

# Cities can be small and smart, mayor says

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NEW YORK -- Underdogs. Comeback kids. Renaissance types.

That's how Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) co-founder Lou Zacharilla characterized many of the finalists in the running for the title of Intelligent Community of the Year for 2011, including Stratford.

"I think what you're going to hear this year is a very dramatic series of comeback stories," he said Wednesday as he briefly profiled each of the seven on the short list for the prestigious honour, which will be announced Friday afternoon at the conclusion of this week's Building the Broadband Economy summit in New York.

Stratford is up against Chattanooga, Tenn.; Dublin, Ohio; Eindhoven, The Netherlands; Issy-les-Moulineaux, France; Riverside, Calif. and Windsor- Essex, Ont.

In introducing Stratford, which he visited in April as part of the judging for the annual competition, Zacharilla told delegates not to discount the smallest city on the list.

"I'm here to tell you that size doesn't matter," he said.

Mayor Dan Mathieson echoed that in his own summary of Stratford's progress along the path to becoming a world-class digital community.

"You're going to realize that while it might be 32,000 people, it does punch above its weight," he said, picking up on Zacharilla's earlier Rocky reference. "It represents a city that has a vision for the future."

Speaking from the 52nd floor of the Met Life building in Manhattan, with a spectacular view of New York City, Mathieson traced Stratford's history of reinventing itself to become a cultural centre with a strong manufacturing and agricultural presence.

Strategic investments in digital infrastructure -- including a fibre optic loop, a mesh network, free WiFi and smart meters, as well as support for the University of Waterloo's new Stratford campus -- are driving the city's efforts to reinvent itself once more as a digital centre of excellence, said Mathieson.

"So a city that five short years ago was in the digital space now is a leader within it in Canada," he said. "And all those things come together with pride and a sense of purpose that the Stratford people have, and a belief that when they work collaboratively together, a renaissance or reinvention can occur."

That spirit of co-operation has in the past few years alone helped revitalize the city's hospital, upgrade storm and sanitary sewers, build a new recreation complex, and attract a digital media school as well as the new data centre for RBC, Canada's largest bank, noted Mathieson.

"We were able to do that because we collaborated and came up with solutions and ideas," he said. "And we just keep building on that success."

Stratford and the other finalists will be profiled more fully today as the summit gets underway at the Polytechnic Institute of New York University in Brooklyn.

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