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the pulse

SAULT STE. MARIE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEWS

ALSO INSIDE:

- City gets 2011 OCAA bball tourney
- Virtual Advisor system purchased
- Fibrestick Ltd. expanding operations
- Sault delving into accessibility sports
- Column: Local gaming sector growing
- Algoma U announces new president



INDUSTRY: Heliene building presence in North America's Alternative Energy Capital **Solar panel manufacturer setting up shop in the Sault**

Sault Ste. Marie is a major alternative energy producer and has been for quite some time.

With a May announcement, the city is entering into a new phase in the green sector. Heliene Canada is establishing a solar panel manufacturing facility on the corner of Second Line and Allen's Side Road. It will employ up to 36 people.

Company President Martin Pochtaruk commended City Council and staff for their "vision in establishing the community as the Alternative Energy Capital of North America." He also thanked the local Innovation Centre and Sault Ste. Marie Economic Develop-

ment Corporation for facilitating the firm through the bureaucratic process of start up.

Such help is what the SSMEDC is mandated to do.

"When an entrepreneur makes a decision to move forward — from an economic development perspective — to assist them," said John Febraro, Acting Executive Director of Development Sault Ste. Marie, a division of the SSMEDC. "Whatever the client needs to get it to the next level, that's what we support."

In Heliene's case, funding was needed. Part of it would come from the provincial gov-

ernment. To help get off the ground, the company received a \$2.5-million investment from the province's Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation.

"Without its financial contributions, our project wouldn't exist and neither would the jobs that we're (creating)," said Pochtaruk, who's also a member of the SSMEDC Board of Directors.

Being able to access such funding is one of the benefits of starting a business in Sault Ste. Marie, said MPP David Oraziatti. The NOHFC "is very important for strategic investments in Northern Ontario."

PHOTO: At Heliene's groundbreaking ceremony May 7 (L to R): Development Sault Ste. Marie's John Febraro, Heliene investor and former Algoma Steel CEO Denis Turcotte, MPP David Oraziatti, Heliene Canada President Martin Pochtaruk, and Councillor Steve Butland.

TOURISM: Sault wins hosting rights for 2011 OCAA Men's Basketball Championships**Big bball tourney coming to town**

Sault Ste. Marie has been selected to host the 2011 Ontario Colleges Athletics Association Men's Basketball Championships. It will be the first time the event is held in Northern Ontario in more than 30 years.

The tournament will take place from March 2 to 5 at the Essar Centre and will feature eight teams with 340 total visitors.

It was bid on by Algoma University and Tourism Sault Ste. Marie, a division of the Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation.

"This event will raise the profile of basketball in our city," said Mark Kontulainen, Director of Athletics & Recreation for Algoma U, whose teams compete in the OCAA.

The provincial college basketball championships are traditionally held in large cities like Toronto, Ottawa and London. In the local bid package, a case was made as

to why the Sault was a unique and, in many respects, better place to hold the tournament.

"In Sault Ste. Marie, an event like this will generate a considerable amount of attention, whereas it may fall below the radar screen in a city like Toronto," said Kontulainen.

These comments were echoed by Steve Hollingshead, Tourism SSM's Coordinator of Sport Tourism.

"When bidding on events like this, we focus on our city's advantages," he said. "In this case, it included the fact that visiting players and coaches can easily walk from their hotel (Delta Sault Ste. Marie Waterfront Hotel and Conference Centre) to the basketball venue. The solid partnership between Algoma University, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie and our private-sector partners also enabled us to put forth the strong bid."

As well, having the state-

of-the-art Essar Centre helps when bidding on major sporting events, added Hollingshead. Also beneficial is the portable basketball floor Tourism Sault Ste. Marie purchased a few years back.

The easily-transportable wood surface, stored and used in the George Leach Centre at Algoma University, was bought to allow the city to host several Ontario Basketball Association championships. Since then, it has also been used to lure the Harlem Globetrotters on two separate occasions. Put simply, the investment has paid off.

Meanwhile, the community is developing a reputation as a place that can host basketball and many

other types of sporting events.

"Sault Ste. Marie is a hockey town, but we're showing that we're much more than that," said Hollingshead.

"Our city can host pretty much anything as long as we have the support of local champions like Algoma University. They take the lead in organizing the event, and we use our experience to help them along the way. The OCAA Basketball Championships is a prime example of what can happen when we work together."



PHOTO: Mark Kontulainen (left) and Steve Hollingshead discuss the OCAA bid package.

SMALL BUSINESS: Enterprise Centre SSM gets Virtual Advising system**Business consulting in the region just got easier**

Meeting with the team at Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie just got a whole lot easier.

The small business wing of the Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation, which services the Algoma District and Chapleau, is preparing to launch its Virtual Advisor system. The system will allow staff to overcome distance barriers and meet with clients online

across the region.

"This will make it much easier to reach out to clients," said Andrew Ross, General Manager for Enterprise Centre Sault Ste. Marie. "It will also make our services more available for those looking to start or expand a business."

What makes the Virtual Advisor system different from videoconferencing is that it allows for documents to be shared in a way that

both end users can view it and make edits simultaneously.

When reviewing business plans, which can be used to apply for government grants and low-interest loans, such software will come in handy, added Ross.

"A face-to-face meeting is the best way to conduct business consulting, but, given the travel distance between our head office and clients

throughout our district, this isn't always possible," he said. "The Virtual Advisor system provides a method of reducing distance barriers that are common in Northern Ontario, particularly in rural areas."

The purchase of the equipment was made possible thanks to a \$15,000 investment from the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade.

INDUSTRY: Fibrestick Manufacturing ramping up production; creating jobs in Sault Ste. Marie

Local wood products manufacturer has sights on expansion

Business is business.

Ryan Connolly spent more than 20 years working his farm north of the Sault. Little did he know that the entrepreneurial skills he learned there would also allow him to excel as the owner of a wood products manufacturing facility.

Four years ago, Connolly purchased Fibrestick Manufacturing Ltd., which then

produced only packing and bracing materials for the lumber industry. Also at that time, the mill manufactured one product, employed three staff and did business with just two customers — one in the Sault, the other in Wawa.

When the latter, Weyerhaeuser, shut its doors, Connolly knew he'd have to adapt quickly or risk shutting his

own.

"It was a wake-up call," he said evenly.

To survive and prosper, Connolly would have to increase his client base.

"It's important to identify growing mar-

kets," he said.

For Fibrestick, that market proved to be the housing sector, including high-rise apartments, in southern Ontario and certain parts of the U.S. Today, the firm has nine staff, more product offerings and a client base that stretches across North America.

"For a Northern Ontario business, that's a significant increase," said John Febbraro, Acting Executive Director of Development Sault Ste. Marie, a division of the SSMEDC. "Often, businesses in the region operate on a smaller scale, but when grouped together, they have a huge economic impact. That's why we support them."

Meanwhile, Fibrestick's ongoing expansion is being

aided with an investment from the province's Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation. The \$100,000 loan will help the firm purchase equipment for the production of medium density fibreboard door jambs and mouldings.

"By supporting the expansion of Fibrestick's product lines, we are helping it compete in the global marketplace while also investing in job creation in Sault Ste. Marie," said MPP David Oraziatti.

For the future, Connolly would like to ramp up production even further, which may include establishing a complete second shift.

As it has in the past, the SSMEDC will help the company along the way with business consulting and other aid.



PHOTO: Fibrestick owner Ryan Connolly (right) gives a mill tour to MPP Oraziatti (centre) and SSMEDC's John Febbraro.

TOURISM: Accessible sports show paves the way for new tourism market

Sault proves its ready, willing and able to host more sporting events

A local group is working to ensure that a disability doesn't prevent someone from participating in sports.

The Sault Ste. Marie Accessible Sports Council, established last year, held an awareness event at the John Rhodes Centre in May. The sports show, called "Ready, Willing and Able," allowed attendants to try their hand at wheelchair basketball, sledge hockey and other activities.

Meanwhile, with an eye towards another sport tourism market, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie has been working with the local Accessible Sports

Council for a while now. The goal: have the city host a major accessible sports event.

"When looking to delve into a new sport tourism market, it's crucial to have the local champions on board," said Steve Hollingshead, Coordinator of Special Projects and Sport Tourism for Tourism Sault Ste. Marie.

This formula has been successful in the past, he added. For instance, it was the local Finnish community that took the lead with planning and organizing the 2010 Finn Grand Fest, a summer event expected to attract thousands

of visitors to the Sault.

In this example, and many others, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie worked with a local organizing committee to secure a major event.

"Whether in the bid process or planning stage, having everyone working together is a recipe for success," said Hollingshead.

With this recipe in mind, Tourism SSM and the local Accessible Sports Council are now working to bring a ParaSport event to town.



HOOPS: At the Rhodes Arena, locals try wheelchair basketball. The portable nets were bought a few years ago by Tourism SSM to help attract basketball events.

COLUMN: Sault carving out niche as serious computer game technology centre

Enjoy the ride of a growing gaming sector in Sault Ste. Marie



BY MARC CAPANCIONI
Communications Coordinator

The last game console I purchased was the original Nintendo Entertainment System. The year was 1988.

Since then, I've been meaning to upgrade to something newer. However, the right time just seemed to never come up.

In 1996, I strongly considered buying the new Sony PlayStation, but, for whatever reason, it didn't happen.

A few years later, I thought about grabbing the newest craze, Microsoft's Xbox. This also never materialized.

To make a long story short, gaming just isn't my cup of tea. But I may be the exception as opposed to the rule.

Despite my reluctance to jump on board the bandwagon, many others have. This is especially evident in Sault Ste. Marie, a community that is quickly becoming

a major player in the video game sector.

Both post-secondary institutions in town offer gaming-related programs. Starting this fall, students at Sault College can earn a two-year diploma in video game art.

Algoma University has a gaming program as well. The school offers the only master's level gaming program in the country, and it has plans to delve even further into the sector.

In partnership with the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre, the university recently established a video game studio aimed at creating serious games for the health-care industry.

Algoma Games for Health, in collaboration with the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, is now developing a speech therapy game designed to help stroke victims recover.

Recently, I spoke with Dwayne Hammond, Algoma University's Strategic Adviser for Computer Games Technology, who gave me the low-down.

"Canada, as a whole, has been targeting (the gaming sector) for a while now," he said.

"The Sault is starting to claim its space. There's a lot of activity happening here."

For the speech therapy endeavour, Hammond hopes to unveil the final product in about one year's time.

These types of things "don't get developed in a few months," he said.

While cutting edge and exciting, these aren't the only gaming initiatives in Sault Ste. Marie. Just last year, a couple of entrepreneurs opened up a video game café and lounge on Queen Street next to Top Hat. It's a place where patrons can enjoy all the popular picks for a mere \$3 hourly rate.

I spoke with co-owner John Garside a few months ago while I was drafting a business profile on Never Ending Games.

"You can really play all the top games every month, and it still won't cost as much as the price of buying a single

game," he said.

On the board game front, there's also a place to go in Sault Ste. Marie.

Chris Weatherby's business, Local Friendly Gaming on Northern Avenue, offers a variety of role-playing board games. From beginner to pro, the establishment can accommodate. It even offers two large gaming tables where large groups can hold tournaments or a friendly game night.

With all of these gaming ventures, Sault Ste. Marie appears to be carving out a new niche for itself — something with the potential to have a significant impact on the local economy.

Whether you're a seasoned gamer, or someone like me who still plays the original grey-box Nintendo — and couldn't be happier doing so — this is a ride that many of us can enjoy.

Happy travels.

Column originally published in The Sault Star on May 1, 2010.



STUDIO: At Algoma Games for Health, serious video games are developed for use in the health-care field.



BORED?: If you're looking for a place to host a group gaming night, Local Friendly Gaming may be for you.



LOUNGE: Never Ending Games is a perfect fit for those looking to play the best video games for a low price.

In the Community: EDC Photo Gallery



AWARENESS: Summer Student Kyleigh Binkley (left), CEO Bruce Strapp (centre) and SSMEDC Board member Councillor Susan Myers. They were on hand for the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario's Chair Leaders Event, designed to raise awareness of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities.



POST-SECONDARY PARTERSHIP: Bruce Strapp (right), CEO of the Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation, with incoming Algoma University President Dr. Richard Myers (centre) and outgoing President Dr. Celia Ross. The Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation and Algoma University have an excellent working relationship, with the AU President sitting on the SSMEDC's Board liaison committee. This strong partnership will continue under the new leadership of Dr. Myers.



SOLAR SPEECH: John Febbraro, Acting Executive Director of Development Sault Ste. Marie, a division of the SSM Economic Development Corporation, emcees the announcement for Heliene's solar panel manufacturing facility May 7. The plant will employ up to 36 people and add to the city's green sector.

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99 Foster Drive - Level Three
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
Canada P6A 5X6

Phone: 705.759.5432
Toll Free: 1.866.558.5144
Fax: 705.759.2185
E-mail: info@ssmedc.ca

www.sault-canada.com

the pulse is prepared by:
Marc Capancioni
Communications Coordinator
Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corp.
705.759.0409
m.capancioni@ssmedc.ca



Sault Ste. Marie
**ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION**

The Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation recognizes the financial support it receives from the City of Sault Ste. Marie. As well, it recognizes the strong backing it receives from the Mayor, Council and City staff team. The SSMEDC also thanks the federal and provincial governments, and its many other partners, for their financial support.

The Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation is a non-profit organization, funded by public and private partners, whose goal is to be the community's leader in supporting and promoting an environment that generates sustainable employment in a healthy, growing and diversified economy.