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Transforming Halifax into hot spot for YPs

By donalee Moulton
Contributing Writer

The Greater Halifax Partnership is thinking young. Such thinking is critical to the future of our city, says president and CEO, Stephen Dempsey.

"We need to engage young people," says Dempsey. "We need to capture their creativity, their energy, and their innovation. We can't be successful as a city without them."

"With the support of Saint Mary's University and Industry Canada, the Partnership is working with Next Generation Consulting to calculate Greater Halifax's 'handprint' in seven indices that young professionals (YP) use to evaluate and screen communities when relocating," says Mr. Dempsey. "We need to understand where we are right now. Then we can determine what to do next."

Next Generation Consulting, based in Madison, Wisconsin, studies 20-40 year olds. Since opening its doors nearly a decade ago, the company has conducted interviews, focus groups, and surveys with nearly 30,000 young professionals. In Greater Halifax, for example, World Cafés were held with emerging professionals and university students, and nearly 700 young professionals were surveyed in an effort to paint a clear picture of the existing landscape and identify ways to attract and retain the next generation of citizens, patrons, employees, and customers.

"You could call us market researchers," says Rebecca Ryan, president and founder of Next Generation Consulting. "We prefer to think of ourselves as detectives."

Her detective team uncovered important information with respect to the seven indices that are critical to young professionals. Those cornerstones are learning, after hours, vitality, social capital, around town, cost of lifestyle, and earning. "In each area, we're doing well, but nothing can be taken for granted," says Mr. Dempsey. "If we can create the most options for the most people then we will be a community of choice."

One area where more work is needed is employment options — or the perception of those options. "Only 31 per cent of respondents said they feel Greater Halifax offers a broad range of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities," notes Ms. Ryan. "Young professionals feel they must leave Greater Halifax to gain career advancement."

Many young professionals are acting on this disquieting feeling. Seventy per cent of survey respondents who no longer live in Greater Halifax said they left for a better-paying job. Interestingly, however, only four per cent of those who came back, a group known as the boomerangers, returned back for employment reasons.

"We know that this generation values lifestyle, and Greater Halifax is well positioned on this front," says Mr.

Dempsey. "You can be kite surfing in the morning before a 20-minute drive to the office, then grabbing a quick bite of Greek or Thai food before heading off for an evening class."

The value of that diverse lifestyle is not lost on today's young professionals. "Cost of lifestyle was ranked number one in what YPs value most in a community by those surveyed," says Ms. Ryan.

"However," she notes, "only 58 per cent of those people believe Greater Halifax is a place in which they can afford to live, work and play."

That is an issue that must be addressed if Greater Halifax is to attract and retain the young professionals who will be the heart of our economy as more and more Baby Boomers retire. "Greater Halifax has a distinct advantage," says Ms. Ryan. "People who know this community, love it. Our research shows that 79 per cent of people who no longer live in Greater Halifax have considered moving back."

More than a welcome mat is needed to draw them here. "We need to do whatever we can to make sure young professionals have as many employment choices as possible in Greater Halifax," says Mr. Dempsey.

Using the data that has been gathered, the Partnership is now moving forward to address gaps, change perceptions and create a handprint for the community that speaks to young profes-



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The Partnership is now moving forward to address gaps, change perceptions and create a handprint that speaks to young professionals globally.

sionals around the world. "This is a globally competitive environment. We can take nothing for grant-

ed," says Stephen Dempsey. "We must have a focus on growing and retaining our young professionals."

Fusion Halifax rolls out the welcome mat for young professionals

By donalee Moulton
Contributing Writer

Young professionals (YP) in our city are coming together. They are connecting through Fusion Halifax — the first broad-based organization for the next generation to be established in Greater Halifax.

"Young professionals feel strongly about getting involved, and they want to do that in a way that will also enable them to connect with other young professionals," says Peter Moorhouse, director of investor relations with the

Greater Halifax Partnership. Research conducted on behalf of the Partnership by Next Generation Consulting found that young professionals — educators, entrepreneurs, artists, and others with a commitment to career and community — had noted the absence of a YP organization in Greater Halifax. "Such groups bring young professionals together and connect them to each other and to the community. They are important," says Molly Foley, lead consultant on communities and young professional services for Next Generation Consulting.

In response to the identified need, the Greater Halifax Partnership researched best practice models and met with Fusion Saint John to explore how that successful YP organization was operating in neighbouring New Brunswick. "Being part of a network enables us to share ideas and energy while at the same time evolving to meet our own unique needs," says Mr. Moorhouse, noting that a third Fusion group is also up and running in Maine. "Fusion Halifax," he adds, "will provide a welcome mat for young professionals who choose to call our

community home." That welcome mat will help open doors for young professionals, but what lies behind those doors will vary significantly from one group to another. The individual path is critical, says Ms. Foley. "It's important for every young professional group to look at their community and figure out how they can contribute." In Milwaukee, for example, the YP organization there has grown to become actively involved in employee attraction and retention and works

closely with the business community. In New Orleans, the young professionals' organization is reaching out to their peers who have relocated to other communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. They have launched a Come Back Home campaign. Fusion Halifax will provide opportunities for young professionals in the community, newcomers and established residents alike, to get involved — and to get to know one another. "They will build relationships," says Mr. Moorhouse, "that will last for years."

