THE INTELLIGENCER

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Hastings gets creative

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When Theresa Dostaler left Madoc at age 18 to attend the University of Ottawa, her vision of the future did not include returning to Hastings County and running her own business.

“I could have told you two things for sure — one, that I would never be an entrepreneur, and two, that I would never be able to live in Hastings County,” Dostaler told guests gathered last week at West Wings Bookstore and Cafe in Stirling for the first in a series of networking events for creative entrepreneurs from throughout Hastings County.

“But flash forward to 2002, and the first of three children, and suddenly I wanted to be back among family and neighbours in the wonderful place I grew up,” said Dostaler, who operates Synergy Research and Evaluation Consultants.

She was one of six local creative entrepreneurs to speak at the March 21 Creative Hastings event organized by Hastings County Economic Development to foster business and social networks and the generation of ideas to encourage the growth of the creative economy in Hastings County. “The purpose is to bring everybody together to let them know about the creative economy that we have here in Hastings County,” said economic development manager Andrew Redden, stressing the importance of networking in the small business community, especially among people working in the creative economy from home or in small offices.

The creative economy includes everyone from farmers doing creative things on their farms to financial professionals, architects, website designers, painters and potters, Redden said. “The creative entrepreneur is someone who is paid to think,” he said. “And the number of jobs in the creative sector is going to increase by 40 per cent over the next decade. So as our economy develops, I'm saying that's an area we need to go after, because it can go to areas that are not developing.”

Hastings County is a rural area with few industrial parks outside of Belleville and Trento to attract manufacturers, Redden noted. But most creative entrepreneurs require only broadband internet and a stimulating environment that fosters their creativity, he said. “We don't need a lot of infrastructure for those kinds of jobs, for people who want to be able to connect and work from home or tele-commute. So we're going to go after those small individual entrepreneurs who like our place. The like to come here because we have the nice downtowns, we have the theatre and we have the countryside and the lakes. That's the kind of atmosphere the creative entrepreneur wants to come to.”

Dostaler said many small creative entrepreneurs don't understand the opportunities that exist for their businesses to thrive in rural communities. “There are actually a lot opportunities here for professional and creative services, but people don't realize it.”

Dostaler works with clients in the education and non-profit sectors both within and outside Hastings County and is easily able to commute to see clients in Ottawa and Toronto. At the same time she and her family are able to enjoy the enhanced quality of life offered by rural Hastings County, she said. That quality of life includes a community that promotes, encourages and supports creative ideas and businesses. “People who want to start new businesses or delve into something new are really supported here. You're only limited by your own creativity.”

The second in the series of networking events will take place May 23 at the Royal Canadian Legion in Coe Hill.

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