

# City as smart as they come

## Local News

By MIKE BEITZ STAFF REPORTER, BEACON HERALD

Posted January 20, 2011

For Stratford geeks, technophiles and community boosters, it was a little bit like watching a semi-final playoff hockey game, where the home team scores the overtime winner.

Only instead of a crowded sports bar, it was the University of Waterloo Stratford Campus.

And instead of watching it live, the small but enthusiastic group gathered there Wednesday night listened to the play-by-play from Mayor Dan Mathieson as he announced Stratford has made the short list of the smartest cities in the world.

The New York-based Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) has named the city to its prestigious Top Seven Intelligent Communities of the Year.

What was supposed to have been a live webcast Wednesday night from the Pacific Telecommunications Council conference in Honolulu was delayed, so Mathieson -- checking his Blackberry periodically -- announced the results himself.

And he made it interesting.

With a disappointed look on his face and a "better-luck- next-time" tone in his voice, Mathieson read off the names of each of the finalists.

"Chattanooga, Tennessee; Dublin, Ohio; Eindhoven, Netherlands; Issy-les-Moulineaux, France; Riverside, California; Windsor-Essex, Ont."

Then, after a slight pause, he looked up, smiled, and added:

"And a small city named Stratford."

The room erupted. Laughter, shouts of excitement and a sustained round of applause spoke to the heightened anticipation surrounding the announcement.

When that subsided, several people whipped out their Blackberries or iPhones and tapped away furiously on tiny keypads to tweet the news.

Mathieson said a long list of people, organizations and institutions in the community are responsible for Stratford's place on the coveted Top Seven list.

"It started with a vision that we all bought into a few years ago that we could be a technology community, and that technology would be where the new economy was," he said. "And collectively, we've all moved in that direction."

Being named to the Top Seven list is recognition the city is on the right track, he said.

"We need to take an enormous amount of pride in this achievement," he said. "We are on the front edge and the cutting edge of where the economy is headed."

The mayor first received word of Stratford's victory from city economic development director Larry Appel and Coun. George Brown, who both sent him text messages from Honolulu, where they were representing the city at the conference. (Mathieson was also scheduled to attend, but remained in Stratford after the death of his father-in-law, David Wright, Sunday.)

Mathieson said while he's "ecstatic" at being named a finalist, he wants to hear the city's name called in June, when the ICF chooses its Intelligent Community of the Year from among the Top Seven.

"I'm in this to win," he said. And the accolades should highlight the reason the city has chosen to embrace broadband and information technology in the first place -- to attract new business, create jobs, stimulate the local economy and make it easier for people to communicate, he said.

David Hicks, who spent weeks putting together Stratford's highly detailed submission to the ICF -- with input from almost every sector of the community -- said the announcement brought a combination of "elation and relief."

But he wasn't entirely surprised Stratford was chosen as a finalist.

"It's an extraordinary city," he said, praising the wide-ranging, co-operative effort behind the city's submission. "A lot of people from different areas poured their passion into this."

Sometime between now and June 3, ICF judges will visit the city to conduct a more in-depth examination of how Stratford is using broadband technology as it whittles down the top seven to a single winner.

"To all of the citizens in each of those seven communities, we congratulate you for your hard work, and for the ways you're shaping the future," said ICF co-founder Lou Zacharilla after announcing the finalists Wednesday night.

[mbeitz@bowesnet.com](mailto:mbeitz@bowesnet.com)

*Article ID# 2938754*