

# Businesses weigh in

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The first round of results from the Winkler & District Chamber of Commerce's Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) survey has given the Chamber a lot of food for thought.

Over 80 local businesses of all sizes and in all sectors have been surveyed since last fall by the Chamber, which plans to poll the entire Winkler business community within the next few years.

The results give an in-depth look at the concerns and issues facing local businesses today, said Chamber president Ken Thomas.

"The whole eventual goal of the program is to grow from within and take away the barriers that prevent local businesses from growing," he said.

In its review of the results released late last month, the Chamber has identified several important areas of concern, Thomas said.

The first has to do with providing skilled labour and training opportunities, he said.

The majority of businesses surveyed cited the continuing shortage of skilled labourers as a major issue in the region, said Thomas.

Businesses also lamented the lack of on-going training opportunities - on management techniques, marketing skills, customer service, etc. - available for employers and their staff, he said.

To that end, Thomas said, the Chamber would like to work out ways to offer more

skills training for businesses in addition to the current crop of workshops and seminars it offers.

The Chamber also wants to sit down with local immigration officials to look at how we can more quickly get immigrants with needed skills into the area, he said.

Promotion of our community was another concern, and one that has an impact in attracting new Winkler residents as future employees and customers, Chamber executive director Brenda Storey said.

"We need to do a better job of advertising and promotion of the city in terms of packaging what we have to offer," she said.

The Chamber hopes to help put together a comprehensive promotional package - likely including a video, brochures, and other materials - that companies can send to prospective employees outside the region, Storey said.

"I think that's part and parcel for the lack of our skilled labour and the professionals we are not attracting," Storey said, adding such materials could also be used to promote more tourism to the area.

Another important issue was the lack of understanding within the business community of the City's strategic planning, Thomas said.

"I think for me what was startling is businesses overall didn't really have a grasp on the city's strategic direction," he said, noting better communication needs to be fostered, a goal that may be made easier with the



Ashleigh Viveiros/Winkler Times

Chamber executive director Brenda Storey and president Ken Thomas with some of the charts outlining the findings of the first round of the BR+E survey.

establishment of a more-visible economic development office.

Highway 32 proved to be another contentious issue, Storey said. Eighty-two per cent of businesses surveyed fully supported the twinning of the busy highway.

Until that happens, the business commu-

nity recommended the city make nearby Eastview Drive a more attractive alternate truck route by improving signage at the Hwy 14 intersection, creating a turn-off lane, and adding new lighting to the street, she said.

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# "Get rid of the junk... and we really mean it!"

By Lorne Stelmach

Rural residents with derelict vehicles on their properties may not be let off the hook for much longer.

The Rural Municipality of Stanley could start laying down the law by more strenuously enforcing its derelict vehicle bylaw.

That didn't come, however, without some debate at council about their will to better enforce a bylaw that has been on the books since 1999.

"So nobody really wants to be the bad guy?" councillor Ken Schellenberg commented at their April 24 meeting.

Despite having the restrictions on derelict vehicles - cars or trucks that are unlicensed and generally inoperable - there are a number of properties around the municipality where the bylaw has generally been left overlooked.

And chief administrative officer Rick Klippenstein suggested municipal representatives may be reluctant to step in and enforce the rules if their actions end up not having the full support of all council members.

He said they need to know they have council's backing if, for instance, they were to reach the point of calling on RCMP support to go on to properties and impound vehicles.

"I think there needs to be clear direction on this issue. Are we going to enforce this bylaw or aren't we?" asked Klippenstein.

The derelict vehicle bylaw sets out a number of conditions and restrictions. For example, in villages, there are to be no more than six vehicles on properties of more than two acres. In agricultural zones, that restriction is 10 vehicles.

And as well, council noted, the new Stanley zoning bylaw prohibits auto-wrecking within villages.

Councillors noted there have been some instances where the number of derelict vehicles on properties appeared to have multiplied without any effective enforcement of the bylaw in place.

Council member Bill Reimer agreed that was a concern, however he also expressed reluctance to start enforcing the bylaw in a heavy-handed manner.

Other council members responded that they should change the bylaw if council is not going to enforce it.

"You've never come up with any alternatives," Reeve Art Petkau suggested to Reimer.

Bernie Wiebe agreed that council either needed to start enforcing the existing bylaw or change it if they didn't like it.

"We either back it up or we back off," he concluded.

**"We either back it up or we back off."**

— Coun. Bernie Wiebe



Ashleigh Viveiros/Winkler Times

## Perfect attendance

Fire Chief Garry Klassen (right) recently presented long-time Winkler firefighter Jake Rempel with a special plaque to recognize Rempel's perfect attendance record for all 51 training sessions the department held in 2007. Winkler's paid-on-call firefighters are encouraged to attend as many of the weekly training sessions as possible to practise and update their skills, Klassen said.