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Todd Gillis Photo

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HRM needs to be community of choice

By donalee Moulton
Contributing Writer

At one time, young people went to live where there were jobs. Now the next generation of talent is going to where their heart is, and where they want to make their home.

"To attract and retain young people, we need to be a community of choice," says Stephen Dempsey, president and CEO of the Greater Halifax Partnership.

"The rules of the game have changed," notes Brad Smith, the Partnership's vice president of business development. "In the early '80s, it was a buyer's market for employers; they had a wide talent pool to draw from. Today, the shoe is on the employees' foot."

The well-shod community needs to be prepared for a highly competitive environment, he adds.

Halifax Regional Municipality is certainly getting ready. Last year, it put in place an economic development strategy with a far-reaching vision: improving and empowering the lives of every citizen by building a prosperous, dynamic, globally-competitive economy where creativity and risk-taking can flourish alongside a quality of life that is the envy of the world.

In a global economy, economic development activities must meet 'smart growth' criteria. These include: economic growth, environmental sustainability, cultural priorities, and social objectives. Only a prosperous, growing economy, one that generates tax revenue, can attain these outcomes.

"HRM's strategy encompasses all those criteria," says Mayor Peter Kelly.

Complementing the economic strategy is the municipality's 25-year regional plan, which has now been adopted by the regional council. It is a guide for the future development of the community that outlines how sustainable growth should take place in a way that preserves the environment while still maintaining a strong economy.

A third element in HRM's commitment to being a community of choice is the city's first cultural plan, which was given a thumb's up this spring. The plan, a 10-year strategy, is built on seven cultural pillars critical to becoming a community of choice, explains Holly Richardson, HRM's Regional Coordinator of Culture and Heritage.

Those pillars are: heritage, arts, community design, life-long learning, diversity, leisure and celebration, and economic development. Focused investment in these areas will be key. It's about building on HRM's unique cultural identity and vitality.

Cultural is not an aside to being a community of choice, it is a central ingredient, notes Mr. Dempsey. "In the war for talent, the top locations will be dynamic and exciting."

And they will draw the next generation. As Richard Florida documents in his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, young people are looking to live where they are inspired, where there are values that mirror their values, and where there is a thriving cultural core. Such communities do not simply happen, they are planned for.

Indeed, says Carol Macomber, acting director of Community, Culture and Economic Development for HRM, a labour shortage looms, and it will be imperative to attract and retain talent. HRM must be ready.

"Other cities aren't sitting back," she notes. "We have to be competitive."

Fortunately, adds Ms. Macomber, HRM is starting from an advantageous position.

"We are an attractive destination now," she says. "We have much strength to build upon."

One of those strengths is clearly the creative and committed companies that have built their businesses here. It's not just local organizations that are looking to them for ideas and inspiration, it's the world. Take, for example, Colour.

The PR and advertising agency, with offices throughout Atlantic Canada, has



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launched an innovative program called Year One that draws applications from recent graduates of design and advertising programs around the globe. This year, more than 160 young people from as far away as India applied to work at Colour. In return, they are given an

apartment for a year, trips home to visit family and, perhaps most importantly, an opportunity to work on challenging projects as they begin their careers.

"It's a great chance for young people to make a difference in their field while being mentored. It's a great opportunity

for Colour, and our clients, to channel new ideas, fresh energy and a wealth of talent," says Colour president, Chris Keavill.

And it's a golden opportunity for a community of choice to say, "Welcome to your new home."

'Live first, work second' is new work ethic for next generation of employees

By donalee Moulton
Contributing Writer

When it comes to attracting and retaining employees, it's a sellers' market. Successful employers must appeal to — and deliver value — for a whole new group of employees.

Rebecca Ryan, founder of Next Generation Consulting, is helping organizations around the continent do just that.

It is important to put the next generation in context, Ryan said. There are currently four generations in the workplace, a situation unique in North American history. Those age groups are com-

prised of the Traditionalists, born between 1925 and 1942; the Baby Boomers, born between 1943 and 1960; Generation Xers, born between 1961 and 1981; and Millennials, born between 1982 and 2003.

Ryan's Madison, Wisconsin-based firm studies 20-40 year olds. Since opening its doors eight years ago, Next Generation Consulting has conducted interviews, focus groups, and surveys with more than 10,000 young professionals. Cities, states, arts organizations, and companies use this research and its related applications to attract and develop the next generation of citizens, pa-

trons, employees and customers.

"You could call us market researchers," says Ryan. "We prefer to think of ourselves as detectives."

Here's a sampling of what Next Generation's sleuthing has uncovered since it opened its doors on April Fools' Day 1998:

- Most younger employees would like good mentors and managers;
- They want control over their time;
- They want challenging work;
- They are looking for companies that provide them with the tools, technology and training to do their jobs well.

Not surprisingly, the next generation

of employees isn't just concerned with work, they're also concerned with where they do that work, notes Ryan, who was named Entrepreneur of the Year by the U.S. Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

A 2002 report, Hot Jobs-Cool Communities, studied 43 variables, ranging from farmer's markets to recreation areas to number of actors and nightclubs per capita to understand what attracts young people to a community. Next Generation has now put these variables into seven indexes. Together they form a 'Handprint' for communities of choice. The handprint has seven appendages:

Vitality, Earning, Learning, Around Town, Cost of Lifestyle, Social Capital, and After Hours.

"We can transform our communities into truly great places to live for today's generations — and the next generation," says Ryan. "We just need to understand the ingredients to success. Live first, work second is the new work ethic. The next generation wants a great place to live and a great place to work."

She will share her research and highlights at the Greater Halifax Partnership's Building Our Future Luncheon, Engaging Next Generation Employees, today, at Pier 21.