

GE already producing spinoff industry

By Dave Johnson, Tribune Staff
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Mayor Frank Campion, seen in his office Thursday, December 21, said the city is not shy when it comes to telling developers and investors what the city has to offer. Dave Johnson/Welland Tribune

Welland's keys to success are its aggressiveness, its willingness to keep potential investors engaged and not looking elsewhere, its incentive programs and having land serviced and ready to go, says Frank Campion.

"We're not shy," says the mayor.

He says the president of GE Canada remarked that's one of the reasons the company decided to move to the Rose City in 2016.

"We were in very stiff competition for GE ... we were able to land them because of our incentive programs and having serviced land available. We weren't being considered at all and then it was like, 'What's going on with Welland?' We essentially stole GE from Quebec and some other Ontario municipalities."

Campion says that was really the catalyst for the city's successes and growth last year.

"We were able to get the attention of the global community and tell them what was going on in the city. Our economic development office is extremely busy, there are people here on a daily basis talking about investing, buying property and asking about our incentive programs."

Campion says because of the activity in 2017, Welland should expect to see at least three to four mid-level industries open in the city this year.

“What we are seeing is the spinoff effect of having GE in our community.”

Attracting those three to four mid-level industries is due to the hard work of city staff and the economic development office, the mayor says, adding they work together to get developers into the city and into the ground as quickly as they can.

“Our team has a fantastic reputation and we work with various (provincial) ministries all the time. We make sure people know who we are.”

The mayor has met with various ministries and ministers over the last year when in Toronto and now Welland is on the radar. The province will direct foreign investors to the city when they come looking to locate and invest in Ontario, he says.

“Three years ago, that would have never happened. Our strategies are working and we leverage everything we have. We feel once we get people into the office, we can explain what’s going on here, what incentives we have.”

He says Welland’s success in attracting new businesses and jobs to the community has seen it nearly run out of industrial land.

“There’s only a few acres left in the Harry W. Diffin Industrial Park. We just sold 2.5 hectares to a manufacturing company. There is some land that is not serviced and that will be one of our big objectives, to make sure it is ready. Having serviced land is key.”

Harry W. Diffin Industrial Park is on the west side of Highway 140 between Buchner Road and Silverthorn Street, where the new GE factory is going up.

Just up Highway 140, on the east side at Enterprise Drive, Campion says, Northern Gold Foods is undergoing an expansion of 75,000 square feet, which started in 2017.

“That was a big win for us, they were looking elsewhere, out west or down in the U.S. We talked to them about our incentives and they decided to expand here. We’re very happy they did that.”

Over on the other end of Enterprise Drive, at Ridge Road, Wainfleet-based Devron — it supplies products for construction, agricultural, drainage and environmental industries — is finishing up work on its new facility, which should employ up to 30 people.

Campion says the city will look for land it can purchase for industrial use in the new year and continue fighting to keep incentive programs from Niagara Region going, especially those for brownfield properties.

Incentive programs make those brownfield properties, like the former Welmet property on Lincoln Street, more attractive for investors.

“The Welmet property sat stagnant for years and was flipped a number of times. The owner is working to remediate those lands now, and we’ll see the Atlas Steel lands, where the new fire hall will go, remediated as well.”

There’s even talk about the former Union Carbide property, the mayor says. He’s heard there’s talk between Carbide and a developer to see if there are opportunities for development.

“Without those incentives, no one wants to touch land like that.”

Bringing new companies, business and jobs was the focus of 2017, says Campion, adding 2018 will see the city focus on more than just that.

“We have to look at giving people more things to do. We’ll only be successful if people want come to Welland for other reasons, not just employment. There has to be more than just incentives. It’s why would I want to move my family here to work. We have to focus on enhancing the livability of the city.”