

New economic development officer on the job

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By Ashleigh Viveiros

Without a clear vision for the future, economic development - even in a growing community like Winkler - suffers.

This from Darlis Collinge, the new economic development officer for the Winkler/Stanley Economic Development Organization (WSEDO).

Collinge took up the mantle at the start of this month, and, though she's still settling into both her new home and new job, she already has some clear ideas of her role in the regional community.

"My job at the moment is to get familiar with the community ... to try to identify some opportunities for growth in business, industry," she said from her temporary offices at the Winkler Chamber of Commerce this week.

"It's really important for a community to have an economic development plan; to know what your strengths are ... and also what your challenges are," she said. "Without knowing where you want to go, it's more difficult to get there. By having a plan in place, you know where to put your resources."

Collinge notes the WSEDO plans to meet this spring to discuss economic development in the Winkler-Stanley region, and to determine a plan of action for the months and years ahead.

"We're going to determine where to focus our efforts, what opportunities are out there," she said.

Tackling the huge challenge of helping to guide the area's economic progress isn't something new for Collinge, who has spent the last decade working as an economic development manager in the Swan River Valley area.

Since moving to Winkler last month, Collinge has been impressed by the local business community and is excited to be a part of its future, she said.

"People are very open-minded. They are willing to listen to new ideas," said Collinge. "I also see a lot of entrepreneurs that have started up within the community - they believe they can do something and so they do."

Helping current and new entrepreneurs succeed is part of her role as EDO, Collinge notes. She's available for business owners or potential start-ups to meet with to discuss business plans, strategic planning, funding sources, and so on.

Looking to the future, Collinge hopes to see the region take further advantage of its proximity to Winnipeg - which is developing itself as a major international distribution centre - coupled with the benefits of rural living.

"I think there really is an opportunity there, once we let people know we are here, that we're open for business," she said.

Collinge's offices in Winkler's City Hall are expected to be up and running by sometime next week.

To contact her in the meantime, you can call or stop by the City of Winkler or Chamber offices.

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