

Economic plan 'brewing'

BY JANET RICHARDS
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Belleville – People enjoy a local ale, or at least that's what Hasting County Economic Development manager Andrew Redden hopes.

Redden has a team of six commerce students from Queen's University working this fall to develop a business case for micro-brewing in Hastings County.

Redden said the industry is growing in Ontario and there are a couple of area farmers already growing hops, one of whom has experimented with his own brews.

He has also seen a little interest from some other people in the micro-brewing idea.

"The big thing is having a business case," Redden said.

The students, who will be doing the work as part of their fourth year commerce program, will conduct research and gather information that can be presented to potential investors. Redden said he has already identified a number of potential sites for micro-breweries and such businesses could fit well with main street and downtown revitalization strategies in some municipalities.

The efforts to bring one or more micro breweries to the area also fits with the county's recently-approved Investment Attraction Strategy.

The report identifies "lone eagles" and value-added agri-products as

areas of high opportunity for the county.

Lone eagles is a term coined to describe workers with "highly transportable skills" such as writers, accountants and artists, who want to move to smaller communities for a better quality of life. Micro-brewing and artisan cheese are mentioned as new agri-food opportunities.

Hastings County, trademarked in the '90s as the cheese capital of Canada, once had more than 80 cheese factories in operation. The county has already joined with the counties of Prince Edward, Frontenac, and Lennox and Addington to form Ontario's Artisan Cheese Region.

With a website established at www.investincheese.ca, and plans to attend event such as the upcoming Zoomers Show in Toronto, the initiative is designed to build on the industry. There are currently six artisan cheese factories in operation in the cheese region.

"There is still an opportunity in the area and we're looking at attracting more," Redden said. "There are a number of farmers and other entrepreneurs interested in making cheese."

Artisan cheese producers focus on the art of making cheese and is made in small batches.

Redden said Hastings County is an ideal area to expand on the cre-

ative economy, shown by research to be a leading area of growth. Lone eagles looking to locate in the county have the opportunity to enjoy a more natural environment with better air quality than large urban centres while still having access to both small quaint downtowns, and the larger cities.

Redden said many of these people are looking to escape the bigger cities and when their skills and careers are transferable they don't have to be in Toronto, for example, to do their work.

Tourism, forestry and wood products are also identified in the Investment Attraction Strategy as key industries and areas of development for Hastings County.

Redden said the plan has helped officials narrow down target areas and assets to help attract business to the county.

Redden joined the county two years ago when the economic development role was re-established.

"I didn't even have a desk when I started," Redden said "It's been an uphill climb just to get investment ready and establish a role."

He said the reaction from county member municipalities has been "great." Prior to joining the county Redden had worked with a number of the municipalities through a main street revitalization program.

More information is available at www.hastingscounty.com.