



Regional Review

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM DEPARTMENT

A look at the local economy

The Region's Economic Development and Tourism Department discusses challenges and opportunities in Durham Region, and what is being done to help Durham businesses weather the economic storm.

Doug Lindeblom
Director of Economic Development and Tourism

A big question for Durham Region's energy sector is: How do we develop as an energy capital and leverage our unique assets? Continuing to position Durham Region as a leader in nuclear energy presents both opportunities and challenges, the greatest being the provision of the skilled workforce to undertake and maintain such a major initiative.

The Durham Strategic Energy Alliance plays a huge role in bringing together education institutions, businesses and governments. Durham College and UOIT are expanding their unique energy education and training programs, which is timely and critical.

We haven't seen the full effects of the economic downturn on the real estate market yet. There are indeed companies downsizing in the region, but expansions and new investments are happening as well. In support of continuing investments and business expansions, we anticipate new infrastructure and development projects—Seaton is showing a lot of promise—and we have a strong labour force in place to meet the demands.

Liisa Ikavalko
Senior Economic Development Officer

Tech-driven manufacturing is a large component of our local economy.

In the last 18 months, many of our sectors such as automotive and machinery manufacturing experienced a series of events that led to unprecedented challenges.

Opportunities can be found in every downturn. Some companies have purchased excess capital equipment from competitors. Others are taking advantage of the slowdown to invest in employee training. Companies should be advancing their productivity improvements to stabilize their businesses. Good examples can be found in the pharmaceutical, environment, food processing and aerospace sectors.

To assist our manufacturers, we advocate on their behalf to create business opportunities. We continue to work with municipal partners, boards of trade and chambers of commerce to deliver programs that build awareness of funding opportunities. We're also partnering with community organizations to develop the labour force.

Marlene Werry
Senior Economic Development Officer (Rural)

Agriculture is at a crossroads. Our primary producers are faced with challenges such as the rising cost of inputs and price uncertainty in commodity markets. Restrictions in land use and transportation gridlock are also everyday hurdles.

Farmers can no longer rely on low-cost commodities. They want and need new opportunities to increase farm income and attract youth. The ability to move beyond traditional agriculture and create value-added products through such options as

packaging, new methods of processing and diversifying product use can help to open new markets. A great example of this is Algoma Orchards, which is now beginning to implement new cider processing technologies.

Huge opportunities can be found in the development of biofuels, biochemicals and value chains, and technology to transform produce into final products. We help to create communication pathways or the "missing link" between processors and producers.

Kerri King
Tourism Manager

Tourism stakeholders are looking to us more than ever for marketing support. Building on momentum from last year's award-winning campaign, we continue to support businesses and boost local tourism. Social marketing is a powerful and cost-effective tool that reaches not only Durham region, but also visitors from the GTA and beyond. We'll therefore continue with our blog, social network groups and e-newsletters, all of which are well-received so far.

Funding is also a major issue for tourism stakeholders. Durham Tourism continues to build relationships with industry and government partners to ensure that funding opportunities are available. With workshops, we also educate tourism operators on topics ranging from online promotions to packaging.

Tourists look for value and authentic experiences. We're now laying the groundwork to grow our creative community, beginning with cultural mapping. There are also exciting opportunities in culinary tourism and agri-tourism that we're exploring.



UOIT, one of the key players in growing our knowledge-based economy.

Business leaders weigh in

Todd Skinner
Trainer, Coach and Partner, Business Accelerator Group

There's been a slowdown in the fourth quarter of 2008 and as a result businesses cash flow has been tightening. The economic impacts are broad-based and the impact isn't just in just one or two sectors, but I think there's still optimism.

It (the slowdown) has many businesses getting back to the basics: making phone calls, building relationships and putting themselves back in front of customers. How to get bottom line results will always be their major concern.

The message of hope is that we've been here before. Great opportunities always come from downturns—if you have the right mindset and are willing to step back and re-evaluate your business.

Peter Spratt
Vice-President, ROCG and Director, Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade

What we've experienced in the North American economy is referred to by some as the "perfect storm." A series of events, including the near-collapse of the U.S. financial sector and the resulting global credit crunch, have sent our economy into a tailspin. This has resulted in a decline in public confidence and consumer spending.

Financing may not be as readily available to businesses in our current economic climate. Maintaining a strong balance sheet, a measure of your financial health, is essential. If businesses are financially healthy, they'll be able to pursue opportunities as they arise.

Businesses would be well advised to seek out opportunities with municipal economic development offices, chambers of commerce and boards of trade, in order to build alliances or find partners to explore emerging opportunities.

Build success at the IMC



Robotic work cells in the IMC.

The Integrated Manufacturing Centre (IMC) is an educational facility built by Durham College. The space is shared by the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). Fully automated and industrial-grade, it can be used by Durham Region manufacturers to drive business innovation.

"IMC's setting and resources can

provide industries with practical and applied training in key high-tech areas of automation, manufacturing and applied research," said Brent Brooks, a professor at Durham College. "Most of our full-time programs break for the summer. This creates an ideal opportunity for our industry partners to use the IMC with the benefit of scheduling flexibility from May to August."

The IMC is capable of assembling finished products from raw materials with limited human intervention, and offers eligible companies well-maintained equipment to design, develop and test automation innovations inexpensively. Experienced faculty and instructors can develop and deliver customized training for employees.

Phase One of the IMC, completed

in 2003, consists of an industrial computing lab with 16 stations to develop software for automation and robotics. Eight robotic work cells enable troubleshooting as well as networking and integration of major devices. Phase Two, machining and measurement, was built in 2005 and focuses on the manufacture of products from CAD/CAM models.

Research partnerships aimed to promote innovation and solutions in manufacturing are also welcome. "The IMC is an ideal facility for applied research in many high-tech areas such as CAD/CAM, robotics, automation, CNC machining and injection molding projects, to name a few," said Beau James, also a professor at Durham College.

Companies need technical expertise and automated solutions to remain

competitive in global markets. "The IMC can help by delivering relevant, practical training and assistance to applied research projects," continued James. "Benefits (of research partnerships) are many and can be a win-win situation for all. Students win by obtaining technical skills essential to employment. Employers also win, because students provide value-added expertise that results in increased efficiency and productivity, ultimately enabling manufacturers to be more competitive and profitable."

To learn more about how your company can take advantage of unique opportunities at the IMC, contact Durham College Corporate Training Services (Melody Moran, 905-721-3331 or Julie Martin, 905-721-3345) or visit www.corporate.training.durhamcollege.ca

MAKING BUSINESS HAPPEN

Resources for success

Now may be the right time for your business to invest in R&D. Find out how the following resources and programs can help you strategize your next move.

Scientific Research & Experimental Development (SR&ED) Program

A federal tax incentive program that encourages businesses of all sizes and sectors to conduct industrial R&D.
www.cra-arc.gc.ca/sred/

The National Research Council-Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP)

An innovation assistance program that provides technical and business advisory services, and financial support to eligible small- to medium-sized businesses that wish to grow.
irap-pari.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca

Ontario Centres of Excellence

This independent, non-profit organization funds and promotes commercial innovation and is the pre-eminent research-to-commercialization vehicle in Ontario.
www.oce-ontario.org



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