



Canadian Trade Successes 01-06

SWIFT CURRENT PLAYS TO ITS STRENGTHS

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Key Quotation: The financial support from the Community Investment Support Program (CISP), which will help support the second phase of the strategy, represents an important boost to the coalition's efforts and a vote of confidence in the regional approach to pulling in foreign investment, added Sandra Blyth.	
Story details: Sometimes the biggest hurdle to economic development isn't a shortage of natural resources, labour or expertise—it's getting the word out that you're ready and open for business. That's the challenge facing southwestern Saskatchewan business leaders, who are working to boost their region's profile among foreign investors. The one-year-old Action Southwest Business Networks Coalition is now putting together a major drive to draw attention to what can best be described as an abundance of local riches. The Coalition is getting help from the federal government. It recently received a \$60,000 contribution from the Community Investment Support Program (CISP), a program run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) to help municipalities attract foreign direct investment. Combined with matching funds from local business, municipal and provincial governments, and other federal government programs, the CISP contribution will support a variety of awareness-building projects, including a comprehensive website that will promote the investment advantages of the entire region.	

Another initiative supported by Action Southwest is the Wind Power Interpretative Centre along the Trans-Canada Highway, which will exploit both the region's enormous wind energy potential and one of the hottest trends in the energy sector. The Centre will showcase the region for foreign investors the world over.

In addition, a map is being created highlighting the top 100 local attractions to further promote all the region has to offer in the tourist sector. Wind power and tourism are two of the many sector strategies that Action Southwest is pursuing to attract foreign investment.

The first phase of the Coalition's strategy—which last year brought together 120 community and industry leaders to explore ways of cooperating—has already won recognition from the Saskatchewan Council for Community Development in the form of an Economic Development Achievement of the Year award. Those meetings identified more than 30 possible projects in each of four targeted sectors: manufacturing, energy, tourism and agribusiness.

“If we can get those industries growing, and build a healthy, viable foundation, that will breed an attractive investment environment,” said Sandra Blyth, project manager for the Coalition. “It's also about getting a province full of independent thinkers to adopt a regional approach, to recognize that the community next door may have resources you can benefit from, and vice versa.”

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Evidence of the value of this new approach can already be found in the city of Swift Current, where, according to Blyth, close to \$70 million in construction activity can be attributed in part to increased confidence in the economy and a common vision for growth shared with the Rural Municipality of Swift Current. The goal now is to continue spreading that vision across the entire Southwest region.

The Coalition is focusing on finding investors to build on local successes. Many of the largest employers in the province today are a product of homegrown entrepreneurship. The task for the Coalition is to take that energy and direct it at the global marketplace, said Blyth. “People's mindsets are already changing. It's amazing how people have come together and are really buying into ‘thinking regionally’ and wanting to see success in the Southwest.”