

City's digital reinvention pays dividends

By MIKE BEITZ STAFF REPORTER, BEACON HERALD

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Two years ago, at his state of the city address, Mayor Dan Mathieson suggested that Stratford start working toward an Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) designation as one of the world's smartest cities.

It would help attract new tech-based jobs and investment here as Stratford works to reinvent itself as a digital city, he said.

At the time, Mathieson told guests at the Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce event that he wanted to see Stratford as one of the finalists in the prestigious international competition in 2011. It was an ambitious goal that even he wasn't sure the city could meet.

But things are going according to plan. Last October, Stratford was named to the ICF's so-called Smart 21 list of semifinalists from among hundreds of applicants around the globe, and in January it earned a spot as one of its Top 7 finalists.

In two weeks, representatives from the ICF will be here to determine whether the city has what it takes to be named the Intelligent Community of the Year.

"Believe me, if anyone had said two years ago that we would get this far this quickly," said Mathieson. "I think we've done extremely well in two years. I'm pretty excited about where we're at."

On April 3, ICF co-founder Lou Zacharilla will be in Stratford to review the city's submission and meet with community representatives to assess just how well Stratford has embraced the new broadband economy.

"I think we're ready for the judging," said Mathieson, noting the city has taken significant strides in recent years in terms of connectivity and inclusion, two things the New York-based think-tank values highly.

A citywide wi-fi network linked to a fibre-optic backbone and the ways in which that infrastructure is being used by local businesses, schools, organizations and institutions will be a centerpiece of the city's bid for the top spot, he said.

As part of his visit, Zacharilla will be a guest at the annual mayor's breakfast hosted by the chamber of commerce April 5 at the Stratford Country Club.

"I think some of our best attributes are going to be in the room that day," said Mathieson, referring to business and community representatives who will speak about how they've taken advantage of the information and communication technologies available in Stratford.

In the lead-up to that event, local businesses and organizations also have been encouraged to display a poster promoting the ICF visit. On the poster is a QR (quick response) code which, when scanned with a smart-phone, opens a link to the city's ICF blog at www.stratfordsmartcity.ca.

The April 5 meeting, which begins at 7 a.m. with registration and a buffet breakfast, will feature the mayor's formal state of the city address at 8 a.m., followed by a question-and-answer period. Zacharilla is also expected to speak on the ICF at the meeting.

Tickets are \$20 for chamber members and \$25 for non-members. Advance registration is required through the chamber's website at www.stratforddistrictchamber.com

The Intelligent Community of the Year for 2011 will be announced June 3 in New York City.

mbeitz@bowesnet.com

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