

President's Message
General Membership Meeting
Tuesday, April 28, 2009

This year is a very exciting one for the Chamber and the Board of Directors, and I am pleased to serve as the President while we celebrate our 100th Anniversary of the forming of the Chamber or as it was called in 1909, the Fort Frances Board of Trade.

We began this year with our first event, the 21st annual Home and Leisure Show, which kicked off our celebration the week-end May 1st and 2nd at the Fort Frances Sports Plex. The opening ceremonies and kick off took place at 6:30 on Friday evening and the Fort Frances Highlanders created the excitement leading a march through the whole show.

In early June we will be publishing the Centennial Tabloid, which will feature much of the history of the Fort Frances Chamber.

The Chamber is also planning to increase the number of hanging flower baskets to 100 this year, to further celebrate our Centennial year.

One of the big changes this year will be the move of Quest for the Best Talent Show (also a new name) to June 30th. The committee has decided that along with this change will be a new look. The show will have three different talents portions – singing, dance and comedy. It is our hope that changing this event will offer some new excitement to our Canada Day celebrations and Fun in the Sun.

Since the Chile Cook-off was such a huge success last year we will again sponsor this event this will be closely followed by our annual Business Awards Banquet.

The Fort Frances Chamber of Commerce is proud to be hosting the The Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce Fall meeting September 24th, 25th and 26th at La Place Rendezvous. The meeting was award to our Chamber so that all the active chambers from Marathon to the Manitoba border could join us in celebrating our 100th Anniversary.

As we celebrate our past 100 years, it is more important than ever to look to our future. Our community is facing one of the biggest challenges ever put before us. With the uncertainty surrounding our largest employer, it is now time to strengthen our commitments to work together in partnership to develop a plan for the future to insure that our businesses and citizens have the opportunity to remain in this community and that they may thrive and prosper.

Last October the Business Retention and Expansion Action Plan was completed and delivered. This plan outlines what businesses and organizations in the area saw as important issues that needed to be addressed. Ten different strategies were identified at that time, and time lines for completion were outlined. These strategies are to be addressed by the following leads; the BIA, Confederation College, Fort Frances Chamber of Commerce, Northern Community Development Services, Rainy River Future Development Corp., and the Town of Fort Frances. These organizations working in partnership will or already have addressed the concerns outlined in the document. However, with what we are now facing with the downturn in the economy both globally and locally, we need everyone within Rainy River District to come to the aid of our communities to make plans and find solutions that can maintain and improve our quality of life.

Earlier this spring Geoff Gillon, George Emes and I had a meeting in Kenora with Jeff Post, their city planner to discuss what prompted Kenora to begin make the changes that they are making. Kenora started their fresh outlook and planning during the first time that the mill had down time. Now, that mill is completely gone. But they were ahead of the curve, because they didn't wait for the final blow. I hope we do not to see this happen in Fort Frances. However as we know the Company is in bankruptcy protection on both sides of the border and we do not know what the future holds. I am asking that all of you here speak with others in your network and encourage them to come on board so that we too can work together and form a plan and see that plan through to implementation. This is not a problem that any of the partners I have already mentioned can tackle, even working together. This is a problem that everyone must address together. This is how the solution was found in Kenora, everyone caring about their community, and everyone welcome at the discussions.

Let's start the ball rolling to preserve what we already have and it even better. You have all heard of the Power of Positive Thinking –Let's try the Power of Positive Action.