

Business Voice Column
By Mayor Mike Savage
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It's always a pleasure to pen something for this publication for the Chamber of Commerce, an organization that continues to have a significant voice in the community, working with City Hall toward shared economic goals. Recently, I had the pleasure of swearing in new board members, including Rob Batherson as the new and very capable chair of the board, and thanking outgoing chair Francis Fares for his time at the helm.

Halifax has a terrific story to tell, from its rich history, to its tremendous pride of place and its big ambitions for the future. And, yet, this port city is often reluctant to boast about its advantages and attributes, as if to do so would betray our sense of Maritime humility.

Some readers will have heard me say on other occasions that I see myself as the city's Marketer-in-chief. I will speak to anyone willing to listen, anywhere, anytime, about this jewel of a city. And, no, not just because I'm proud to be the mayor – although that is true – but because I firmly believe Halifax is a special place with a deep well of potential.

Marketing Halifax is so much more than rhyming off GDP, ROI and KPIs, its helping people see this city for what it is – a fascinating collection of smart, interesting, creative, community-minded people.

Halifax residents can trace their stories to our Mi'kmaq First Nation, to some of the earliest Europeans on North American shores, to escaped slaves and Black Loyalists, and the waves of newcomers who followed the tides of history to our province. Increasingly, though, our city is drawing new people who see promise of a good life in this city.

In April, I had the pleasure of attending a Get to Know Your Municipality event for new immigrants to Halifax. Hundreds of people from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds crowded into the Central Library, happy to be part of their new city's success story.

In Halifax we are often challenged to see ourselves as others see us. Recently, the Conference Board of Canada predicted Halifax will tie for with Kitchener-Waterloo for the fastest growing urban economy in 2015 – a nice prediction given the Chamber's goal to see us be one of Canada's fastest growing urban economies by 2018. Increasingly, our growth is attributable to people who are finding our city and choosing to stay here. Indeed, since 2000, international immigration has accounted for 50 percent of Halifax's population growth, and our immigrant retention rate is now at 70 percent.

When I am asked to speak about Halifax at meetings and conferences I talk about the Halifax we have been – with its rich heritage, great Port, strong public sector, and its educated workforce – but I also emphasize the city we are becoming. Our new Halifax is more diverse, innovative, entrepreneurial and collaborative. That's how good cities grow.

This spring the province made a commendable decision to invest in the former Coast Guard base on the Dartmouth side of the harbour, soon to become the ocean innovation hub site – a bricks and mortar location for the meeting place of ideas that will be private sector led. In a province with more than 400 oceans sector PhDs this seems like an idea whose time has come.

The Halifax oceans sector demonstrates what cities do best – serve as the nexus for people and ideas. Simply put, people in proximity breed ideas and innovation that advance society and fuel the economy. In a city this size, the next big idea – or a few great small ones - can spring from a chance meeting over a coffee or a pint.

We have all of the charm, the culture and character to draw sought after millennial workers. As the municipality, the private sector and other seek to market Halifax, let's try to remember what we have been, what we are now and what Halifax is becoming.