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*Hamilton Chamber of Commerce helps link
jobs and immigrants in Hamilton*

BRIEF HISTORY - THE VOICE OF HAMILTON BUSINESS SINCE 1845:

The Chamber's leadership in supporting integration of newcomers goes as far back as our founding in 1845, via our then President & founder Isaac Buchanan.

Over 165 years ago, on the 17th Day of April 1845, a group of 37 merchants from the "then" town of Hamilton gathered together and signed their intentions to form the Hamilton Board of Trade – officially, on April 29th the Hamilton Board of Trade was born, pre-dating the City of Hamilton itself by over a year. The founding President was Isaac Buchanan.

Isaac Buchanan was himself an immigrant from Scotland. Indeed, many, if not most of the 37 charter members would now be considered as “newcomers”. Isaac became one of Hamilton's founding fathers. He was a contemporary of Premier Sir Allan MacNab, founder of Dundurn Castle. Isaac built his own estate, rivalling Dundurn Castle - Auchmar House and Estate on West Hamilton Mountain, now diagonally across the street from Mohawk College. He was instrumental in laying the groundwork for how Hamilton runs its business and commerce to this very day.

He was particularly welcoming to the community to what was then referred to as “people of colour”, hosting large celebrations, at his own expense, at Auchmar House commemorating “Emancipation Day” (August 1, annually) marking the freedom of all slaves throughout the then British Empire earlier in that century. Indeed, he was rumoured to have been a “*conductor*” of the northern terminus of the “Underground Railroad” helping to settle fugitive slaves from the United States in then Upper Canada (now Ontario).

In 1920 the Hamilton Board of Trade name was changed to the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce (“HCC”) and the Constitution was changed to read, "*The object of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce shall be to promote the economic, civic and social welfare of the people of Hamilton and vicinity.*"

Over the years the HCC has played an active part in supporting the economic growth and get involved with many initiatives to achieve our common vision to make Hamilton a harmonious community that values diversity.

HCC has long recognized the need to better integrate talented new Canadians into businesses that can benefit from their expertise, insight, global experience and connections. In an effort to better integrate foreign trained workers into the labour force, the HCC is currently assisting in facilitate bridging between skilled newcomers and potential employers.

With support of the Government of Ontario, the Government of Canada and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, HCC has developed in active partnership with SISO our new “Diversity Works” project, our second project funded in part by “Global Experience @ Work” (“GE@W”) program of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. This follows on the success of our first [GE@W](#) project the “Workplace Development Toolkit” partnership with SISO launched about 3 years ago.

“Immigration is the lifeblood of Ontario; the skills and experience of newcomers fuel our economy and enrich our culture;” said Dr. Eric Hoskins, Ontario Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at the official launch of our Diversity Works Project on August 17, 2010. *“That is why,”* he continued, *we have partnered with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in programs such as the GE@W. Our future success depends on the skills and talents of our newcomers to ensure that we can compete successfully in today’s global economy.”*

DIVERSITY WORKS:

Hamilton Chamber of Commerce is committed to helping newcomers fully integrate into the local workforce, provide them with the tools they need to succeed, and so help our community to benefit the most from the wealth of talent and knowledge internationally trained individuals bring to Canada.

Diversity Works project facilitates the integration of Internationally Trained Individuals (ITIs) into the workforce at two levels, as:

1. **Employees:** By providing local businesses free HR services including recruitment and integration of diversity in the workplace; And,
2. **Entrepreneurs:** By establish a Business Mentoring Program to provide opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs to learn about business in Canada and to establish and develop a business network. As a Champion of “*Hamilton: City of Entrepreneurs*” – this aspect of the programme is particularly “*near and dear*” to us.

This Project's objectives include to:

1. Assist 200 local businesses in developing/increasing their capacity to recruit and hire it is;
2. Assist the establishment of 30 new businesses by immigrant entrepreneurs;
3. Raise awareness and assist other local businesses and the community to better integrate ITIs ; and,
4. Publicizing the activities related to the project.

Benefits of the programme include, to name but a few:

- Assist the business community to forge new links with the pool of s it is;.
- Support the effort of businesses to better integrate current and future ITIs in the workplace;
- Support the overall economic development by assisting immigrant entrepreneurs to successfully;
- Establish a network of business mentors and business connections; and
- Assist the efforts to attract and retain both skills and investment, by supporting the development of new connections between existing businesses, newcomer entrepreneurs and skilled ITIs.

The project will be overviewed by a Steering Committee including representatives from all partners involved and includes specific activities related to development, implementation, outreach/marketing, progress measurement, project evaluation, adjustment and reporting.

In the year 2001, the Chamber participated with the City of Hamilton and other partners in a landmark study called "H/R Matters", which was a farsighted document that predicted quite accurately the current skilled labour shortages, further predicting that they would become acute locally by 2013, and last effetely until at least 2031. The study predicted that these shortages would be so dramatic that many businesses may have to close because they could not find enough skilled people to meet their needs. This is particularly crucial in our new global knowledge based economy. The study clearly demonstrated that even if we took every kid graduating high school and out them into a skilled trade, there would simply not be enough to replace all those skilled workers who would be retiring over the same period.

Obviously then, the need to fill this gap with ITI's would be crucial. If anything the intervening period has made the situation more critical HR Matters predictions were based on an assumption that Hamilton would be receiving 6,000 immigrants per annum. In fact, over the intervening period it seems that we have attracted merely 1,500 per annum on average. Notwithstanding the recent economic downturn, in 2009, 57% of interviewed Hamilton employers said that they were already experiencing shortages of skilled people.

Diversity Works also helps to address employer concerns with the skills shortage that has and will increasingly affect their businesses. Immigration now represents the only net growth in the economy, therefore making it even more vital that immigrants' talents are fully utilized. Further, having ITI's on staff has the material added benefit of helping local businesses compete effectively in international markets.

In addition to the Business Mentoring Program that matches seasoned entrepreneurs from the Chamber membership with newcomers wishing to start a business in Hamilton, Diversity Works provides free HR Consulting Services to local companies interested in recruitment, hiring and integration of global talent and diversity in the workplace.

Diversity Works assists local employers to meet their staffing needs by providing free HR services, training and workshops to equip them with strategies, resources and tools to recruit, select and integrate global talent.

Hamilton Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Mohawk College is organizing free workshops to assist and support local businesses with their employment needs and connect employers with a selection of services and resources to assist and support in the attraction, hire, integration and retention of internationally trained individuals (ITIs).

"*Are you Ready*" Workshops are designed to inform employers about ways of tapping into the skilled immigrant talent pool to meet their staffing needs. The sessions build on employers' capacity to effectively recruit and select skilled immigrants and integrate diversity.

EMPLOYERS' SURVEY:

In July 2010, The Chamber sent an electronic survey to Chamber members. The survey questionnaire consisted of 11 questions intended to collect information regarding the participants' experiences with hiring immigrants and the type of training they need to successfully integrate skilled immigrants into the workplace. Nearly 300 employers viewed the survey. Responses were recorded from all sectors with the majority from professional and services sectors.

The results of the survey indicate that 58% of participants didn't hire skilled immigrants during the last 12 months. When asked if they are reluctant to hire skilled immigrants, 92% said no. 36% said they face difficulty in sourcing skilled immigrants and only 21% said that they have received training for hiring and integrating skilled immigrants. When asked in which areas they mostly need training, building HR tool box with recruitment and selection tips and techniques received the highest score of 24%.

The results show that a big percentage of participants are not reluctant to hire skilled immigrants and need training specially in building their HR tool box with recruitment, selection tips and techniques and sourcing.

Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, with Mohawk College and the support from SISO and other partners, will be delivering the “*Are You Ready?*” Workshops to meet employers HR needs.

Workshops were developed by TRIEC, coordinated by CONNECT, and supported by Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber will host the first workshop on September 28, 2010. The second workshop will be organized also, at the Chamber on Jan 25, 2011. Free post support will be provided to participants after the workshops.

The Hamilton Chamber of Commerce has already partnered with SISO and other partners in a variety of projects to support the integration of newcomers, including Bridging to Business Program, Micro Lending Program, Workplace Toolkit and Phase 1 of the Global Skills @Work.

BRIDGING TO BUSINESS:

The program leverages the education, skills and abilities of International Trained Professional (ITPs) to assist them transition into self-employment and create new businesses that contribute to economic development and growth. The project will create, pilot and disseminate a sustainable model to facilitate the transition of skilled immigrants into self-employment, especially in sectors poised for growth in a knowledge-based economy.

Program components include:

- Skills assessment, business management, communications and entrepreneurship training, coaching and
- Support along with mentoring and business start-up activities.

The program includes activities related to development, implementation, evaluation and dissemination and aligns an impressive list of partners such as Hamilton Chamber of Commerce. In addition, the program includes a combination of skill assessments, career decision making, direct employment, coaching and support and access to further education, training and upgrading programs.

The program activities addresses the identified gaps, the program will undertake a series of consultation with regulators, and employers to develop an occupation-specific language training curriculum, marketing to employers to secure work placements, etc.

This program develops and implements interventions related to the access of ITPs to employment in the Business Management Sector, while linking participants with education/training, employment and self-employment opportunities.

In addition, program activities include outreach (participants) and marketing (business community); consultations with business associations (to include their feedback); curriculum development; program entry, academic and language assessments; delivery of modules; career development; placement and follow-up; evaluation; monitoring and reporting; review and adjustment of curriculum and delivery.

The outcomes for the program include:

1. Participants' measurable advancement towards skill-commensurate employment;
2. Participants gaining workplace experience;
3. Participants upgrading academic and employment-related skills;
4. Increased access of participants to other training/upgrading programs;
5. Increased employer awareness and confidence in hiring ITPs;
6. Matching skills with employers' labour/skill demand and requirements;
7. Creating the foundation for self-employment and entrepreneurship;
8. Special rate for membership at HCC (which equated to 60% off regular membership fees for the first year in business);
9. 160 participants will access the program, with 40 starting their own business (15 of whom are now Chamber members); and 40 more obtaining related employment.

MICRO LENDING PROGRAM:

This is a new programme that was first facilitated by the Chamber. It is designed to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit within the Hamilton community. This new program provides Micro Loans to individuals who have a great idea for a micro-enterprise, but may not be able to access traditional financing. Financial assistance in the form of a Micro Loan from FirstOntario is combined with support programs offered by participating community partners to help these individuals get their self-employment dream off the ground.

To take advantage of the Micro Loan Program, new entrepreneurs should approach one of our Community Partners and take the business education program being offered.

After completing a Community Partners' business education program, the new entrepreneur can then obtain a letter of recommendation from the Community Partner to receive a Micro Loan from FirstOntario. The FirstOntario Micro Loan Program is a graduated loan program. The maximum amount to borrow the first time is \$500. Once successfully repaid, the entrepreneur can apply for a larger amount, up to \$2,500.

Program community supporters include four not-for-profit Community Partners, the St. Joseph's Immigrant Women's Centre, the Settlement and Integration Services Organization - SISO, Today's Family and the Welcome Inn Community Centre. Supporters also include three Community Advisors, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, the Hamilton Community Foundation and The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton.

Community Advisors for this program provide support, funding and advisory services to help make the Micro Loan Program a success. The financial contribution made by the Hamilton Community Foundation has also helped to strengthen this program further by making even more Micro Loans available to entrepreneurs in the community.

FREE NETWORKING EVENTS:

Hamilton Chamber of Commerce is offering an opportunity for newcomers to attend two monthly networking events: either Business After Business and/or Good Morning Hamilton for free. These two events will help newcomers to expand their network by connecting them with the Chamber members.

I could go on and on. Suffice it to say that the Chamber, either in isolation, but more often in active partnership with effective organizations, like SISO, has long actively assisted and welcomed newcomers many other ways far too numerous to list here. We do so, not merely because it is the right thing to do; but because it is the smart thing! Simply put, we need them if we are to continue to thrive as an economy!