

Stratford named smart city

News

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Stratford is smart.

In fact, it's one of the smartest cities in the world, according to the Intelligent Community Forum.

The New York-based think-tank announced Thursday that Stratford has made its prestigious list of Smart21 Communities of 2011, recognizing those who have embraced the broadband economy and use technology to enhance competitiveness, innovation and inclusion within it.

The ICF considered more than 300 submissions from around the globe before selecting its Top 21, which will now be whittled down to the Top Seven Intelligent Communities of the Year before a single winner is announced next June.

"This is a great achievement for Stratford," said Mayor Dan Mathieson yesterday after learning of the designation. "I'm very proud of this."

It is, in part, a recognition of the strides the city has made over the last decade in establishing a fibre-optic communications backbone and, more recently, a high-speed city-wide Wi-Fi network.

"We're now starting to see that investment pay off, in today's terms, in how efficiency is gained and how communications occur," he said.

Being named to the Smart21 list not only gives Stratford some bragging rights, but could also help it attract new technology-based businesses to the city, he said.

"It allows us to build some forward momentum around developing new sectors of our economy," said Mathieson, "and build on the strengths that we have." But the city is not stopping at the ICF's Top 21 list, he said.

It will now have to provide a more detailed submission to the ICF as it aims for the top-seven list, the next step in the process.

"I always strive to move forward," said Mathieson, suggesting that his ultimate goal is to be the last one standing as the Intelligent Community of the Year.

This year, the ICF is focusing on health care in its consideration of a winning community, and the city is in a good position to capitalize on that, said Paul West, business development manager for Rhyzome Networks, the city-owned company behind Stratford's fibre-optic and wireless network.

The public can already access, at no cost, health-related information provided by the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance, the Perth District Health Unit and the Stratford Family Health Team through links on the city's wireless network.

Before long, local family doctors will be able to use a dedicated, secure channel of that same network to access patient records, for example, wherever they are in the city.

West said Stratford's designation to the ICF's Top 21 list is a result of hard work and "a great team effort" from many segments of the community.

"Now the real work begins," he said of preparing for the judging to determine the final seven.

Of the 21 finalists at this stage, six are from the U.S., four from Canada (the other three are Windsor-Essex, Quebec City and Winnipeg), two from China and one each from the U.K., France, Netherlands, Greece, Hungary, India, Taiwan, Australia and Brazil.

With a population of 32,000, Stratford is the smallest city among the 21. The largest city, Chongqing, has 1,000 times as many people, with a population of 32 million.

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