

2020 Annual Report

Atikokan Economic Development Corporation



“There’s a Reason they call it Ontario’s Sunset Country”

photo courtesy Alan Gauthier-Poelman

This years Annual Report is dedicated to the memory of Elvin Rydberg



JUNE 22, 2021





Atikokan

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
A Community Futures Development Corporation

April 17, 2020

2020 was a year for the books with so much going on in the World, but for the most part Atikokan continued to hold on and preserve once again.

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. In October 2020, after two and a half years of planning, Community Living Atikokan broke ground on the Aspen Court Senior Living complex, this complex will house 38 apartments for seniors. This is just one step working towards the demands for our senior population. Regional and international out-shopping slowed down this year due to the Pandemic, but the rise of online shopping skyrocketed since stores were forced to close. 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. There are 24 active mining sites in the immediate area, the main ones being the Agnico Eagles Mines Limited gold mine project and the Nuinsco Sunbeam Gold property. The Cassandra Energy project continues 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 during this challenging year, your continued 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 2020 was another successful year for the AEDC.

Jim Turner, AEDC Chair





Town of Atikokan

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March, 2021

Thank you from Mayor, Council and staff

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, as well as an important connection to all business firms.

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 still serving as the Atikokan Tourism intern promoting Atikokan as well as Katie Hannon serving on the Friends of White Otter Castle Board and promoting tourism for our town as well.

We are very pleased to have Gord Knowles back in Atikokan now serving as a senior coordinator with Destination Northern Ontario where he will work on investment attraction and economic development.

This has been a difficult year due to COVID-19. We have lived in very unpredictable and unprecedented times. As our community partners are working hard to vaccinate citizens, we are hopeful this will make the year better.

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 can get one here.

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.

Thank you for working hard during these challenging, difficult times. 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 started with Tourism Development Coordinator, Waverley Dovey, attending a workshop in Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls on RV route development. This workshop led to Atikokan joining a working group run by Destination Northern Ontario to develop a touring loop from Winnipeg to Thunder Bay.



In early 2020 Tourism Atikokan found out they were successful in their 2019 Canadian Experiences Fund Program grant application through FedNor. This grant covered a variety of initiatives including refreshing and printing of town maps and promotional booklets, brushing around and installation of 11 new highway signs, and the production of a series of short promotional videos. All but one of the 11 signs have been installed and the booklets updated and printed. Production has begun on the promotional videos with the first round of filming having been completed in July.

Efforts to promote municipal facilities saw early success with a multi team hockey tournament in February and further bookings requests later in the year. Plans have been made to continue promoting the Recreation and Wellness Centre and other town facilities as interregional travel opens up.

Tourism Atikokan opened the Travel Information Centre (TIC) on July 13 and greeted 428 people before it's closure on September 4. The TIC saw a shortened season and reduced traffic compared to 2019 for a number of reasons directly and indirectly related to the COVID-19 pandemic however maintained a strong average of 11 visitors a day. The AEDC hired two summer students through the Canada Summer Jobs Grant to staff the TIC.

In collaboration with the AEDC a promotion was run through Horizon Media to promote Atikokan to the Greater Toronto Area. This promotion included a print ad in Horizon's Travel Magazine as well as the periodic showing of a short promotional video in Dundas Square in downtown Toronto over one week.

Tourism Atikokan continues to maintain a strong online presence through their social medias and various other online listings with some of the most popular posts being the video of the Dundas Square ad and a Then/Now photo comparing past Atikokan spots to the present.



ANNUAL ATIKOKAN CHRISTMAS PARADE

In 2019, the Atikokan Economic Development and the Atikokan Employment Centre decided to take on the role of organizing this event, in hopes to do so for many years.

2020 proved to be a challenging year with Covid changing or cancelling many tourism and community events. The Annual Christmas Parade was no exception to this. The AEDC determined there was no safe way to host this event with large crowds watching and participating in the parade, as well as no safe way to meet Santa in the mall. WE are hopeful to be able to continue this event in 2021.

REGIONAL RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUND (RRRF)

Near the end of March, FedNor announced that the AEDC and all other Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) in northern Ontario would be invited to deliver the RRRF to our small business community. In essence, the RRRF allows for unsecured, interest-free loans of up to forty thousand dollars and no payments for an extended period of time. If seventy-five percent of the loan is repaid by the last day of 2022 the remaining twenty-five percent will be forgiven.

The AEDC received a contract for \$772,548 on May 22nd. The RRRF was promoted through local media, social media, direct mail, personal visits and phone calls. Uptake for the program was very slow in the early days so FedNor amended the agreement by reducing the amount by \$386,274. That amount was wire transferred back to FedNor for re-distribution to CFDCs with high volumes of RRRF loans.

The businesses that have taken advantage of this loan program are very appreciative and have expressed their thanks to FedNor and the AEDC.

15 Businesses were helped through the RRRF Project with a total of \$463,774.00 given out to support the local economy. Also, with this money the AEDC purchased enough supplies to give out 50 Covid Safety Cleaning Supply Kits to local businesses. Kits included plastic gloves, face masks, re-useable face masks, face shields, hand sanitizers, cleaning wipes and spray.

FOREST SECTOR

After nearly two years of development, the steering committee for the amalgamation of the Crossroute and Sapawe forests and development of a new forest management company was completed. The Boundary Waters Forest Management Corporation (BWPMC) took over responsibility for management of the forest in April. BWPMC is governed by a board of directors comprised of community, industry, indigenous, and harvest representatives. The first year of operations was not without its challenges but the early reports from outside interests are quite positive. Garry McKinnon is Atikokan's representative on the board and he enthusiastically voices our community's interests in preserving jobs and developing opportunities.

Although 2020 was not the greatest year from many perspectives, the forest industry fared rather well. With the exception of a bit of dip late in the year, prices for lumber, panel board, and pulp all trended up through the year and lumber and panel board prices were particularly strong. The combination of natural disasters and increased home renovations and projects were a major contributor to these trends.

Atikokan Biopower said goodbye to their manager, Brad Sampson this year and promoted Melissa Bates from within to fill the vacancy. Mr. Sampson moved to High Level, Alberta to be the first manager of a

new pellet mill in that community. Biopower continues to be a primary supplier of wood pellets to the Atikokan Generating Station. The company also makes a line of pellets for domestic use and they continue research and development of new products.

Production continues to improve at Resolute Forest Products sawmill at Sapawe. The company has also celebrated several safety milestones this year. A reliable supply of trained and trainable workers continues to be the greatest challenge for this industry. A cursory review of local, regional, national, and international demographics indicate that this will continue to be an issue! The company continually expresses their appreciation for the efforts of the Atikokan Employment Centre to assist with worker recruitment and development.

ENERGY SECTOR

The Atikokan Generating Station (AGS) continues to be an important driver of our economy. AGS is a major direct employer and the indirect employment derived from this operation is substantial. The majority of employment at Atikokan Biofuels can be attributed to the AGS as can many jobs in forest harvesting and transportation. With the current contract with Ontario due to expire in 2024, there is urgency to encourage the contract to be renewed, extended, or renegotiated. There is some consolation in the fact that the IESO Annual Planning Outlook published in December 2020 shows biomass energy through to 2040!

Steep Rock Joint Venture Partnership remain committed to developing energy storage capacity at the former Steep Rock Iron Mines property. This enterprise is owned by four First Nations and supported by one of the largest engineering firms in the world. Early in 2020 it appeared as though some progress was being made with the province of Ontario regarding this project but the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic brought all discussion to a standstill. The IESO document referred to above gives significant emphasis on energy storage as part of Ontario's long-term energy strategy. Perhaps this bodes well for the future of the Steep Rock project.

BROADBAND

The AEDC and our CF colleagues in Fort France, Kenora, Dryden and Red Lake are supporting the Bell Canada application to Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada to the Universal Broadband Fund. If successful, this project will see improved access to broadband internet in many locations throughout the region.

If the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that high-speed internet is essential to survival of business in modern society. The ability to secure inventories, maintain customer relations, facilitate bi-directional transportation, and execute transactions without human contact relies almost exclusively on digital communication. Without high-speed internet, many of our businesses are extremely disadvantaged and at risk. A further lesson from the pandemic is that there is that people have learned that remote work and work from home is indeed possible and that living in less densely populated areas is safer, and in many ways, more desirable. High-speed internet is essential to accommodate these lifestyle changes and seize the opportunity they represent.

Personal mobility has been almost eliminated due to the health risk of infection transmission. Digital mobility and communication have become extremely important to support mental well-being in a time when we cannot meet with friends and family. Again, high-speed internet connectivity is essential!

The delivery of healthcare services has transitioned to most telehealth services to protect the public and the healthcare community. Access to, and participation in these services is limited due to the challenges with high-speed internet. Folks with poor or no connectivity are excluded from access to services essential to their well-being.

Much of the economy in the Atikokan area is resource based. For the most part, the resource sector is located outside of the built-up areas and away from traditional internet service access. For safety and commerce reasons, it is imperative that these drivers of our economy have reliable high-speed internet.

UPSALA & LAC DES MILLE LACS AREA



Upsala with the help of the AEDC, was able to hire an intern through NOHFC. This intern was able to promote tourism and economic development for Upsala and area.

In 2020, one of the major accomplishments was securing for a Tourism Grant through FedNor. This allowed for Upsala to be included in local tourism publications, the development of a website (under construction), marketing (traditional and digital) and highway signage. Local tourism operators, with the intern formed a committee to promote the area; with the onset of COVID this was put on hiatus.

There were many challenges in 2020 due to COVID-19. Though some businesses were hit hard because of border closures, others thrived. Local campgrounds and resorts saw

an uptick in overnight stays as many Canadians were staying local for vacation. As well, resorts saw more regional campers looking for seasonal sites.

A housing shortage is detrimental to Upsala. Employers are unable to hire staff as there is no suitable accommodations. As well, people from urban centers who wanted to move to a rural area were disappointed. This affected some small businesses who inquired about storefronts.

The area continues to struggle with adequate broadband. Outside of the village of Upsala highspeed internet is not available making working from home difficult.

After many years of being dormant, Upsala's logo was brought back to life. This beautiful piece of artwork by Ben Johnson was created in 1993. It reflects our past (the canoes used in the fur trade), our present (our natural resources – the forest, flora, fauna and the many lakes), and our future (the handshake, which represents so many people working together).

SENIORS' HOUSING

After two and a half years of planning, Community Living Atikokan (CLA) broke ground on the Aspen Court Senior Living complex located at 154 Willow Road in Atikokan in October 2020. The town provided the former row housing land as part of their in-kind contribution to the project required by National Housing Strategy for community support in order for CLA to secure the mortgage and a grant required for the construction.

The \$14,000,000 project will provide much needed seniors' housing for the community. There will be thirty-eight suites that will all be ground-level, accessible units that have a small patio space. The building will consist of thirty-one 2-bedroom units and seven 1-bedroom units, a community room and a fireplace lounge. Twenty-six of the suites are market rent and twelve are affordable rent suites.

The developer and builder, CGV Builders from Cochrane, has supported CLA from the beginning through the complex National Housing Strategy application process administered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). CLA asked CGV Builders to utilize local contractors where possible to support Atikokan's local economy. Seven local contractors are working on the build, which is great for local economic development.

The funding secured by CLA is specified by CMHC as being for the construction portion of the build. CLA has engaged Firedog Communications of Thunder Bay to assist CLA to raise \$200,000 required to purchase necessary equipment (appliances, lawn and snow clearing maintenance, lounge furniture, etc.) for the building to make it move in ready for November 2021.

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. In 2019 the Friends applied to FedNor for their Northern Ontario Development Fund to complete repairs and necessary maintenance to the Castle. They were successful in being approved for 90% of their application in 2020 and then needed to look for the remaining 10%. An application was submitted to Northern Ontario Heritage Fund (NOHFC) for the remaining 10%. After much discussion with NOHFC it was encouraged that the Friends apply for more than the 10% needed to help with completing some marketing projects that will increase tourism for the White Otter Castle. As of year end for 2020, the Friends of White Otter Castle are still waiting to hear the results of their

grant application to NOHFC. Overall this was a moderate year for the Friends as they prepared and completed grant applications for both FedNor and NOHFC, but we are excited for what is to come in 2021.

THE PATH OF THE PADDLE ASSOCIATION

(Co-written by Clara Butikofer & Lise Sorensen)

The Path of the Paddle Association (POPA) is pleased to submit a report to this publication. Together, with tourism operators in the region, the organization has navigated the challenges of a difficult year and while it wasn't "business as usual" the organization was able to accomplish quite a bit to prepare for the eventual reopening.

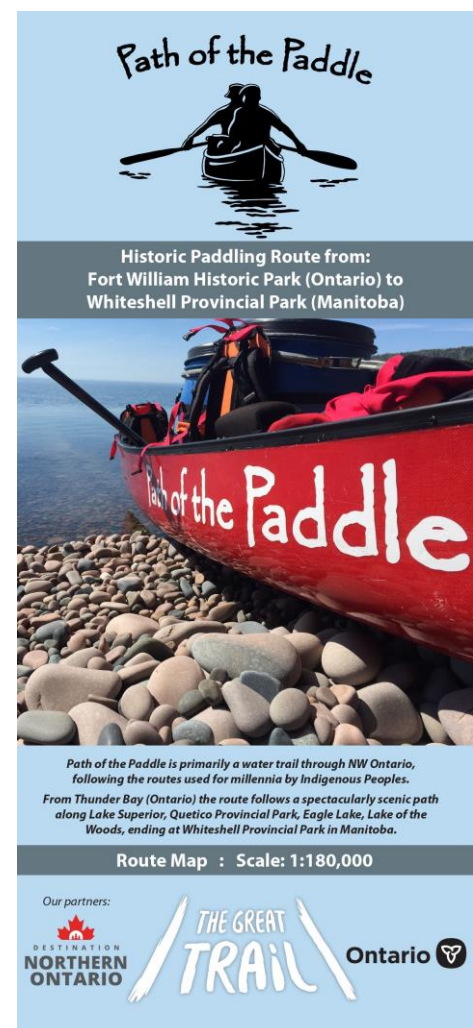
POPA is non-for-profit, driven by volunteers. Incorporated in 2013 the objects are to: establish a paddle, canoe, kayak route into a sustainable experiential tourism initiative; develop a cooperative marketing program; initiate specific promotion products; oversee trail development, communications, governance and sustainability of local regional trail committees. The organization focuses on developing a tourism product, therefore enabling economic development in the communities along its path.

A great deal has been accomplished in the last 8 years and every year of change and accomplishment is a credit to the dedication of a group of volunteers. 2020 was no exception. Despite it being a very challenging year for tourism, funding from Trans Canada Trail and Destination Northern Ontario allowed POPA to improve their tourism product and keep focusing on the paddler's experience.

This 1,100km mainly water trail section of The Great Trail of Canada (Trans Canada Trail) 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 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 Linoo 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.

In 2020 with the financial support of Destination Northern Ontario and designer Canadian Mapmakers Inc, POPA was able to print 3000 copies of the Path of the Paddle Overview Map. The map was launched in September 2020 and met with excitement and admiration from purchasers. Copies of the map are available for sale on line www.pathofthepaddleassociation.com and at Quetico Provincial Park Headquarters and the Friends of Quetico shop at Dawson Trail Campgrounds, throughout the upcoming camping season.

The association had a difficult start to the paddling season of 2020, with indecision on promotion. In fact, travel or trail work wasn't encouraged on POPA because of COVID19. Summer students weren't hired and strict protocols were put in place for volunteers maintaining the trail. Events weren't planned nor face



to face meetings. Fortunately, the trails were in pretty good shape and any travelers that ventured out were pleased with what they found.

When restrictions opened up, our volunteers began getting to work and locally were able to accomplish some important tasks including brushing Nym/Fire L portage and updated some local wayfinding markers. In mid Sept, volunteers installed metal post/signage at Kekekwa Creek and used a grubbing axe to level side slopes on the 400m portage to Eagle L. They paddled across Upper Manitou (UM) to complete the reroutes around dangerously steep sections of the UM/Harper portage, clearing debris, taking down a few trees, brushing the entire portage and adding wayfinding signage (arrows and markers). This portage is now complete, safe, and in good shape.

Another crew did work between Kekekwa L and UM earlier in the summer, maintaining portages and clearing a few new campsites. Sponsorship signage was installed at Pinkerton's Landing, Atikokan, to acknowledge funding from Ontario Power Generation, Souris River Canoes and Trans Canada Trail.

Funding from Trans Canada Trail allowed several projects to be completed and some are still ongoing. In the Atikokan area, new signage was installed at Dawson Trail and traction aid was purchased to be added to the board walk at Dawson Trail. Volunteers from the Friends of Quetico handled installation. This season two benches will be put in place; one at Nym Lake entrance and another at Dawson Trail overlooking the Pickerel River. Log books will be attached to the benches so please sign in and comment when you see them.

Also benefitting Atikokan was the hard work of Beaten Path Nordic Trails, managers of the land segment of Atikokan's Great Trail. This year, the club adapted the Great Trail Loppet to comply with Covid restrictions. Usual gatherings at the 'start and finish' of the event were eliminated. Midway through, there was a bonfire, big enough to provide warmth, while allowing for social distancing. The theme was the "Snow Moon" (Feb. full moon). There was moonlight, firelight and ice candles across Tea Fire Lake. 36 participants skied in small groups, and provided their own drinks, snacks and transportation. There were posters, lots of online info about the event and 2 articles in the Atikokan Progress.

Beaten Path Nordic Trails received \$2000 from TCT for new brush saws under the "Winterize your Trail" program.

As Atikokan representatives, Ray Waterman sits on the Board of POPA as the Treasurer and Lise Sorenson is our trails manager when we have projects and funding on the go. More representation is needed so please be in touch to get involved.

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 2021. Keep calm and paddle on!

The Heart of the Continent Partnership brings community members, local stakeholders, government agencies and private sector together to find and work towards common goals. Our mission is to build vibrant and resilient communities that value and protect public lands in northeastern Minnesota and northwestern Ontario. The Partnership is a bi-national, non-partisan forum where diverse groups can meet and work together. The partnership does not take positions nor attempt to influence the policies of participants, other than celebrating support for our public lands and our neighboring communities.

Accomplishments for 2020:

It was an interesting and challenging year but it started out with a lot of energy that took us through the year and still made some great accomplishments. In January we met in Atikokan/Quetico area at the Quetico Lodge and Conference Centre for a roundtable winter gathering. Discussions topics and plans included a proposed multi-agency facility in Crane Lake MN with the idea that could house a number of public land agencies and possibly bunks for public land workers and volunteers. We also planned for a second season of Bike the Heart, a series of rides throughout the Heart of the Continent on club trails and popular routes. Sustainable recreation and tourism were discussed and how to achieve it. Our other big venture was our Dark Sky Initiative.

It was well attended by different facets of our partnership including the Atikokan Economic Development. Presentations were well received. Land Managers from the United States Forest Service, National Park Service, Minnesota State and Ontario Provincial Park managers discussed past projects and stepping into 2020 and how our partnership could benefit the public Lands and communities. Also included in our meeting and presentations were our National Geographic geotourism website was to be have a brand-new revision with new opportunities for pictures/mapping/social media linking.

In the spring of 2020 we launched our revised website that has a clean new look.

Our January meeting was also focused on our Dark Sky Initiative and we were all in agreement that this was going to happen this year.

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
- Coordinating calls with the International Dark Sky program manager
- New Website familiarization and roll out
- Submitted requests for annual dues from collaborating organizations
- Collaborated with National Geo-tourism Council

In September our Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness was awarded the status of Dark Sky Sanctuary. It is the first National Wilderness to get that designation, the first agency in Minnesota to get dark sky status, the 13th area in the world to get the high designation of dark sky Sanctuary and by far the largest.

In December our Voyageurs National park was awarded Dark Sky Park status and this year Quetico has also been awarded Dark Sky Park status – Together the combined area is the largest protected dark sky areas in the world. There is a lot of work in the process, a rigorous two-year process which required:

- Light management planning to convert existing external lighting to dark sky compliant light fixtures.
- Annual sky quality measurements to ensure dark sky criteria were met
- Development of new educational programming and signage to help visitors learn about the importance of protecting our night skies.

Looking into 2021 the Heart of the Continent Partnership (HOCP) Steering Committee will continue to engage with our members and communities via online meetings. A proposed and plans are in the works for a series of forums. Also, in our plans are a big “face to face celebration of our accomplishments” with a big slash event hosted to celebrate our Dark Sky Initiative. We hope to do that in the fall and I hope to tell you about in next year.

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

The Executive Director's term on the CFO Board of Directors expired in 2020 after two years as President and two years as Past President. The Board requested that he remain as chair of the Management Information Systems Committee (MISC). The MISC works with the software and hosting suppliers to ensure the integrity and security of data and systems on behalf of the members of CFO. The current focus of the committee is data retention and privacy compliance in light of recent and anticipated legislative changes and in response to ongoing data breach issues in other entities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS COUNCIL OF ONTARIO (EDCO)

In February 2020, Gord Knowles was elected to serve as 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. Garry and Katie were fortunate enough to travel to Toronto to participate in EDCO 2020 before the Pandemic hit.

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & AWARDS

2020 proved to be a difficult year for the AEDC's staff to complete professional skills and development with the Pandemic occurring, as larger conferences and training simply were cancelled. In the beginning of the year, staff was able to develop their skills by attending the annual conference for the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO). After March 2020, some conferences were able to move to an online platform and have virtual conferences; staff were able to attend the Northern Ontario Tourism Summit 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.

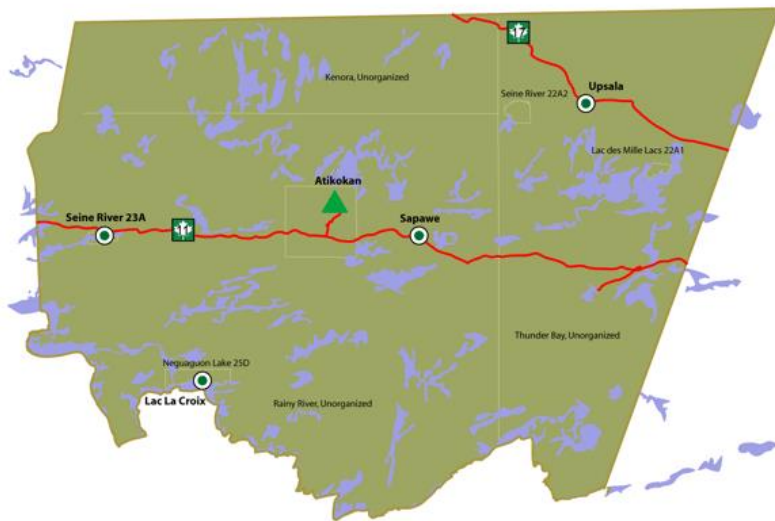
Community Development Advisor Katie Hannon continues to work towards obtaining the Ec.D designation. Katie and Garry completed the following online courses through Cu Source Professional Development and Education; Small Claims and Security Realization & Commercial Loan Collection in November and December.

AEDC Office Administrator Annette Bryk and Administrative Assistant Brigitte Tribe (retired July 2020) continued 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. Melanie Hachey joined the AEDC in October and in-house training was completed for FaaSBank and Sage as well as completing a Sage Preparation Course through Sage University.

Staff from the Atikokan Employment Centre also attended training throughout the year related to Depression, Addiction, Mental Health, Communication, Assertive Communication, Career Development Ethics and Standards, Career Development Theories, Models and Practices, Stress Management and Wellness and Resumes. 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

It is with great pleasure that I write a testimonial of the incredible support and service we received from the AEDC. From our very first contact, to opening our business doors, we enjoyed endless support, immediate response to our crazy concerns and were consistently kept apprised of the process. Gary McKinnon and his staff stopped at nothing to make sure our questions were answered, walked us through the development of our business plan and made the process easy to understand and something we can look back on and feel very confident in. We moved through the process with clarity, enhanced knowledge of business functionalities, were made aware of ancillary supports and services available to us to align with our business model and enhance our funding. Each and every person we had the pleasure of working with was knowledgeable, accommodating, and they have continued to provide us this level on ongoing service. We highly recommend utilizing the supports and services through AEDC and look forward to maintaining our relationship with them for years to come.

-Marc Caron & Kristina St. Pierre- Caron's Auto

BOARD RECOGNITION- ELVIN RYDBERG (In Memory)

We would like to express our deepest thanks to Elvin Rydberg, whose years of experience helped steer the AEDC with strong, passionate leadership to build our business community. In the fall of 2020, Elvin passed away, who at the time was serving on the Investment Fund Committee. Elvin has served on the AEDC Board of Directors since 1994, which was the year of amalgamation for the Atikokan Futures Incentive Corporation and the Atikokan Economic Development Corporation. He also represented numerous other committees during this time right until his passing. Elvin has provided personal business experience and leadership to the AEDC, as well as to the many businesses that he assisted through the Investment Fund Committee. Our everlasting thanks to Elvin Rydberg for his dedication to the AEDC and the community of Atikokan.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

METRICS FOR SUCCESS (JAN 1 TO DEC 31 2020)

Atikokan Economic Development Corporation

General Inquiries	↓ 135
In-Depth Counselling and Information Services Interviews	↓ 69
New CED Projects	↓ 13
Number of Community-Based Projects in Progress	↑ 40

Atikokan Employment Centre

In-Person Visits	↓ 1,470 (-1937)*
Electronic Visits	↑ 19,888 (+1,790)

* Please note that due to the Pandemic, the Office was closed to the public for the majority of the year and that's why the number is significantly lower

Social Media Accounts

Website	AEDC	↑ 16,194 Visitors (+1,418)
		↑ 25,338 Actions (+631)
	VisitAtikokan.ca	↑ 17,873 Visitors (+2,057)
		↑ 47,660 Page Views (+5,446)
Facebook	AEDC	↑ 375 Followers (+128)
		↑ 373 Likes (+123)
		↑ 17,052 Post Reach (+5916)
		↑ 4,181 Engaged (+1,134)
	Tourism Atikokan	↑ 2003 Followers
		↓ 1,899 Likes (-53)
		↑ 147,880 Post Reach (+21,809)
		↑ 20,497 Engaged (+6620)
Instagram	@tourismatikokan	557 Followers (+119)
		119 Posts
		3,311 Engagements
		33,329 Post Reach

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



DID YOU KNOW?

In 2020, 40 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;

2020 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 2020, our office disbursed new investment funds of \$1,741,340 towards new loans. In total, 23 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 9 of these regional investments totaling \$533,065 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: Tami Stinson, Elizabeth MacKay, Kim Cross, Jack Pierce, Dave Homer, Dave Elder and Elvin Rydberg (till Oct of 2020).

BUSINESSES & JOBS CREATED/MAINTAINED VIA BUSINESS LOANS

YEAR	BUSINESSES STARTED	BUSINESSES MAINTAINED	JOBS CREATED	JOBS MAINTAINED
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
2020	4	14	76	39

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO BALANCE

YEAR	LOANS ISSUED	LOAN AMOUNT	REPAYMENTS	PORTFOLIO BALANCE
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
2020	23	\$1741,340	717,723	\$5,124,746

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO ACTIVITY

SECTOR	AMOUNT OF LOANS ISSUED IN 2020	CURRENT # OF LOANS IN PORTFOLIO	CURRENT AMOUNT OF LOANS
Hospitality	\$180,000	9	\$739,195
Agriculture	--	1	\$34,933
Mining	--	--	--
Service	\$342,189	28	\$1,618,356
Tourism	\$611,050	5	\$752,753
Manufacturing	--	1	\$108,999
Transportation	\$310,000	6	\$670,126
Retail	\$183,000	14	\$1,048,006
Forestry	\$115,100	3	\$152,377
Research/Development	--	--	--
Culture & Arts	--	--	--
TOTAL	\$1,741,339	67	\$5,124,745

Atikokan Employment Centre

ANNUAL REPORT

BY BRAD BEYAK, EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLOR

Our year at the Atikokan Employment Centre was dominated by the COVID-19 and reshaping our services in our attempt to seamlessly continue to provide services digitally. Although somewhat a transition, it is anticipated that our efforts will further prove to increase accessibility to services for both employers and potential program participants.

Early in year, employees responsively transitioned to working out of their residences while preparing our workplace to fully meet associated pandemic requirements. Over the course of the first half of our fiscal year, the major focus of our work was to provide ongoing support and assistance for area residents and employers in identifying/applying for income/financial support programs offered by the various levels of government. It is noted we were inundated with questions regarding financial support programs available to both individuals and local employers.

As knowledge regarding COVID-19 increased, and the governments established appropriate guidance, we began to see a number of employers searching for new employees as business activities further improved. This directly resulted in increased access and utilization of our employment related programs especially with respect to student and seasonal workers. However, during the winter months it seemed that employment activities slowed in align with COVID related restrictions.

As of February 2021, Ontario's unemployment rate was determined to be 9.30%. In the Northwest however, the unemployment rate was somewhat lower at 7.1% (Statistic Canada's Labour Force Survey). Considering this, it would seem that resource-based industries were affected less by the pandemic when compared directly to other employment sectors. Notably however, Ontario's Youth unemployment rate was more than double the provincial average at 20.9% in February 2021. Although this group has higher levels of unemployment, it is recognized that younger individual's employment across the province was negatively impacted to a greater extent by the onset of the pandemic. This high youth unemployment is directly associated with the closures/slowdowns in both the accommodation and food services sectors where many younger individuals were employed. Overall, the regional labour market continues to be strong and tighten even further but the youth unemployment remains high. The Northwest's labour market is also being influenced by a lack of new residents coming to Northern Ontario as well as the aging population of communities.

Locally, we continue to see a relatively strong labour market given that available employment opportunities appear to be outpacing available qualified candidates. Interestingly though, is the fact that youth/young adult unemployment remains significantly higher than that of the population over the age of 30 across Northern Ontario. As well employers continue to report being unable to find appropriate employees that meet their skill requirements. It would seem that available younger workers who continue to reside in Northern Ontario do not match employer skill requirements. In fact, a number of local employers have elected to search for new employees from outside of our immediate area with the hope of attracting new employees. Qualified truck drivers, equipment operators, licensed tradespeople and senior apprentices are in high demand at this time. There are also regular openings for professionals/para professionals associated with both the health, social service and educational sectors.

In an attempt to better meet their needs and reduce turn over, employers may want to consider hiring available younger individuals that currently reside in Northern Ontario, opting to train this group using available funding programs. By adopting this strategy, employers may ultimately secure employees that are more committed to continuing to reside in the region. It is also hoped that expansion of available housing will also positively influence those considering relocating to our region for employment. Regardless, Northern Ontario still needs a significant influx of people to maintain the quality of life experienced in the region and allow businesses to further develop in the area.

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. It is anticipated there will be an increasing need for services provided by Atikokan Employment Centre as area as potential participants and employers address their needs in light of the pandemic and the current demographic trends being experienced across Northwestern Ontario.

In the current year, the Atikokan Employment Centre has continued to provide quality employment related services and 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. We wish to thank Employment Ontario, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills (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.

It is noted the Atikokan Employment Centre had in excess of 21,500 visitors to our website which represents close to 19% increased over the previous year. These visitors took 51,300 actions while using the website resulting in 48,600 pageviews. Most visitors to the website appeared to be most interested in searching for local jobs and employment opportunities. Most website users accessed the website looking for local jobs at a relatively even rate across weekdays from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm.

The majority of visitors to the Atikokan Employment Centre's website resided in Ontario, Canada. Most Ontarians using our website accessed it from Thunder Bay, Ontario or in Toronto, Ontario. Many of the visitors resided in communities in Southern Ontario but there was also heavier use from communities located in Northern Ontario as well including Fort Frances and the Sudbury areas. Interestingly, a decrease in accesses to the website from Atikokan itself was seen. This may be an indicator of the number of active job seekers in the community. Accesses from the United States were also seen originating from California, Oregon and Louisiana. Outside of the USA, international visitors to the website resided in numerous countries but predominantly in Ireland, China, India and Nigeria.

In person visits to the Atikokan Employment Centre's resource centre were not tabulated in the current year as the majority of most visitors occurred electronically/digitally to adhere to or exceed public health guidance. Most often inquiries were addressed through telephone calls, e-mails and text messaging. It is noted that video conferencing has also been implemented as well as a live chat feature on our website.

Most digital visits were seeking advice/guidance regarding available income support programs, job application processes, employment searches and the availability of computer/office equipment use. Visitors most often required specific information regarding federal and/or provincial programs,

available local services and/or for assistance in completing Employment Insurance reporting requirements.

In response to public guidance Service Canada cancelled monthly visits to our site and implemented full reliance on telephone and electronic inquiries/applications with respect to their programs. Once Service Canada representatives become available to the general public, the Atikokan Employment Centre will work to re-establish hosting Service Canada representatives each month and will offer free use of a private office space and appropriately secured internet access.

To better serve area residents, we have continued to upgrade our computer systems and further expanded our public access WIFI. Coverage for this public service WIFI should be available across the entire block of Main Street and potentially beyond to improve connectivity. We have distributed a number of digital devices or computers to our program participants to assist with their service needs. We also continue to provide program participants with considerable access to online training focused on occupational health and safety, job searching, employer expectations and workplace wellness. All staff have remained available over the last year and continue to be contactable by telephone, video conference, digital messaging and email. In person appointments continue to be available as needed aligning with the requirements of ongoing public health restrictions.

Through the delivery Atikokan Employment Centre's "regular" Employment Services program, over 85 individuals received a higher level of support in their search for appropriate employment or for accessing education/skills development opportunities. This service includes career exploration, resume creation/revisions, interview preparation, job search activities, placement services and referral to educational or necessary community-based services.

Twelve of the 85 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 \$30,000 in incentives were provided to employers who participated in on the job training placements. Additionally, a number of individuals received financial support totaling close to \$1200.00 to acquire specific certification training or personal supports/items (e.g. clothing, safety boots) needed for employment. A number of local individuals working as apprentices in a designated trade were also assisted through our Employment Services program.

Interest in Employment Ontario's Second Career Program was extremely low in the current year as potential participants hesitated with attending post-secondary programs during the pandemic and trainers limited their program offerings. Moreover, during the current fiscal year, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's (MLTSD) Second Career program was significantly changed. The Second Career program being funded through (MLTSD) introduced a "fast track" access stream for those laid off as the result of COVID-19. However, the duration of programming funded through Second Career for all participants was reduced from 2 years to 1 year. This leaves laid off workers the ability to access financial support to attend training opportunities that for the most part, are at a certificate level. In past years, the majority of individuals who pursued Second Career were consistently interested in completing "AZ" Truck Driver Training and/or Heavy Equipment Operation training.

The Atikokan Employment Centre was also provided with funding through the Youth Job Connection programs to provide youth specific services for those 15 to 29 years old experiencing difficulty in accessing paid employment. Eligible youth accepted into the Youth Job Connection programs participate in a range of pre-employment training for which they are paid a stipend equivalent to being paid minimum wage (\$14.25/hr.) for their participation.

As part of the Youth Job Connection programs, the Atikokan Employment Centre dispersed close to \$44000 to provide supports directly to participants and employers hosting work training placements. In total, 38 individuals accessed youth-oriented programs and had the opportunity to access supports. Of these 38 individuals, 18 participated in work training placements with their employers being provided with an incentive. As well a considerable number of participants also accessed financial support for the purchase of items or services needed for their work. Thanks goes to Denine Richard for leading these youth-oriented services.

As a leader in the Employment Service field in Northwestern Ontario, the Atikokan Employment Centre continued to coordinate the activities of the area interagency group. To continue on with regular lunch hour meetings, the local interagency group kept getting together monthly using video conferencing. The interagency group mainly consists employees of faith groups, area educational, social service, protective services and health care providers. The regular meetings provided a forum for the various attendees to provide an update of on their programs and exchange information about any new initiatives. Cindy Geurts, with the Atikokan Employment Centre continued to be the main contact and coordinator for 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. It is hoped that accessibility to programs for potential participants and employers will be made easier this year through the expansion of our digital services and ongoing support or part-time outreach workers in some communities. As soon as acceptable, we will re-initiate face to face contact with potential program participants and residents of these communities. Thank you to Chief Michael Ottetail, Jim Windigo, Karen Geyschick, Zerlina Whitecrow, Cleo Wolfsiffer, Debilyn Neslon-Albert and Mayor Dennis Brown for supporting our services.

Moreover, we look forward to also renewing our relationships with staff and students while supporting Atikokan High School employment related initiatives in the upcoming year. It is hoped our ongoing involvement with the schools in our area will facilitate program accesses and assist with transitioning students into meaningful careers opportunities. Thank you to Robroy Donaldson, Beth Fairfield, Ed Ojala, Mike Krassey and Sherri Dragan for their continuing to support our work with local students.

In the current year, the Provincial government has moved forward with their planned transformation by contracting out the management of Employment Ontario related programs in 3 “prototype” areas. At this point in time Northern Ontario has not been impacted by these changes as data collection regarding performance of the new Service System Managers and services in the prototype areas is incomplete. However, it is anticipated that in the coming year this ongoing government initiative will continue to move forward and may impact services in Northern Ontario. The government continues with it’s plans to select 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 all employment related services now delivered by Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. As stated previously, it remains uncertain how the Atikokan Employment Centre will fair during the transformation process and will be highly dependant on who ultimately is contracted to manage services in our area. Regardless, employees at the Atikokan Employment Centre continue with participating in relevant training courses/certifications to bolster our chances of securing a future contract with a potentially new Service System Manager. We

remain open to working with any interested parties and feel confident in our ability to be the preferred service provider of employment services in the Atikokan area. Staff will continue with training activities designed to assist with service efficacy especially among specific populations. Staff will continue to pursue their full certification as Career Development Practitioners and obtain full registration with the Career Development Practitioners Certification Board of Ontario and/or the Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada. Moreover, additional training on engaging people in the delivery of digital services, building self efficacy of participants and further implementing a trauma informed approach to service delivery will be of the high priorities for training.

Lastly, a sincere thank you to all community members and employers who continue to support our programs and assist in making our services successful by providing local residents with opportunities to further advance their careers and occupational pursuits.

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.

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

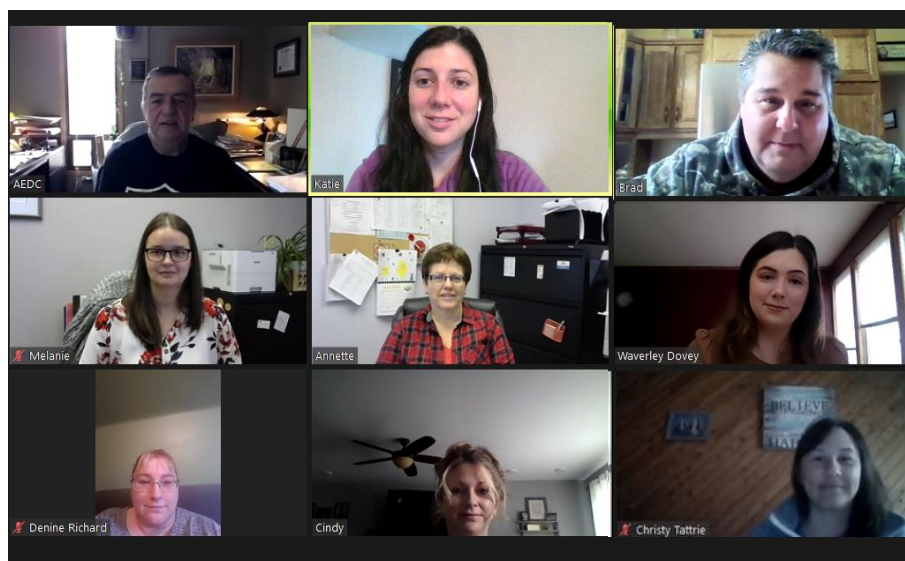
Annette Bryk

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

Administrative Assistant

Melanie Hachey

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



Absent from Photo- Michelle Gushulak, Debilyn Nelson-Albert & Chris Stromberg

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

Waverley Dovey (Contract Started October 2019)

AEDC Board of Directors

We wish to thank the 2020 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.

JIM TURNER
CHAIR

TAMI STINSON
VICE-CHAIR

MARY MAKARENKO
SECRETARY/TREASURER
TOWN COUNCIL REP

DAVE ELDER
PAST CHAIR

ROB FERGUSON
TOWN COUNCIL REP

VIC PROKOPCHUK
MEMBER EMERITUS

CLEO WOLSIFFER
UPSALA R.D.A.
REPRESENTATIVE

DARCY WHITECROW
SEINE RIVER F.N.
REPRESENTATIVE

JULIAN JORDAN
LAC LA CROIX F.N.
REPRESENTATIVE

DAVID BJORKMAN

DAVID HOMER

ROBERT POTTS

BRIAN STIMSON

JACK PIERCE

SHANNON RIDING

JERRY LASKOWSKI

AEDC Committees

INVESTMENT FUND COMMITTEE

DAVE ELDER

JACK PIERCE

TAMI STINSON

DAVE HOMER

LIZ MACKAY

KIM CROSS

FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION/AUDIT COMMITTEE

MARY MAKARENKO
CHAIR

TAMI STINSON

JIM TURNER

BRIAN STIMSON

CLEO WOLSIFFER

PUBLIC RELATIONS & NOMINATING

JACK PIERCE

BRIAN STIMSON

AD HOC COMMITTEES – AS REQUIRED

Looking Ahead

2020 presented many challenges throughout the world and our little portion of north western Ontario was not spared. Stay at home orders and mandated business closures resulted in disastrous impacts for many enterprises in our area. Fortunately, the government of Canada, through FedNor, provided almost \$465,000 in Regional Relief and Recovery Funds to the AEDC to assist and support impacted business through this difficult time. Fourteen businesses accessed loans between \$10,000 and \$60,000 with very favourable repayment terms. We were also able to provide PPE and professional services support to many businesses, again through FedNor programs.

Anticipating what 2021 may bring is a bit of a head scratcher. Will government-imposed restrictions be lifted? Which ones? When? If restrictions on access to retail and service businesses are lifted it will likely bode very well for those businesses due to an expected pent-up demand. Online shopping will continue to compete with in-person shopping but for many people it has proven to be rather unsatisfying and many will return to the more traditional methods. Opening of the US border is critical to the revival of our tourist industry and it is expected that a high volume of US tourist traffic will almost immediately result when the border opens. As the US border is not expected to open until late in the summer, it is essential that the Ontario-Manitoba border open as soon as possible to allow tourist operators to salvage some revenue to assure their survival.

Reaching the AEDC

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

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ATIKOKANEDO
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