel; the local operators at the plant continue to adapt to the new technology with great skill and pride in their work. The Agnico Eagles Mines Limited gold mine project, the Cassandra Energy project and the Nuinsco Sunbeam Gold property continue to prosper; hope remains that shifting global markets and government cooperation will move all projects back into full-scale development. We will continue to advocate for this and other large-scale projects as viable and responsible community building blocks.

Congratulations to the staff of the AEDC, your contributions to the community and economic development are well deserved and speak highly to the work being done here. I am pleased to extend my most sincere appreciation to all of the volunteers and staff who have committed countless hours to ensuring 2019 was another successful year for the AEDC.

Jim Turner, AEDC Chair





Town of Atikokan

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April, 2020

Thank you from Mayor and Council

On behalf of Atikokan Town Council and staff, I would like to once more thank the Atikokan Economic Development Corporation Board (AEDC) and staff for their ongoing support in community and economic development initiatives that benefit Atikokan and area. The AEDC is the ultimate group of information for small businesses and Atikokan community groups, and an important connection to important additional resources.

I want to congratulate the staff at the AEDC for all the great work they are doing. I know too that the AEDC staff are putting a great deal of effort to increase tourism in Atikokan and area. We are also pleased to have Waverley Dovey serving as an Atikokan Tourism intern promoting Atikokan as well as Katie Hannon serving on the Friends of White Otter Castle Board.

Atikokan is very fortunate to have such dedicated, progressive thinking Economic Development staff and we thank all of them very much for this.

By working with many groups, including Atikokan Town Council, the Atikokan Economic Development Corporation is able to help sustain and expand employment through community economic development initiatives. This is crucial for our entire community and area. We know there is very little, if any, unemployment in our town at this time. Anyone who is employable and wants a job and lives in Atikokan has one.

Having access to capital funds, through a Community Investment Fund at the Atikokan Economic Development Office for businesses is very important, especially at a time when it is becoming more difficult for the private sector to acquire such capital funds from other sources. The AEDC is a fair, free, accessible and confidential source of financing, something Atikokan certainly needs for small business and community projects in Atikokan.

The Atikokan Employment Centre, which is administered by the AEDC, is also an essential service to the workers and their families in Atikokan.

AEDC services such as those provided to tourism related activities, help to make for a better Atikokan. Special thanks for meeting with Atikokan Town Council and staff on several occasions this past year to discuss and plan for common issues.

This is something Atikokan Town Council and staff certainly appreciate and we hope to be able to continue meeting in the days ahead.

Congratulations on another successful year. Your efforts in community and economic development are necessary and very much appreciated. Keep up the good work.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis Brown".

Dennis Brown
Mayor

Community & Committee Reports

INVOLVEMENT AND UPDATES

TOURISM ATIKOKAN

Tourism Atikokan kicked off 2019, with the continued hard work from Sarah Leatherdale, with implementation and promotion of the top priorities set for Tourism Atikokan.

One of the top priorities developed in conjunction with the Tourism Development Committee is promotion and marketing. This involved looking at our current inventory of promotion and marketing assets, including highway signage. Sarah developed the Tourism Atikokan Highway Signage Report that highlights all fifteen highway signs that the Town of Atikokan is currently responsible for. In this report, you will see that of the fifteen signs, eight signs are in desperate need of immediate attention, while three signs require updating, and four signs are in good shape, or have recently been upgraded.

With the completion of this report, and a little bit of perfect timing, the Government of Canada released a new grant, Canadian Experience Fund (CEF) Program, through FedNor. This CEF grant is a national program to support communities across Canada to create, improve or enhance tourism products, facilities and experiences. In July, Katie Hannon, Community Development Advisor for the AEDC, applied to the CEF grant on behalf of Tourism Atikokan for 11 new highway signs, and salaries for brushing in front of the highway signs, 2 print materials and a promotional video. As of year-end the AEDC is still waiting to hear the results of this grant application.

Sarah Leatherdale and Hannah Hayes implemented the first celebration for tourism called, Atikokan's Tourism Week in early July. Celebrations kicked off with Canada Day celebrations, followed with highlighted tours of local attractions, the grand re-opening of the Atikokan Travel Information Centre, a movie night and Heli-tours flying over the community and surrounding area. The focus of this week was to raise awareness of local tourism amenities and all the great things Atikokan has to offer.

Tourism Atikokan reopened the Atikokan Travel Information Centre (formerly the Tourist Bureau) for the summer season on June 3 and welcomed 1034 travelers before it closed for the year on September 5. While in the bureau travelers were asked to complete a short survey and 35% of people indicated they would be coming into town following their stop. The AEDC, hired three summer students through the Canada Summer Jobs Grant and through the Summer Experience Program through Sunset Country to staff the Atikokan Travel Information Centre.



Tourism Atikokan's Facebook page continues to grow, through likes, interactions and comments. This night time aerial photo of the Town of Atikokan, alone had a reach of 12,500 people view. Facebook and Instagram continue to be the number one source of free promotion and marketing tools that Tourism Atikokan utilizes to promote Atikokan and the surrounding area.



In 2019 the Tourism Development Committee was successful in their application for the Community Investment Initiative for Northern Ontario (CIINO) grant which funds a full-time tourism development position for a three-year term. This position was offered to Waverley Dovey who started in October and has since been working hard to maintain and implement tourism initiatives in the community.

Waverley's first project in her role was to work with the Town of Atikokan to develop and distribute promotional packages for town facilities to attract out of town user groups. She is also working with the town to implement the Municipal Accommodation Tax which will generate funding for her position and Tourism Atikokan. Waverley continues to maintain Atikokan's online presence by updating and posting on the Visit Atikokan's website and social medias and by assisting local business in updating their listings online.

ANNUAL ATIKOKAN CHRISTMAS PARADE

With the fold of the Atikokan Kiwanis Club in 2019, the Atikokan Economic Development and the Atikokan Employment Centre decided to carry on this annual tradition. With the annual parade on the Saturday evening, it was decided to add in a tree lighting and caroling evening on the Friday night. Around 60 people from the community attended the tree lighting and caroling event, where they enjoyed hot chocolate, the lighting of the Christmas tree and caroling of Christmas songs together. The Annual Parade drew over 20 parade floats with 19 local businesses participating. This was a huge success for our first year organizing this event. We look forward to carrying on this tradition in the coming years.



FOREST SECTOR

The sector continued to be quite strong over the course of the year.

The Resolute sawmill at Sapawe operated throughout the entire year without interruption. They were in a constant hiring mode and relied heavily on the assistance of our Employment Services and held interviews at the AEDC every second week.

BioPower Sustainable Energy Corp. also enjoyed a full year of operation without interruption. The company added a bagging line to expand their market and optimize surplus production capacity. Domestic and off-shore markets were under development at year end for bagged pellets.

ENERGY SECTOR

Ontario Power Generation's Atikokan generating station was available as a peaking plant in 2019 and maintained a workforce of approximately eighty. Wood pellets to operate for the generating station were supplied by BioPower in Atikokan and Resolute Thunder Bay. The long-term future of this engine of the Atikokan economy is not determined at this time but Atikokan continues to advocate for the continued operation of this public asset.

SCI Stantech Joint Venture (SCISJV) continued work in 2019 to secure approval to develop an energy storage project in the old Steep Rock Iron Mines site. Engineers from Stantech and representatives of the ownership group visited the site, accompanied by MNR personnel working on the rehabilitation and mitigation plan. Following this site visit, engineers confirmed that the project was notionally feasible. SCISJV met with the Minister of Natural Resources, Energy, and Indigenous Affairs along with representatives of the owner's group and local representatives to present the project and seek support. The Minister has subsequently committed to assisting project proponents to navigate the provincial bureaucracy. The proponents are still committed to the development of this valuable energy storage project!

SENIORS' HOUSING

The Town and Atikokan Economic Development Corporation have made several attempts to put together a seniors' housing development over the past five years. Such a development would go a long way to easing the housing shortage here and offer seniors who want to stay in town a manageable way to do that. Those efforts have come up empty because ultimately the Town would end up having to hold (or at least guarantee) the mortgage, a move which would limit its ability to finance needed infrastructure work on roads and Town facilities.

Community Living Atikokan (CLA), which has been in the property business for decades providing accommodations for its members, has undertaken the development of a housing project with the hope of giving back to the community. CLA is working through the National Housing Strategy and with the Canadian Housing Mortgage Corporation, would hold the mortgage, and would manage the property as the tenants' landlord. The plan is to build a thirty-eight-unit seniors' housing complex that will all be ground-level, fully accessible units and have a small patio space. The unit will consist of thirty-one 2-bedroom units and seven 1-bedroom units.

CLA asked for in-kind support in the form of a donation of the land from the Town of Atikokan, and held a community meeting for input in October from community members. CLA's application was submitted to the Canadian Housing Mortgage Corporation in late 2019 and should expect results in early 2020.

FRIENDS OF WHITE OTTER CASTLE



The Friends of White Otter Castle continue to preserve and highlight the importance of Jimmy McOuatt and the White Otter Castle. The Friends is currently waiting for the outcome of their grant application to Northern Ontario Development Fund through FedNor. The main objective for applying to this grant is for repairs and maintenance to the White Otter Castle. The last major restoration was completed in the mid-1990s and the castle has since seen a need for improvement. As of year-end for 2019, the Friends of White Otter Castle is still waiting to hear the results of their grant application to FedNor.

The main accomplishment for the Friends for the year was being highlighted by Shaw Spotlight in the Forgotten History Series. The videos of the series were filmed in September 2019 and were put on the Facebook page in 2020.

The Friends purchased materials in 2018, but no repairs were completed in 2019, due to our grant application to FedNor.

Overall this was another slow year for the Friends of White Otter Castle, but they continue to fight to preserve this unique gem in northwestern Ontario.

THE PATH OF THE PADDLE ASSOCIATION

(Co-written by Clara Butikofer, Lise Sorensen & Michelle Savoie)

The Path of the Paddle Association (POPA) is an incorporated non-for-profit driven by volunteers, named for the renowned film maker and paddler Bill Mason. After completion of a 5 year business plan in 2019 it became time to start enacting the plans in all regions of the route. As a reminder, this is where the route meanders:

The 1,100km mainly water trail section of The Great Trail of Canada extends from the Animikii Trail traversing from Fort William Historic Park in Thunder Bay along the world-class beauty of the islands and mesas on Lake Superior to the International border at Pigeon River. The Omimi Trail then extends through La Vérendrye Provincial Park, abutting with the Boundary Waters in Minnesota, to the world famous Quetico Provincial Park and Atikokan. Continuing as the Maukinak Trail from Turtle River-White Otter Park canoeists paddle on to Dryden, the Migizi Trail then heads to Rushing River Provincial Park and Kenora and finally, the Inoo Oowan Trail traveling along the Winnipeg River to the Manitoba Border to join the existing TCT land trail (Borders to Beaches) at Whiteshell Provincial Park.



Within the Atikokan region, one can paddle from town to Nym Lake via the Atikokan River, and to Plateau Lake and Fire Lake from Nym Lake. Heading towards Dryden one can then paddle from town on the Atikokan River to White Otter Lake via the Eye River, Dashwa Lake and Clearwater West Lake.

In the summer of 2019, Path of the Paddle hired two Wilderness Trail Stewards with funding from the Canadian Summer Experiences Program. The job description required the stewards to groom campsites, portages, adjust signage and find the coordinates of sections of the route.

Also, with funding from Destination Northern Ontario, POPA was preparing to print an overview map of the entire route. The stewards were tasked with travelling some of the sections to provide consistent mapping information. At the time of writing this update, 3000 maps are in the process of being shipped from the printers and will be available for sale this season.

The Atikokan Regional Trail Committee (RTC) was busy with all aspects of the Stewards and the overview map. They provided GPS, chainsaw and brush saw training for the Wilderness Stewards. The Stewards were included in Quetico Provincial Park Red Cross First Aid Training. Markers were added on the Atikokan River.

In conjunction with Beaten Path Nordic Trails, POPA received \$5000 of funding from Trans Canada Trail to re-route an unsafe portage north of Upper Manitou Lake, and to clear debris that blocked Atikokan's land trail after the ice storm of October 2017. The entire Great Trail from Atikokan to Nym Lake was reopened and the accomplishment celebrated with Atikokan's 6th " Great Trail Loppet", February 23, 2020.

The Path of the Paddle's Trails Officer, Lise Sorenson, traveled with the stewards to complete a portage re-route north of Upper Manitou Lake and to install road signage at Kekekwa Creek. Trailhead signs at Rushing River Provincial Park and Vermilion Bay were updated with new maps and Path of the Paddle info. In September the trail segment between Upper Manitou and Thunder Cloud Lakes was audited and found to be in good condition. Rattlesnake Creek was perfectly navigable and the Thundercloud/unnamed lake portage was easy to walk in spite of reports of it being temporarily flooded out during a summer deluge that also caused havoc for the town of Dryden. Trail markers in this section were updated and GPS'd.

Data was re-submitted to MNRF to ensure that POPA portages are considered as values to be preserved under any future Forest Management.

Atikokan is represented on POPA's Board of Directors by Regional Trail Committee Chair Michelle Savoie and Ray Waterman. The Atikokan Regional Trail Committee promotes the Path of the Paddle and engages the community with such events as the Paddling Film Festival in conjunction with the Cross Quetico Ski Tour & dinner. A geocache provided by Canadian Geographic also was hidden in the Dawson Trail Campsite and sought after by treasure hunters during July and August 2019.

New RTC and Board members are essential to keep the great dream and vision alive. Michelle Savoie will be completing her second term on the POPA board this May. Michelle's dedication to POPA for the last 6 years has been greatly appreciated and she will be hard to replace on the board but will continue with the Atikokan RTC. A new Board member from Atikokan will be sought.

In reflection, the work completed by volunteers, not only in Atikokan, but in all the Regions of the trail is commendable. Path of the Paddle's common goal of creating a tourism product that will provide visitors and locals with outdoor experiences is currently moving upstream. It will be interesting to see where our POPA canoe takes us in 2020 during this challenging year.

THE HEART OF THE CONTINENT PARTNERSHIP (by Chris Stromberg, Coordinator)

The Heart of the Continent Partnership brings community members, local stakeholders, government agencies and private sector together to find common goals and beneficial projects to work towards. Our mission is to build vibrant and resilient communities that value and protect public lands in northeastern Minnesota and northwestern Ontario. Inclusivity has always been encouraged and we have a diverse group connecting and sharing their common goals.

Some of our accomplishments for the last year, from January 2019 to present are listed below:

We held our second big science symposium in Duluth MN at the university. It was well attended and the presentations were well received. United States Forest Service hosted a landscape modeling workshop and then we had a poster night presentation. The next day was all day oral presentations from agencies throughout the Heart of the Continent.

Our “Bike the Heart” Initiative, was a series of cycling events that showcased favourite trails, popular biking routes, bike shops, clubs and food/accommodations available for cycling tourism throughout the Heart of the Continent. This initiative began in late summer 2019 and into the fall. We worked with local clubs and organizations to put on 9 rides, all varying in difficulty and/or terrain. We are hoping to do some of the rides/events again late season 2020.

In the Fall of 2019 we held a general meeting (HOCP Gathering) in Crane Lake MN. Topics of talks included:

- Bike the Heart
- Science Symposium
- Sustainable recreation
- ‘TravelTheHeart’ website
- Dark Sky Initiative
- Proposed Crane lake inter-agency facility/visitor center

Throughout the year we have on-going call meetings

- Steering Committee conference calls – twice monthly
- Conference group call with key people working on our Dark Sky Initiative including land managers from Ontario Parks, Superior National Forest and Voyageurs National Park- also attended was representatives from Starry Skies Lake Superior IDA and Bob Meadows, Sounds and dark sky division NPS
- Coordinating a call with the International Dark Sky program manager
- Website administration training for Phase III on Travel the Heart Geo-tourism site
- Reviewing new phase III version of Travel the Heart Geo-tourism Map Guide and Web-site
- January Winter Gathering at Quetico in Ontario for all membership meeting, strategic planning and presentations
- Submitted requests for annual dues from collaborating organizations
- Collaborated with National Geo-tourism Council

Looking into 2020 the Heart of the Continent Partnership (HOCP) Steering Committee will continue to engage with quarterly as well as in person visits. Some of the big topics that are up for conversation in 2020 include the Dark Sky Initiative, Bike the Heart 2020, phase three of the website migration and sustainable recreation & tourism as well as sustainability of HOCP.

COMMUNITY FUTURES ONTARIO (CFO) & COMMUNITY FUTURES NETWORK OF CANADA

The Executive Director continued to serve as Past President of Community Futures Ontario (CFO) as well as chair of the Management Information Systems committee. CFO worked tirelessly to advocate for increased operational funding for Community Futures organizations and increased autonomy for boards. CFO made significant contributions to the national effort to secure recognition from the federal government for the essential role Community Futures plays in the economic and social well-being of rural Canada.

The E.D. also represents northern Ontario at the Community Futures Network of Canada (CFNC) board table. CFNC worked diligently with Canada's Rural Development Agencies to have the terms and conditions of Community Futures modernized. As a member of the representation committee, the E.D. met with many senior federal bureaucrats, MPs and Ministers to champion this cause. Although CFNC was unsuccessful in securing additional funding for the Community Futures program, a number of gains were made in terms of lending limits and interest rate considerations. The CFNC's advocacy activities continue and the organization is hopeful for additional movement by the Federal government in the future.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS COUNCIL OF ONTARIO (EDCO)

In February 2019 the AEDC's Gord Knowles was elected to serve as Vice President of the Board of Directors of the Economic Developers Council of Ontario. Gord co-chaired both the organization's conference and awards committees, as well as sat on the finance committee and human resources committee. EDCO, which has grown to be the country's largest economic development body meets six times in person annually in various locations in Ontario, and the organization serves over 1,100 economic development and municipal members through networking, events, and professional development and awareness campaigns.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & AWARDS

AEDC's staff continued to develop their skills through additional professional development, in an effort to increase our capacity to assist clients and better our understanding of economic development as it relates to community building. In 2019 staff attended annual conferences for the Community Futures Ontario (CFO), the CF Network of Canada, the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO) the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit, Econous Conference and the PAROBiz Awards Night, as well as a number of meetings for regional projects including Tourism Northern Ontario, the Northwest CF Network, the Northwest Training and Adjustment Board and the Heart of the Continent Partnership.

Senior Community Development Advisor Gord Knowles completed the University of Waterloo's Year 3 Fellowship course 'Leadership and Advanced Economic Development Insights', and will complete college certified education through the Leadership Development series at Confederation College in Spring 2019.

Community Development Advisor Katie Hannon, after successfully obtaining her Certificate in Economic Development, continues to work towards obtaining the Ec.D designation. Katie and Garry completed Innovation Leadership Training in Thunder Bay in May, 2019.

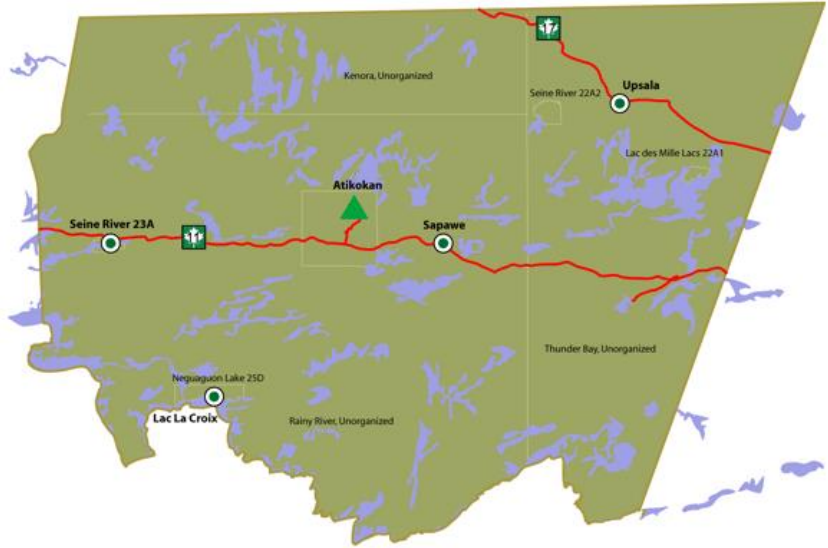
AEDC Office Administrator Annette Bryk and Administrative Assistant Brigitte Tribe continue to participate in building skills in order to facilitate the in-house delivery of bookkeeping and loan services. Such programs include FaaSBank, Sage and Valeyo Insurance.

Staff from the Atikokan Employment Centre organized and participated in a multi-day course from Penny Trembley called Play Nice in the Sandbox, which is related to maximizing team productivity, performance and profitability. Additionally, staff from the Atikokan Employment Centre also attended training throughout the year related to Youth Engagement, Health and Safety, Career Development. Brad, Denine and Cindy have become Certified Career Strategist through Career Professionals of Canada, this work brings them closer to becoming a Certified Career Development Practitioner.

Staff continue to attend seminars and courses designed to maintain their designations and build skillsets.

OUR SERVICE AREA

The AEDC offers its services to the residents of Upsala, Lac La Croix, Lac Des Mille Lacs and Seine River. We continue to strengthen our relationship with these outlying areas, as we attend meetings together and finance projects within their communities.



Map courtesy of Community Futures Ontario

DID YOU KNOW? The AEDC's service area is over 2,400 square kilometers!

CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

Our experience in dealing with the Atikokan Economic Development we found the AEDC to be quite pleasant and easy to work with while being treated with respect and courtesy. We found all the staff to be quite knowledgeable, ready and willing to answer any questions or concerns we had or might have had. Staff also offered advice, and in our opinion, they wouldn't hesitate to go "the extra mile" to help! We have not seen anything so far that would indicate, in any way that the AEDC is not willing to work with us [or anyone] in a positive manner. We believe the AEDC is a very well-run organization and in our opinion is a definite asset to the community of Atikokan and surrounding areas.

We haven't had a lot of experience with the Atikokan Employment Centre yet, but when we did use their services they were very helpful. They did their best to help us in finding employees and answered any questions we had in regards to government programs available for wage subsidies. We have no concerns in dealing with them in the future.

-Dave Werenko & Jenn Fogg, Owners Perch Lake Lodge

BOARD RECOGNITION- DR. KEN SAWCHUK

We would like to thank Dr. Ken Sawchuk, whose years of experience helped steer the AEDC with strong, passionate leadership to build our business community. In the fall of 2019, Ken resigned from the AEDC Board, who was serving as an AEDC Board Director and the Chair of the Investment Fund Committee. Ken has served on the AEDC Board of Directors, and all previous names, since inception in the mid 1970's. Since being on the Board, Ken has provided leadership, personal business experience and rational influence to the AEDC, which was welcomed by both staff members and the many other board members he served with. Our everlasting thanks to Dr Ken Sawchuk for his dedication to the AEDC and the community of Atikokan.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

METRICS FOR SUCCESS (JAN 1 TO DEC 31 2019)

Atikokan Economic Development Corporation

General Inquiries	↓ 161
In-Depth Counselling and Information Services Interviews	↓ 106
New CED Projects	↑ 19
Number of Community-Based Projects in Progress	↑ 37

Atikokan Employment Centre

In-Person Visits	↑ 3,407 (+838)
Electronic Visits	↑ 18,098 (+2,904)

Social Media Accounts

Website	AEDC	↑ 14,776 Visitors (+1,445)
		↑ 24,707 Actions (+3,313)
	VisitAtikokan.ca	↑ 15,816 Visitors (+4,529)
		↑ 42,214 Page Views (+16,009)
Twitter	@atikokanedo	↑ 197 Followers (+15)
		↑ 14 Tweets (+11)
		↑ 6653 Impressions (+4,547)
Facebook	AEDC	↑ 250 Likes (+39)
		↑ 11,136 Post Reach (+6,750)
		↑ 3047 Engaged (+2,403)
	Tourism Atikokan	↑ 1,952 Likes (+154)
		↑ 126,071 Post Reach (+37,511)
	↑ 13877 Engaged (+5,373)	
Instagram	@tourismatikokan	438 Followers (+147)
		48 Posts
		1,903 Engagements
		12,578 Post Reach

*Facebook metrics changed in 2018 to reduce organic engagement and reach



DID YOU KNOW?

In 2019, 165 meetings and seminars were held at the AEDC offices by non-profit groups!

LOCAL LOAN DISBURSEMENT

SMALL BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT, LOANS & THE COMMUNITY

Our mandate: Working in partnership with the people of Atikokan and the surrounding areas, to generate and maintain permanent employment through the creation and support of self-employment initiatives and economic-based community projects.

The AEDC works with local residents to create and maintain jobs by:

- ❖ by providing access to a loan program;
- ❖ providing technical and advisory support, such as help with their business plan, cash flow projections, staffing issues, training, etc.;
- ❖ works with the Town of Atikokan and community groups, planning to the future;

2019 was another relatively slower year in terms of loan disbursement, as businesses held steady and we did not see dramatic wholesale changes in the ownership landscape. During 2019, our office disbursed new investment funds of \$559,587 towards new loans. In total, 12 loans were refinanced, amalgamated and/or disbursed to clients in a wide range of sectors. We continue to work with traditional lenders to transition its loan clients to their services as per our mandate, but uptake from those institutions has been a challenge.

Since 1988, Atikokan Economic Development Corporation has dispersed more \$17 million in Atikokan and the surrounding region.

With the AEDC, five additional CFDCs within northwestern Ontario form a corporate pool for dispensing larger loans: Superior North (Terrace Bay), Rainy River Futures (Fort Frances), Greenstone EDC (Geraldton), Thunder Bay Ventures and Lake of the Woods Business Incentive Corporation (Kenora).

Atikokan currently has 10 of these regional investments totaling \$563,928 in that portfolio. This partnership allows the AEDC to consider investments in excess of \$350,000 by sharing the risk with five other partners (up to a maximum loan of \$500,000).

All funding applications received by the AEDC are reviewed by our Community Investment Fund Committee for approval by the Board of Directors. This committee is comprised of up to four members from the community at-large, and three members from the AEDC Board of Directors, all of whom have extensive business experience and a high regard for community building.

We gratefully acknowledge the following for the many volunteer hours throughout the year that they contribute: Dr. Ken Sawchuk (Chair) (Resigned Nov 15/2019), Tami Stinson, Elizabeth MacKay, Kim Cross, Jack Pierce and Elvin Rydberg.

BUSINESSES & JOBS CREATED/MAINTAINED VIA BUSINESS LOANS

YEAR	BUSINESSES STARTED	BUSINESSES MAINTAINED	JOBS CREATED	JOBS MAINTAINED
2014	8	11	19	33
2015	3	16	19	37
2016	9	6	38	21
2017	0	10	4	40
2018	2	17	14	57
2019	2	8	14	38

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO BALANCE

YEAR	LOANS ISSUED	LOAN AMOUNT	REPAYMENTS	PORTFOLIO BALANCE
2014	20	\$642,032	\$540,749	\$3,093,750
2015	20	\$1,116,076	\$468,806	\$3,629,099
2016	18	\$1,129,989	\$493,235	\$4,266,474
2017	11	\$220,916	\$501,617	\$3,985,152
2018	23	\$930,284	\$541,180	\$4,184,734
2019	12	\$559,587	\$545,161	\$4,189,933

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO ACTIVITY

SECTOR	AMOUNT OF LOANS ISSUED IN 2019	CURRENT # OF LOANS IN PORTFOLIO	CURRENT AMOUNT OF LOANS
Hospitality	\$266,333	11	\$643,112
Agriculture	--	1	\$34,933
Mining	--	--	--
Service	\$144,269	21	\$1,342,843
Tourism	\$10,000	6	\$418,990
Manufacturing	--	1	\$108,999
Transportation	\$26,557	5	\$368,826
Retail	\$25,000	14	\$1,066,581
Forestry	\$87,428	2	\$205,649
Research/Development	--	--	--
Culture & Arts	--	--	--
TOTAL	\$559,587	61	\$4,189,933

Atikokan Employment Centre

ANNUAL REPORT

BY BRAD BEYAK, EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLOR

An “extraordinary” year at the Atikokan Employment Centre or.... maybe better said as an “atypical” year. Over the last year, we began to see more and more employers struggling to find appropriate, skilled/qualified employees to work in their local businesses. Regionally, there appears to be a marked increase in the number of employment opportunities available. As the demand for labour further increases, it is developing into a job seekers job market, where this is considerable choice for future employment opportunities.

A number of factors are influencing this situation but the population demographics of the Rainy River District and ongoing outmigration from our area pose the biggest challenges. Notably, 60% of the total workforce in the Rainy River District are 47 years or older (6 in 10). Additionally, 43% of the workforce are age 57 years or older (4 in 10). As of 2016, 28% of Atikokan residents (1 in 3) were identified to be between 15 to 44 years of age, with the majority being over the age of 45 years. As can be seen, most of the workforce in the Rainy River District are at an age where they are now actively planning or contemplating exiting the workforce. To address this circumstance, it has been proposed that Northern Ontario as a whole needs more than 8,000 new people per year, for the next 25 years, to sustain our current quality of life (Cirtwill, Northern Policy Institute, 2019).

Although these facts present a challenge, we have seen some in migration to our area with individuals coming from larger regional centres and throughout Canada to take advantage of employment opportunities that exist in the area. But it is becoming apparent, that in migration to date is insufficient to fully address the needs of local employers.

As many employers are already aware, increased skill building initiatives and funded training opportunities that are offered locally to area residents are needed. It is also anticipated that employers will need to step up with the intent of further increasing on-the-job skills training to fully address their business’s human resource needs. However, it is recognized this strategy will result in employers reducing their business’s productivity in the short term, as they spend more time training employees who lack the skills needed to be efficient and effective in their jobs. Realize though, there is a number of benefits to employers who provide ongoing training to their employees. This includes higher levels of employee retention, improved employee productivity and positive moral which may to help off-set business’s decreased productivity resulting from the implementation of increased skills training.

Interestingly at the community level, there remains a considerable number of individuals who continue to seek employment. Some of these individuals have a number of barriers to employment, but with appropriate guidance, support and training they would have the opportunity to fully enter the labour market and reliably sustain employment and better meet employer’s needs.

With the continued support of Employment Ontario funded through the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, the Atikokan Employment Centre continues its’ efforts in connecting workers and employers, further supporting meaningful local training and skill development opportunities, assisting those transitioning from either education to employment, or employment to education/skill development and helping businesses with their ongoing employee recruitment efforts and training needs. In fact, it is anticipated that need for services offered through the Atikokan Employment Centre will only increase as area employers attempt to deal with the developing human resource short falls.

In the current year, the Atikokan Employment Centre has continued to provide quality employment services and related assistance to the residents of Atikokan and the surrounding area. This is inclusive of Seine River First Nation, Lac La Croix First Nation and the community of Upsala which all fall in the Atikokan Economic Development Corporations catchment area. We wish to thank Employment Ontario, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) and Kimberly Williamson with MLTSD for their continued confidence in our employment services and their ongoing financial contributions to assist area employers and residents with their employment and training needs.

In terms of access to our services, over the last year, we have had in excess of 18,250 visitors to the Atikokan Employment Centre's website. These visitors took more than 51,500 actions while using the website resulting in 50,675 pageviews. Those accessing the website were most interested in searching for local jobs and employment opportunities. Most website users accessed the website looking for local jobs from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm predominantly at the beginning of each week.

The majority of visitors to the Atikokan Employment Centre's website resided in Canada. Statistics on website use that residents of all the Provinces in Canada accessed the AEC website but most were from Ontario. Most Ontarians using the website resided in Toronto, Ontario. The majority of other visitors resided in the various communities across Northern Ontario with the most being from either Fort Frances or Atikokan. Accesses from the United States were also seen by residents of California, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Texas, Georgia and Florida. Outside of the USA, international visitors to the website resided in China, Slovakia and India.

In person visits to the Atikokan Employment Centre's resource centre continued to be frequent over the last year. Visitors to the resource centre are usually seeking advice/guidance regarding job application processes, employment searching, computer/office equipment use. Accesses to the resource centre often result as visitors require specific information regarding programs, further details regarding potential training/educational opportunities and associated funding, information on available local services and/or for assistance in completing Employment Insurance reports. Moreover, the Atikokan Employment Centre continues to host Service Canada representatives on a monthly basis to provide area residents with the opportunity to consult and discuss concerns and issues related Federally funded programs during an in-person visit. The Atikokan Employment Centre continues to host Service Canada representatives each month by providing a private office space with an appropriately secured internet connection.

To better serve area residents, we have continued to upgrade our computer systems and recently amped up our public access WIFI. We continue to provide program participants with a considerable amount of online training that is focused on occupational health and safety, job searching, employer expectations and workplace wellness. Notably, all staff are fully able to connect via telephone or through video conferencing to further expand and facilitate potential client access.

Through the delivery Atikokan Employment Centre's "regular" Employment Services program, over 107 individuals received a high level of support in their search for appropriate employment or for accessing education/skills development opportunities. This service includes career exploration, resume creation, interview preparation, job search activities, placement services and referral to educational or necessary community-based services.

Eleven of the 107 individuals accessing more intensive services participated in work training placements with local employers who were provided with an incentive to participate. In total, close to \$25000.00 in incentives were provided to employers who participated in on the job training placements. Additionally, 9 individuals received financial support totaling over \$1500.00 to acquire specific certification training or personal supports/items (e.g. safety boots) needed for employment.

Interest continues to remain relatively low with respect to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's Second Career Program which provides laid off workers to attend funded training opportunities including up to 2 years of post secondary education to the diploma level. The majority of

individuals who expressed an interest in the program this year were interested in completing “AZ” Truck Driver Training, Heavy Equipment Operation Training and lastly Business Diploma training. Most individuals seeking the training identified that they see it as the most efficient method to re-enter the labour market in occupations that tend to have good employment prospects in our area. Another consideration of potential program participant’s is they are wanting to attend programs that take place in the area/locally, as opposed to having to relocate for further education and skill development. Although the Second Career program continues to be available, the Government recently announced that they would be reviewing the Second Career program. It is felt that this review was initiated as the associated funding and program requirements have not been changed since the inception of the program approximately 10 years ago.

With respect youth related programming the Atikokan Employment Centre was once again provided with funding through the Youth Job Connection programs. The Youth Job Connection programs are designed to support individuals 15 to 29 years-old deemed to be experiencing barriers to their employment. Notably, youth who are eligible for the Youth Job Connection programs are paid a stipend equivalent to minimum wage to participate in pre-employment training designed to address their barriers to the labour market.

As part of the Youth Job Connection programs, the Atikokan Employment Centre dispersed over \$70,000 to provide supports directly to participants and employers hosting work training placements. In total, 41 individuals accessed youth-oriented programs and had the opportunity to access supports. Of these 41 individuals, 23 participated in work training placements with their employers being provided with an incentive, and 16 accessed financial support for the purchase of items or services needed for their work. Thank you to Denine Richard, Michelle Gushulak and Melanda Morden for leading these youth initiatives locally.

Relatively unique to Employment Service Providers in Northwestern Ontario, the Atikokan Employment Centre continues to coordinate the activities of the area interagency group. This group which meets monthly is comprised of faith groups, area educational, social service, protective services and health care providers. The regular meetings provide a forum for the various attendees to provide an update of on their programs and exchange information about any new initiatives in our area. It also provides an opportunity for the various groups attend to discuss methods to fully collaborate in the delivery of services to the community and area residents. Cindy Geurts, with the Atikokan Employment Centre. has continued to be the main contact and coordinator of this group and she is thanked for making these sessions a valuable resource for all who attend.

As we continue to further build increased access to Employment Ontario services, the Atikokan Employment Centre continued to provide outreach services in Lac La Croix First Nation, Seine River First Nation and Upsala, Ontario. This work has been made easier through the purchase of suitable computers and the part-time employment of outreach workers in some locations. We will continue to provide services in these outlying areas by regularly visiting each and promoting Employment Ontario programs that are available through the Atikokan Employment Centre. Thank you to Rachel White, Chief Clayton Ottetail, Chief Michael Ottetail, Jim Windigo, Karen Geyschick, Rachel Kabatay, Zerlina Whitecrow, Cleo Wolfsiffer, Michael Chlapak, Debilyn Neslon-Albert and Mayor Dennis Brown for supporting our efforts in each of their associated communities.

To further increase our community outreach activities, the Atikokan Employment Centre also continued to regularly attend community events and being actively involved with the Atikokan High School by providing students with information regarding programs and potential career opportunities. Thank you to Robroy Donaldson, Beth Fairfield and Ed Ojala for continuing to support our work with local students.

Over the course of the last year, our facilities continue to be an appropriate location for employers to complete training, hold meetings, conduct interviews and showcase available employment opportunities. We continued to facilitate a number of employers in these activities by assisting them with the promotion,

coordination and scheduling of hiring events designed to attract local and area applicants. Moreover, we have actively supported trainers who have been wanting to conduct training locally and will continue to collaborate with businesses to support any skill development opportunities in our area. We also independently promoted training locally by hosting training seen valuable to local employers and other Employment Ontario service providers. Most recently, we hosted Penny Tremblay who delivered training titled "Playing Nice in the Sandbox".

Our attention has also been held by the Provincial Government's announcement that it has the full intention to transform Employment Ontario by contracting out the management of these services, creating a limited number of Service System Managers that will be responsible for overseeing the delivery of employment related services in their designated areas. It has been proposed that Northwestern Ontario will have one Service System Manager that will oversee all services from the area of White River, Ontario to the Manitoba border. This will include employment related services now delivered by Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. It is uncertain at this time where the Atikokan Employment Centre will stand in the transformation process. It is my understanding that the Service System Manager will have the authority to determine who will provide employment services, where they will be delivered and how these services are provided. As a trial and learning experience, the Provincial Government has selected 3 Service System Managers to oversee employment related services in designated prototype areas in Southern Ontario. Service System Managers include one Ontario College, one consortium lead by a not-for-profit group based out of the United States and a private company headquartered in Australia.

To bolster the Atikokan Employment Centre's chances of securing a future contract with a potential Service System Manager we remain open to working with any interested parties. We have also been actively involved and on occasion taken the lead role in coordinating discussions with our community partners across the Northwest and Northern Ontario regarding the transformation process. Moreover, staff have continued to participate in educational opportunities with the intent of the Atikokan Employment Centre having the most qualified employees in the region to ensure our future success. Staff have continued to complete training activities that augment their ability to provide services to those deemed to be disabled, experiencing mental health difficulties and improve the methods and efficacy of service delivery. Staff continue to pursue their full certification as Career Development Practitioners and obtain full registration with the Career Development Practitioners Certification Board of Ontario and the Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada.

Lastly, a sincere thank you to all of our community contacts and employers who continue to support our programs and assist in making our services successful by allowing individuals to advance further in their careers and occupational goals.

Sincerely,

Brad Beyak

Meet Our Team

Atikokan Economic Development Corporation

Executive Director

Garry McKinnon

B. Comm.

General management responsibilities including personnel, financial planning and management, business planning, government relations, technical and advisory services to businesses and organizations.

Senior Community Development Advisor

Gord Knowles

B.A., Ec.D, CEcD, APEC-CBC

Business planning and counseling, loan disbursement and compliance, CED projects, tourism marketing and promotion, liaison with community groups and organizations. Resigned in April 2019.

Community Development Advisor

Katie Hannon

B.T.M.

Business planning and counseling, loan disbursement, CED projects, marketing and promotion, liaison with community groups and organizations.

Office Administrator

Annette Bryk

Contract administration, financial recordkeeping, bookkeeping, loans administration, benefits administration, recording of official minutes.

Administrative Assistant

Brigitte Tribe

Reception and customer relations, banking, accounts payable/ receivable, correspondence, recordkeeping, community information.



Atikokan Employment Centre

Counsellor & General Manager

Brad Beyak

B.A., H.B.P.E., MSc., R.Kin

Employment program development, employment counseling and community outreach.

Case Managers

Cindy Geurts

Denine Richard

Employment Centre client file management, resume and cover letter assistance, data management.

Program Access Facilitator

Michelle Gushulak

Resource & Information Clerks

Christy Tattrie

Debilyn Nelson-Albert (Upsala Outreach Office)

Employment Centre reception, maintain job board, resume and cover letter assistance.

AEDC's In-Office Partner

Heart of the Continent Partnership Coordinator

Chris Stromberg

Tourism Development Intern

Sarah Leatherdale (Finished Contract July 5, 2019)

Waverley Dovey (Contract Started October 2019)

AEDC Board of Directors

We wish to thank the 2018-19 Board of Directors and community volunteers of the Atikokan Economic Development Corporation. Your tireless dedication and commitment - to not just the AEDC, but to our community as a whole - allows us to operate as an effective organization.

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SHANNON RIDING

DR. KEN SAWCHUK
RESIGNED NOV. 15/19

AEDC Committees

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15/19

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BRIAN STIMSON

AD HOC COMMITTEES – AS REQUIRED

Looking Ahead

Atikokan continues to benefit from a high rate of employment, although with a good deal of churn. Regional opportunities tend to draw employees to positions offering higher wages, better advancement opportunities or improved benefits. This opens up entry level positions within the community and surrounding region.

In Atikokan in particular, we are experiencing a slow erosion of the commercial/retail sector. This is due in part to labour availability, regulations, and online and out-shopping. The biggest reason for owners closing their businesses is a lack of willing purchasers. As Canadians, we seem to be getting more risk averse; i.e. less willing to take chances. The many options for hourly or salaried employment provide disincentive for people to consider entrepreneurship as an option. In the face of all of these challenges, the AEDC will focus our attention on assisting existing businesses with succession planning in hopes of transitioning businesses to new ownership when the time is right.

On the heels of marginal successes in the development of the Upsala office, the AEDC and AEC will continue to support the community. In 2019 the office has been staffed three days a week with an employment services clerk who assists employers and job seekers in the community. Also, in 2019, in collaboration with the Upsala Recreation Committee, an Intern was hired through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to assist with tourism promotion and provide community development and business support. AEDC staff will mentor these employees and periodically visit the community to provide on-site support.

There is modest activity on mineral development front across the region. Development projects including Nuinsco; who have commenced diamond drilling at their Sunbeam Gold Property, Ambershaw Metallics Inc; with their Bending Lake Iron Project and Agnico Eagle Mine; with their Hammond Reef Gold Project. The AEDC will attempt to monitor those activities and provide any information and support the proponents require. We will continue to pressure the Ministry of Natural Resources to free up some of the Steep Rock lands for exploration where they are not going to be directly impacted by flooding.

The future of the Atikokan Generating Station needs to be entrenched for the foreseeable future. There are less than five years left on the existing contract and now is the time to press for the next era of the AGS. The AEDC will support the Mayor and Town of Atikokan in discussions with the province and IESO to secure a new commitment. In addition, the AEDC will work to identify businesses and industries that could collocate on the AGS site and utilize AGS services.

Tourism continues to be an important sector to the AEDC. Our offices in Atikokan and Upsala will provide support to the dedicated tourism interns in both communities. We will also provide the necessary support for the Atikokan Tourism Committee, Path of the Paddle, and Heart of the Continent. The Tourism Development Committee is working with the Town of Atikokan to implement a Municipal Accommodation Tax, and the AEDC will continue to provide any support requested to assist. The Tourism Development Committee will also be working on updating and producing marketing materials that will promote the community of Atikokan.

2020 looks to be an exciting but yet challenging year for businesses and people in the community with the rise of Covid-19.

Reaching the AEDC

COMMENTS? SUGGESTIONS? IDEAS? GET A HOLD OF US!

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ATIKOKANEDO
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