

**Dr. Michael Barry, Chair, Saint John Board of Trade**  
**Remarks to Saint John Rotary – March 9, 2009**  
**Location: Saint John Boys & Girls Club**

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for the invitation to speak today

I took over as the Chair of the Saint John Board of Trade last May; and what a year it has been! We've seen many historic changes since last May, internationally, federally, provincially and municipally.

Here in Saint John, for whatever reason we do not take the time to blow our own horn on all of our successes. I would like to do that today on all our behalf! In the last 5 years or so, as a community, we have learned to set goals collectively and go after them with purpose. For instance;

- Work has begun on the One Mile Highway Interchange;
- Funding has been dedicated to the completion of the twinning of Route 1 from Saint John to St. Stephen;
- Funding and planning has begun on the building of the Welsford By-Pass;
- Improvements in the Saint John Industrial Parks Ltd;
- Funding and a location have been dedicated to the creation of the Provincial Anglophone Medical Education Program at UNBSJ,
- Funding has been dedicated to NBCC Saint John Campus to expand and improve;
- And, the expansion of the ER has begun at the Regional Hospital.

All of these initiatives have been priorities for our organization and our partners.

As an organization, this year we became a nationally accredited Board of Trade with Distinction! This level of accreditation is given to Chambers of Commerce that meet stringent criteria and have displayed a high level of advocacy work.

I would like to take a moment to discuss the activities that are taking place today and the role the Board of Trade is playing. Only through co-operation and the Team Saint John attitude will we be able to continue our success through these difficult global economic times. Our members volunteer their time, and have embraced the Team Saint John philosophy and the goals we set.

For example, our Retail Forum (Darryl Wilson) has been very active these past 2 years. They have endeavoured to promote the Good News in Saint John to our membership, such as this past Christmas being one of the strongest retail seasons on record! I encourage you to look for the insert in the next issue of Currents. They are also busy engaging various stakeholders in a merchant brainstorming session that will seek to increase Saint John's retail and tourism sectors and make Saint John a retail destination. This indeed is a great opportunity!

With the unexpected downturn in the international economy, many local businesses have been sheltered, but we are not immune. We've had some members who have been directly impacted and their employees have been impacted. We're trying to help our members by ensuring they are receiving the maximum benefit for their membership investment. We are working to provide educational training programs. We are providing opportunities for promotion of our members through free advertising, listings on our on-line directory, and lots of networking events. During these economic times the value of networking cannot be underestimated—it's a lot easier to say "no" to someone you do not know than someone you've built a relationship with.

Federally, we had an election followed by the prorogation of Parliament. Saint John was one of five communities in Canada to host the pre-budget consultations with the Federal Minister of Finance. The Saint John Board of Trade was the only Chamber of Commerce in our region to be invited to participate in the consultations. The result was a federal budget that is supportive of "shovel ready" projects. And we in Saint John

have many projects that fit the criteria. We have met with stakeholders and our local MP to ensure that Ottawa knows what our community is ready to do. We look forward to hearing the future announcements of funds.

Provincially, this past year has seen a lot of changes in the policies of the Province. From healthcare, to forestry, to post-secondary education, to taxation the Board of Trade has submitted recommendations and met with politicians and stakeholders to voice the opinion of business on the proposed changes. Specifically with respect to healthcare, the Board of Trade and other organizations in the community have worked together to support the sector, but more about that later.

Municipally, we have a new Common Council who has faced some tough decisions within their first year, like the sale of the Lantic Sugar site and the revision of the Pension Plan, and no doubt will have more within the years to come.

It is what is to come that I would like to focus on now.

With reports from economists giving conflicting views as to the degree of the economic downturn and the duration of it, we find ourselves and our members facing a very uncertain future.

Now more than ever we will need to work together to ensure our community succeeds and reaches its potential. Two key areas are the Energy Gateway and a centre of excellence in education and health care.

We also have some serious issues facing us locally, an aging water infrastructure system and the need to have an up to date Municipal Plan to be ready for growth, continued improvement to our Industrial Parks, encourage the Provincial government to examine the Finn Report, and increasing strains on our healthcare system, to name a few.

The water system and municipal plan are being examined. We have established an ad-hoc task force to advise our Board of Directors on the issue. There is some concern among businesses that what is being proposed is more than what is needed. Our aim is to be constructive and work with stakeholders to improve our City for businesses and residents alike. With the City, we would like to encourage the Provincial government to thoroughly examine the recommendations in the Finn Report sooner rather than later.

I would now like to take a few minutes to review our healthcare strategy, again from a constructive perspective. Our healthcare system not only in our Province, but across Canada is under stress, and will be especially so during the next 5-10 years. The issue of healthcare is important not just to me personally, but also to the Board of Trade as it has been involved in the healthcare sector in the Saint John region for many years. This past year has been challenging to those in health due to various changes such as that of hospital leadership, its Board, and reduction from 8 regions to 2. This continues to be a work in progress! This restructuring has led to a highly centralized version of our health system, the highest I've seen in my 22 years of practice.

One of the greatest challenges facing us with this centralization is preserving our bilingual delivery model while maintaining quality patient programs with limited resources. Last October I sent an open letter to Minister Murphy that was published in the Telegraph Journal calling for the province to promote bilingual services, not duality in our system. Duality would lead to an inefficient use of our already scarce human and financial resources.

Our other key challenge during this organizational change, will be to retain local input, ownership, and pride which is the source of energy needed in developing innovative new programs and advancements in existing programs. And I would just like to point out that this is not unique to Saint John, but to all New Brunswick communities. Programs like the heart centre, PETCT, cancer, trauma, neurosurgery and med school

were not developed in isolation, but through volunteer community engagement with local physicians, business leaders and our hospital foundations, all working with a common objective.

We at the Board of Trade are engaged in constructive dialogue with our Region B Board along with our local area MLAs and the Premier to ensure this essential energy is not lost in the mix.

The community has over the years has given 10's of millions of dollars to the Saint John Regional and St. Joseph's to grow and develop quality patient programs for the entire province. *(The Saint John Rotary club alone has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the pedway at the Regional hospital and the creation of the Teen Resource Centre).* Local ownership and engagement remains a key to maintaining quality patient programs and development of new technologies .We plan to continue our partnerships , influence medical policies(as we have in the past) in order to pursue excellence. This will allow the province and our community to achieve common goals such as "the energy hub, medical–education –research cluster" along with other components of our True Growth strategy.

Recently, the Board of Trade has played important roles in -; in the recruitment of doctors to the region through its Physician Recruitment Sub-Group that works closely with Dr Don Craig and the medical staff organisation; support of the Regional Hospital's designation as the Tertiary Trauma Care hospital in the Province; -support of Saint John Hospice;- and support in the establishment of the Provincial Anglophone Medical Education Program at the University of New Brunswick Saint John. In each case, the Saint John Board of Trade has taken a vocal role in supporting the improvement of patient care in Saint John and the province. It has been community engagement of residents and businesses that has led to the creation of excellence in all of our medical programs and services. This is not an accident, but is the result of careful planning and input, setting common vision ,and execution. This must continue.

In order to continue, we need to continue to strengthen our partnership between the community, the hospital, and its board especially for our medical education program and the growth potential it brings. . Future growth will depend on research and development of a health care campus with private sector involvement.. We are reaching out to our pharmaceutical and IT partners to help us develop the next phase. These initiatives will provide jobs, strengthen our economy and enhance our provincial health care delivery. We look forward to strengthening our partnerships as we revisit and evaluate our health growth strategy from the True Growth initiative in 2003. We believe our new strategic plan can be a platform for the province perhaps in a similar but not identical way that the energy blueprint plan has been.

This strategic relationship between higher education and healthcare cannot be overstated. Businesses realize that in order to attract highly skilled workers, our health system and institutions of higher learning must meet and exceed their needs. This will be increasingly important over the next decade as the competition for highly skilled workers increases. Saint John and its health science campus, UNBSJ and Community College are now positioned to lead the province to ensure an adequate supply.

In closing, our community, both businesses and residents alike, needs to continue to work together to make Saint John succeed now and in the future, not just in Health Sciences, but also in energy and manufacturing, Information and Communications Technology, Tourism, and all sectors of our economy. Thank you for listening.