

Best Practice

Community and Economic Development Leadership

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THE PRACTICE

The Town of Ogema promotes community and economic development within the community by council leading in every area possible. Ogema participates whenever they can in different community-based competitions and economic development training opportunities.

THE PROCESS

In 1989, the Ogema Economic Development Committee (EDC) started with an informal group wanting to deal with Fair Share Saskatchewan. This was a group interested in promoting and developing the community. The EDC have had seven successful Trade Shows which promoted our local businesses as well as promoted businesses from Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The wake-up call came in 1995-96 when the closures of a Sask Power office, the CP Branch line, and the local elevators, combined with the impending loss of the school became a call for action. The community leaders believed if the school closed everything else would follow and the town could lose a significant amount of its businesses and residents.

Ogema realized that doing nothing was not an option, so council agreed to opt out of rural decline and started to look seriously at the choices for change and adaptations. A series of community meetings were held and options were explored. As a result, a number of business initiatives emerged at the same time from several directions involving different groups of regional leaders. Part of the success was the ability of each group of leaders to focus all their attention on their particular project, although mutually supporting the other ventures when required.

In 1997, an individual from our community took part in a hog symposium and after discussions; a group was formed to look into intensive hog operation in the area. Three hog management teams were asked to give presentations to the group and Big Sky Farms was chosen. The plans for a locally built feed mill was a truly value added process. The total project cost was \$33,000,000. The Community Group had to come up with \$150,000 to identify sites. While other projects were in the works, the group was not able to find 150 individuals with \$1,000 each, but did find ten persons to invest \$10,000 each and signed notes for the balance.

In 1999, construction began on Canada's first 5,000 sow farrow to finish operation. There are nine barns on six sites and a feed mill site. In the construction phase there were 100 to 150 construction jobs of which 50 were local contractors and labourers. New businesses were attracted and local businesses expanded. In the production phase, there is a 1.5 million dollar payroll and 50 new jobs. New families came to the community with an increase of enrolment of 10% that year.

The Red Coat Road and Rail Ltd. formed to negotiate the purchase of the CP Branch line in the fall of 1997. It was complete in July 1999 and involved villages and RM's along the 114 km of branch line from Pangman to Assiniboia. It immediately started operating with the first 20 car spot in Ogema, loaded by Sask Wheat Pool, which had re-opened. It is the first "community owned" short line company in Saskatchewan and operated in the black for the full 10 years. Key leaders from every community were represented on the Advisory Committee.

In the fall of 2001, the Sask Wheat Pool Elevator came up for sale. \$200,000 was raised in the first three months. The first grain was brought into the community for the first time in 40 years. Profit was made in the first two years with a dividend paid in the next year. In a mere 4 to 5 years, the community was able to create 90 new jobs. The project broadened our economic base, retained young families that were sure to have left and attracted new families.

One of the opportunities identified in the strategic planning session was a motel for the community. Whenever the community held a function, there was limited space for people to stay overnight and the people would go elsewhere. A motel was for sale in a neighbouring community and a group of 40 investors bought the motel, moved it and had it up and running in four months just in time for the Centennial Celebrations on Fair Day. It was another great way to invest in your own community.

With all the new job activity, there weren't enough people to fill all the openings. Ogema worked closely with Big Sky Farms to start the immigration process to get farm workers to move to Ogema. In July 2008, the first Philippine family moved to Ogema and in September their two children started school. As of April 1, 2009, there are nineteen adults and six children that have immigrated to Ogema.

In 2002, Ogema had a consultant, Dwight Percy come to the community and had representatives from the community forge a community strategic plan. The EDC had to limit the amount of people in attendance but got a cross section from the youth to the seniors and included the majority of the organizations in the community. After the strategic plan was formulated, a community meeting was held and Al Scholz was the guest speaker, followed by Wayne Myren, Mayor of Ogema and President of the Ogema EDC to speak to the Strategic Plan. Again, the EDC had to limit the amount of people in attendance to the supper and informational meeting because of the hall size. The Strategic Plan is visited at each of the EDC meetings to make sure that we keep on track. Each year, an evaluation meeting is held to go over the Strategic Plan to see if our goals remained the same or did the plan need a bit of tweaking.

Ogema likes to keep the residents involved and informed of what is going on in the community. When a volunteer project comes to the table, the leaders of the project put up posters and phone around to invite people to join in. The Ogema EDC invite different Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assembly, leaders of political parties and chairpersons of different boards (School Board, CWB, etc) to see what Ogema is doing to ensure informed decisions are made concerning our community by outside organizations.

When the Ogema community has a success, the Ogema EDC hire a professional to write a media release and they send it to all the newspapers, radio stations and television stations. Anytime an opportunity arises to promote our community, the Ogema EDC take time to try and make sure that proper information is given and keeps the name of Ogema prominent. Seeing your community's name in the news or being used as a good example for others to follow, gives everyone in the community a sense of pride. This helps to keep a positive attitude in the community.

Shares were sold for the Red Coat Road and Rail, the Ogema Elevator and the Ogema motel making it possible for Ogema residents to invest in their community. A Community Foundation has been set up for anyone wishing to invest in new projects in Ogema.

In 2008, a survey was sent to everyone in the community to see if there was enough interest to start a daycare in the school. The Ogema school was on the non-viable list so by putting the daycare into the school would lower the square footage to student ratio. The survey was positive so a new small group proceeded to apply for grants. By November 2008, the Ogema Total Learning Childcare (Ogema TLC) Daycare opened and the 25 spots were almost filled to capacity. Volunteers helped to

get this not for profit organization going to help keep our school open and also to help with qualified childcare in the community.

In March of 2009, a community planning session was held to raise the bar yet another level. The outcome was the intent to develop a 25 year plan for growth in a timely fashion. Plans were made to develop an Official Community Plan with infrastructure, capital, tourism and a marketing plan all included.

THE RESULTS

The results were a growth in population with a 4.1 per cent increase from the 2001 to 2006 census. There is continued growth as the Philippine's continued to bring their families to Ogema. Today the population has increased by 6 per cent and when all the family members are here, that will be another 8 per cent increase to the population.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Town of Ogema learned the following lessons:

1. You have to keep the residents informed to everything that is going on in the community. Good communication within the community is vital.
2. Think globally and position yourself for growth.
3. You don't always get what you ask for. Even though the community lobbied the government to retain the Sask Power Office in our community, it was moved to a neighbouring community.
4. You have to be persistent in pursuing the project after re-evaluating the information.