

Southwest Saskatchewan Prepared For Future Opportunities

Action Southwest Business Networks Coalition has recently decided it is time for the partnership to disband. The coalition formed in October 2004 and set forth a direction to bring together industry and community leaders from across the region to partner and begin addressing the regional issues affecting the growth of business in the Southwest. Ultimately, a movement driven from the bottom-up that has proven that the answers to southwest challenges are right here in our own back yard.

Since 2004, Action Southwest has seen one success after another; receiving various provincial and international awards for innovation and leadership excellence. What made this partnership so unique isn't just their long list of successes but that the hundreds of volunteers who participated in the coalition over the last five years did so at their own accord. The partners showed that it doesn't take a large operating budget to realize success. It just takes a common sense approach, some innovative spirits and a desire to see change happen.

"Though Action Southwest began at a time when the economy was down and people were largely discouraged, the partnership presented something that people believed could work", said Anne Weisgerber Mayor of Maple Creek and founding partner. It was a simplistic approach that talked about the importance of working together and pooling the region's resources as a means to finding its own solutions to the challenges faced.

The partnerships most recent acclaim was through their assistance in the development of the strategic directives for the formation of 13 Enterprise regions across Saskatchewan and as well developing a framework for how to measure and benchmark regional economies. Ernest Heapy, Acting Vice President of Regional Enterprise for Enterprise Saskatchewan acknowledged the work of the partnership in saying,

"Enterprise Saskatchewan would like to thank Action Southwest and its partners for its progressive work in advancing several regional economic development initiatives over the past five years. The knowledge gained from the southwest and throughout the province has assisted our organization in the design and development of regional economic programming".

The partnership made the decision to disband as a result of the formation of the new Enterprise Southwest. "As a result of the province adopting our directives for the regions, it only made sense that Action Southwest step aside and allow the new organization to carry them on, said Sandra Blyth Action Southwest Project Manager. "Enterprise Southwest is very well positioned for success. Action Southwest has laid the groundwork for economic reforms for the southwest. Historically the focus was on utilizing limited human resources and dollars chasing that "big" dream, large scale projects that rarely ever come to fruition or trying to attract that big investor. The Action Southwest model proposed a new way at looking at things with a revised focus that would instead look at using limited resources to assist existing business, those who have and are making an investment in the region already, and determining what their needs were for growth and expansion. After five years of learning from Southwest business the answer was pretty clear. The focus needs to be on the economic environment. Without the proper infrastructure, regulatory policies etc. our attractiveness to domestic or foreign investment is limited. Once we create a "growth" environment private sector will expand and new investment will be drawn. Now with the province offering increased funding for economic planning and development and a mandate focused on industry competitiveness we have a great opportunity

before us to advance efforts even further. I am excited to see what the future will hold and wish the partners of Action Southwest and Enterprise Southwest many successes.”

“Enterprise Southwest is a new board and we have much to learn about the region and the work that has or is being done by all the organizations involved in economic development. Having this understanding will be important for our planning in the future and the information and data that has been drawn by the Action Southwest partners will certainly lend well to our efforts, said Ervin Carlier, Chair for Enterprise Southwest.

Sharon Dickie, Mayor for the Town of Shaunavon and founding partner said, “Action Southwest has been recognized across this province for its innovative work and Sandra Blyth and the partners deserve full credit for their dedication and commitment to this organization. Action Southwest has been instrumental in guiding the region to further innovative and collective thinking. As a result, I believe the southwest has a strong foundation which will help the new Enterprise Region advance its work”.

Though the partnership has disbanded projects presently underway will still continue under the umbrella organization of Southwest Community Futures. Projects such as the Corridor for Competitiveness: *Expansion of Border Services for Saskatchewan* and Know Your Region.

The partners of Action Southwest also want to acknowledge and thank all the businesses, organizations, municipalities, and provincial and federal government programs who provided financial support for the development of southwest projects. These partnerships were essential in paving the way for a greater southwest Saskatchewan.