



Positive Momentum

Have you ever felt like you're on a roll? It's a great feeling. Like a sports team on a winning streak, sometimes you are "in the zone" and things just seem to be going your way. Or you go for a jog, and it feels like you are running downhill the whole way. That's positive momentum.

For a local economy, momentum is a huge factor. Economists have their rational quantitative models to explain economic activity, but there is an aspect to economic development that is less scientific, and more emotion driven. For entrepreneurs thinking about starting a new business or growing an existing one, an area's momentum can build the excitement and confidence necessary to take a risk and follow a dream.

The Biddeford & Saco region has great positive momentum right now. It's clearly visible wherever you go. National magazines and television programs are featuring us every month it seems. As a resident, it's exciting to see new businesses opening each month, along with the expanded opportunities for art, education and culture that have emerged in recent years. You see it in the improvements and attractiveness of our downtowns led by our two cities and our two great Main St. programs. It's important to understand how this momentum took hold in the past decade and started to accelerate.

The Biddeford Crossing development brought a lot of new energy and commerce to the area. In the downtowns, forward-looking efforts such as the removal of the MERC trash incinerator site created incentives for new development. Renovation of the mills led by Doug Sanford and others generated new opportunities for small business growth and innovative downtown live-and-work spaces in both Biddeford & Saco. Businesses like Michael Macomber and Katie Pinard's Elements buttressed long-time businesses like Reilly's Bakery, making the downtowns even more of a destination. And those successes inspired new

successive waves of entrepreneurship in Biddeford & Saco, paving the way for a thriving food and drink scene, interesting retail shops, and the area becoming an arts destination led by Engine and City Theater. In the past month or so we've had continued new business launches, ranging from Spike Dog Grooming in Biddeford, Maine Optometry opening a beautiful new facility in downtown Saco, and a new Bistro slated to open later this month at the Camp Ellis General Store.

While growth in general is good for our area, it does create new challenges, such as affordable housing, that local leaders and organizations are making efforts to address. For those of us in a certain age demographic, we've seen times when the economy is in a downturn and momentum is heading in the other direction, so the problems generated by growth are on the whole better problems to have compared to those that result from businesses closing and residents struggling to find jobs.

How can we help build on this momentum? An easy thing to do is visit, shop at, or hire local businesses, they are your neighbors who rely on your community support for their success. Another way to support the area's growth is through embracing the need for supporting infrastructure. For example, future growth may be curtailed if we don't collectively find solutions for parking challenges. Another easy thing for all of us to do is share the success story that is Biddeford & Saco with everyone we speak with throughout Maine and beyond. Our businesses need more employees to keep growing, so don't be shy in singing the praises of the Biddeford & Saco region wherever you go!

From the perspective of the Chamber of Commerce, this area is special for many reasons, not least of which is its natural beauty. But the ultimate differentiator anywhere is the people, and people here should take well-deserved pride in what they've built. Nothing comes easily, but there is real collective excitement here about what's to come for our region. You can feel it, and you can hear it whenever you talk to anyone locally. The next time you talk with someone from our area, count how many times you hear the word "We" vs. "I", it's a great leading indicator of positive momentum for our region.