



CEO Message: The Changing Face of Tourism – Sask. Party *Growth Plan, 2020 and Beyond*

“Necessity is the mother of invention” def: *when the “need” for something becomes imperative, you are forced to find ways of getting or achieving it.*

And there you have it. Our “need” for diversity has become a provincial imperative. Provincially our coffers are taking a pounding for a variety of reason, all of which we have bemoaned for the last 4 years. Oil and gas slumping, mining taking a huge hit and now a federal government that seems determined to prevent much needed pipelines from being built.

Ok, so what does that mean? What do we do? How do we deal with the hand that we’ve been dealt? Well, as painful as it is to hear or realize, we evolve or we die. There is no other way to say it and for those of us in the hospitality/tourism world, we have been dealing with this stark reality for the last number of years.

Some have thrived, most have survived (if but barely) but many have succumbed. We have felt the effects of being a “two-trick pony” province as we struggled for revenues in the boom/bust world of commodities. What we have lacked is stability.

What we saw in the release of the Sask. Party’s “*Plan for Growth 2020 and Beyond*” was very encouraging and a significant shift towards stability. Drawing a straight line to an economy based, in part, on consistent revenue streams. For the first time in my memory, we saw specific reference to our VISITOR ECONOMY and the critical importance it can play in our province’s future and sustainability.

Minister Makowsky has championed the efforts of Tourism Saskatchewan as a way to pour the foundation for a new economic strategy. Officially called “Parks, Culture and Sport”, his ministry has evolved into more than just tourism, it truly is an integral part of the economy, the VISITOR ECONOMY.

Great to see but this strategy can’t operate in a vacuum or stay within silos if it’s to succeed. There needs to be intergovernmental cooperation and ministries working in collaboration for us to achieve any measure of success. Enter Minister Jeremy Harrison.

As Minister of Trade and Export Development, he has a very keen understanding of the role his ministry plays in selling our brand to the world. Soon we will have a product, an authentic experience, that we can celebrate and showcase to the world. Tourism packages that the world is hungry to experience but currently have no way to access.

It's one thing to have an experience to sell, it's quite another to be able to deliver on that service promise. We need to provide our operators and the guests they will serve with battalions of well-trained ambassadors who will give the world the genuine, culturally rich narratives they come from all four corners of the planet to experience. Enter Alastair MacFadden.

Deputy Minister of Immigration and Career Training, Alastair, like Ministers Makowsky and Harrison, has a very deep appreciation of what this industry needs and how government can support educational and training efforts.

Well, how about that? Government departments together, breaking down silos towards a goal. Now that's how it's done people. But to what end? The goal, it would appear from the "*Growth Plan*", is to expand our economy, our population and retain our youth.

Lofty goals, so how do we achieve this? In large part the evolution of the VISITOR ECONOMY mindset that exists not just in the halls of the legislature but to the streets of our communities. We need to examine how we see ourselves and change as quickly as the times in which we live. We must be nimble and adaptive, and in some cases, very bold.

Bold "reimagining's" are now coming in waves. Christian Boyle's cultivation of new and exciting Indigenous Experience clusters throughout the province has the potential to completely transform how the world see's us and we see ourselves. Wanuskewin Heritage Park's UNESCO Heritage Site application and reintroduction of bison onto the prairies was beyond imagination 10 years ago. Individuals like Regina hotelier Ryan Urzada, transforming his offerings from a "branded" hotel to an "independent" vision of what a guest can experience.

I realize that this all sounds wonderful and a very positive step forward but how does that help the rest of the membership that struggles each and every day to simply keep the lights on? As many have come to know, I am absolutely shameless in who I will talk to, what groups I will collaborate with or what lengths I will go to drive business to our province and to our member's doors.

Irrespective of the motivation of the traveler; leisure or corporate, I want people to come to our province to spend their money. We will vigorously foster the notion that, for whatever reason, visitors will see our province as a great place to come and ultimately support our local economy's. Couples, family's, teams, delegates or crews, we will engage every level of government we can, municipally, provincially, regionally or nationally, to send the message that we are open for business.

We are all in this together and we will get through these tough times by exploring opportunities to collaborate, buy locally and break down silos that prevent us from talking to each other.

On behalf of the board of directors of the SHHA, Cynthia, Warren and I, wish you and your family a very merry Christmas and safe, happy holiday season.