

Entrepreneurs play a big role in local Economic Development

Entrepreneurs have the vision, commitment and cash

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The dictionary defines an entrepreneur as "a person who organizes, operates and assumes the risk for business ventures." From farmers to fitness gurus - entrepreneurs have the vision, commitment and cash to create conditions where local businesses, employment and the tax base can grow.

Chris Skeat is an entrepreneur. He worked in the corporate world for 30 years identifying good property investments for others - now he uses his expertise to pick up real estate for himself, and he helps local businesses get started or grow. Not every business wants or needs to own a building. Renting suits them fine, and people like Chris provide space for them. Since 1994 he has offered creative financing deals to good tenants, and, in his quiet way, he has helped many County ventures to fly.



Chris Skeat

Skeat's latest purchase is 9 McFarland Drive in Picton's Industrial Park. "I couldn't resist it," he says. "I really like industrial buildings. They're so adaptable, and this is a particularly good one that would suit several operations." With 8,000 square feet, a wheelchair friendly elevator and washrooms, workshops, offices, high ceilings and a great expanse of windows Skeat says it's got "great drive-by appeal and a lot of visual energy."

Everybody knows traditional industries are hard to attract to rural areas, but Skeat believes the right kind of business would find the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages of locating in the County which is centrally placed between Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal.

"Businesses that are Internet-based or service the regional market are less concerned about our distance to the 401. They can enjoy affordable space, a rural lifestyle and our safe, supportive communities," he says. "Those are strong attractions." A good fit would be businesses that support existing local operations, specialized farm equipment, vineyard supplies. "Maybe even another microbrewery," he says with a grin.

Skeat is working with Dan Taylor, economic development officer, to attract a start-up business or business expansion into the building. Taylor says "Like a lot of our business people, Chris Skeat is a great economic driver. At the end of the day a local economy is driven by its business people. Chris buys buildings that he sees potential in, he gets creative to find tenants and helps attract and foster more investment in this community. We're lucky to have people like him who contribute so positively to our economy, employment and ultimately increase the tax base."

A ready-to-go, affordable, well placed building is a great draw for companies looking to relocate. Picton's industrial park is almost full with businesses ranging from new catering companies and a new fitness centre to mechanics, government agencies and manufacturing outlets, but Skeat says, "There's a whole other piece of land they will open up when necessary."

In typical fashion, Skeat is doing a lot of his own legwork and phone work to spread word of his new property. "I'm distributing flyers in and outside the County. I'm talking to people in Trenton and Belleville, Toronto and Ottawa, too," he says. "I've even driven through Napanee's industrial park looking for the kind of operation that might want to relocate to here."

As well as 9 McFarland, Skeat is ready to custom-build for the right tenant on his property on York Street, Picton right beside the CarQuest business. "It's an interesting project," he says. "I'm just waiting for a good tenant who could use a custom-built space. We'll design and build

to specific needs using local contractors, suppliers and materials. We'll keep it as green as possible," he says. "In fact, a green industry would be a terrific tenant for either site!"

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