

How do you spell SUCCESS?

What makes a community successful? David Ivan of Michigan State University Extension says it's all about investing in people, talent, creativity, innovation and the quality of our communities. Mr. Ivan was the keynote speaker at the recent Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies conference in Brandon where he spoke to members of Ag Societies, 4-H leaders and economic development practitioners about creating "cool", successful small towns.

Twenty years ago, he may have encouraged us to attract big industry to our town in order to be successful, but times have changed. While success can be indicated by population growth and business success, it is likely to be achieved today not by courting new industry, but by supporting entrepreneurship, attracting young people, finding ways for people to connect in the community, working with your neighbours and investing in the assets, people and talents that already exist in your community.

Small towns can support entrepreneurship by setting up business incubators, supporting student run businesses, using community foundations to help finance business ventures, and supporting school business competitions.

In order to attract creative, talented people to your town, you might start by appealing to young families who are interested in the safety, the sense of community and the beauty of the rural landscape that they are missing in their urban lives. Creating a "cool" message about your community just might help you become the next viral wonder on U-Tube! You could also send out e-newsletter to young people who grew up in your town – and likely still call it "home" – to remind them why they loved growing up there and to invite them back with their business or business idea.

Communities that find ways for people to "connect" have a better chance for all-round success, according to Ivan's research. He found that it is important for towns to have gathering places (whether it's the local coffee shop or the skating rink) to build that sense of "community", where everyone feels welcome. Young folks who are perhaps more environmentally conscious are also attracted to communities that have "green" community connectors such as walking trails and green spaces.

Connecting people also happens when people in the community are celebrated. Mr. Ivan provided an example of a town that used signage to salute the business, teacher and organization of the month. The promotional town banners in one town in Michigan featured pictures of the local children and teens. One town even gave a gift of a mail box to every high school graduate with a letter inside that said "we're proud of you, we wish you well, remember this is your hometown and you are always welcome at home". They found that the young people who were connected and valued in their towns tended to come back!

So who is responsible for your town's success? Communities must be the ones that initiate and push for success. There are many agencies and programs that can help you along the way, but the spirit and energy to succeed must come from within. Success is not just about being cool, however and can be achieved more easily when there is a community plan leading the way for the entire community, but which involves and is supported by many people, groups and organizations in the town. This means that whether you are part of your local Ag Society, 4-H club, recreation board, parent advisory council, service club or local economic development organization, your goal to reach success is to work together to make it happen!

Check out the "Cool Cities" website at <http://www.coolcities.com/reading.html>, where you will find the article "Can Small Towns Be Cool?" by Dr. Ivan. For support to assist your community to get organized for success, contact your local [MAFRI GO office](#) nearest you!

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