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Business Retention and Expansion Conference Trains Economic Developers

By Tim Tororey

It is one of those questions that crosses the minds of economic developers. “How do I retain this business in this community?” Especially in these globally competitive economic times, the probability of a business closing shop or shipping out is very real.

It is why economic development experts from across the world will converge on Saskatoon, Saskatchewan on June 18-21, 2012, to attend the Business Retention and Expansion International (BREI) Conference. The event will bring together business leaders, entrepreneurs and economic experts to learn and share ideas on how to build a better business environment. The conference theme is *Action Reaction: Be the Catalyst for Change*.

Economic developers have long realized that though it is a major achievement when a new business moves into the community, retaining existing businesses and helping them expand is equally as important in achieving the overall economic goals of a community.

This conference is an opportunity for economic developers, community leaders, and business ambassadors to hear what works and what does not work, to explore Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) best practices and learn how to overcome challenges they may face as they implement their BRE programs.

Many communities in Canada and worldwide, have succeeded in their BRE initiatives and kept businesses in the community. However, some of them have made mistakes and seen their anchor business leave the community, which resulted in a domino effect that pulled down other business dependant on the anchor business. People leave, services are cut back and other businesses suffer. This is why this conference is important.

BREI is a leading professional association for business retention and expansion. BREI’s mandate is to provide leadership resources, education and networking opportunities in business retention and expansion, as well as to build international awareness of the importance and vast economic benefits that a BRE program can have on a community and a region.

This conference will feature an opening ceremony, a two-day training session for participants wishing to become BRE certified coordinators, a professional development session, keynote speakers, tourism opportunities both in and around Saskatoon, an awards banquet, and various other programs and events.

The three main topics of discussion are: 1. Actionable strategies, which looks at how to encourage local business community to remain strong in a global economy. 2. More with less: Ensuring long term viability, which will cover how to get through the economic highs and lows. 3. Understanding the entrepreneur, will be a presentation on how to shift focus from the business to the entrepreneur.

Some of the keynote speakers are: Stephen Dubner, award winning author of *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*; Daniel Isenberg is a Babson Global Professor of Management Practice and the founding executive director of the Babson Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Project (BEEP). A leading authority on international entrepreneurship and Linda Nazareth, TV broadcaster and author of *The Leisure Economy: How a Shift Away from the Work World Will Reshape Our Lives and Industries*.

Every year, BREI utilizes a host community to present an international conference. The conference features an array of world-class expert speakers, networking opportunities, training sessions, sharing of best-practices, as well as professional and economic development tools pertinent to the rapidly changing and increasingly important field of economic development – particularly to the practice of business retention and expansion. The 2011 conference was held in Williamsburg, Virginia in May and the 2010 conference was New Orleans, LA.

Enterprise Saskatchewan has been working to build a healthy local economy and an improved business climate as a major goal of its business retention and expansion program. The program promotes job growth by helping communities identify the concerns and barriers to survival and growth facing local businesses as well as developing key strategies and action plans to create solutions for increased development.

This conference will also bring recognition to the work that various agencies and organizations have accomplished here in Saskatchewan. These include Enterprise Saskatchewan, Enterprise Regions (ERs), Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDC's), Chambers of Commerce, City Economic Development Officers, Saskatchewan Economic Development Association (SEDA), municipal leaders and other economic development bodies.

Be the Catalyst for Change! Register NOW for the BREI Conference, Saskatoon, June 18 – 21, 2012 at www.brei.org