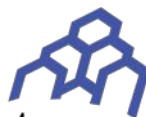




City of
Yorkton



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A Community on the RISE

Written by Margaret Patricia Eaton



Yorkton, located in the agriculturally rich aspen parkland of east-central Saskatchewan, is the province's sixth-largest city. It boasts direct access to markets through Yellowhead Highway #16, which crosses Canada from east to west, and Highway 9, a direct route into the U.S. through North Dakota. It is also serviced by CN rail, CP rail, and Yorkton Regional Airport. The City has much to offer residents, investors, businesses, and visitors alike.

Sound founding principles

Yorkton was founded as a settlement and trade centre in 1882 by a group of businessmen who had formed the York Farmers Colonization Company. They purchased portions of crown land on the banks of the Little White Sand River (now Yorkton Creek) where lots were assigned to settlers who purchased land from them. In 1889, the original town was relocated alongside the new rail line to maintain economic viability as a trade centre.

In keeping with this spirit of cooperative economic development, we were recently invited to participate in an interview with various stakeholders for this article, speaking with Michael Eger, the City's Director of Planning, Building, and Development; Randy Goulden, Executive Director of Tourism Yorkton and a member of City Council; and Marty Sveinbjornson, owner of SveinCo Developments and two-term past president of the Yorkton Chamber of Commerce. ►►



► Thriving community

Eger describes Yorkton as “too small to be a big city, and too big to be a small town,” but possessing the advantages of both. It is home to over a thousand businesses of every size. While the population of the City is 16,280—projected to grow to 25,000 by 2040—it is known for having the third largest trading district in the province, drawing employees from and supplying services to a catchment area with a population close to 200,000, which extends into western Manitoba.

According to a study from The School of Public Policy Publications, small to mid-size cities in Saskatchewan are the exceptions to the downward trend observed in the rest of Canada’s small to mid-size cities, which are not doing well in terms of a ‘vitality scale’ that measures aspects like employment rates, immigration, and youthful demographics.

Yorkton, however—which the study singled out—along with Estevan, which we featured in February; Swift Current; and Lloydminster are all scoring higher on the ‘vitality scale’ and are cited as “enticing places to build a life” by [Global News’](#) Kimberley Fowler. Moreover, *Alberta Venture Magazine* labelled Yorkton as one of the Best Communities for Business in the category of “Community on the Rise.”



Balanced and advanced

Yorkton’s diverse local economy has a balanced mix of agri-culture, food processing, advanced manufacturing, and both commercial and industrial operations. The economy continues to grow by encouraging expansions and attracting compatible new companies.

The City is home to some of Canada’s leading international agri-business companies. With two canola-crushing plants and four grain elevators, their success is a result of their location in the centre of some of the most fertile and productive land in Saskatchewan.

“We crush more canola oil in Yorkton than is done in the entire U.S.,” says Eger, “and we have many more opportunities in agri-processing. We have land, we have water, and we have a competitive advantage people may not realize. I think agri-business will continue to be our bread and butter. We’re the canola capital of Canada, and we have one of the largest oat-milling plants in the country, but we have even more to offer,” he says.

“Flax, wheat straw, and oat waste products present a major opportunity to expand, either through recycling byproducts to create green energy or utilizing the leftover pulp for paper and packaging materials. Through the integration of the entire agri-business sector, there are many more opportunities than just processing canola oil.”

Eger also highlights the City’s partnerships with area First Nations communities, who, he says, “are keen on expanding their businesses by partnering with parties interested in renewable energy. They are looking at solar and wind power generation and food security through developing large-scale commercial greenhouses. They are highly motivated, but sometimes it takes a partnership to move things forward.”



Shopping, health and wellness, and the arts

Yorkton's diverse retail sector ranges from independently owned fashion boutiques and quaint cafés to large retailers including Walmart, Tim Horton's, Superstore, and Canadian Tire, to professional and financial services, personal and health services, general contracting and trades, and hospitality.

The Yorkton Regional Health Centre, administered by the Saskatchewan Health Authority, provides fast-efficient access to health and wellness facilities. In addition, the City of Yorkton offers aquatic classes, recreation facilities, fitness programs, parks, skating rinks, walking trails, and community gardening initiatives, in order to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Yorkton is also home to a rich group of arts and cultural organizations including an art gallery, two community theatre companies, a film festival, a writer's alliance, several dance studios, and the representation of various ethnic groups, including the Bayanihan Filipino Arts and Culture Club and the Kalyna Ukrainian Dance School.

Suncrest College, meanwhile, offers a variety of trade apprenticeship programs, technology diplomas, and the first two



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years of a number of university degree programs, with students able to complete their bachelor's degrees at the University of Regina or the University of Saskatchewan. In addition, the college provides training tailored for specific local employment opportunities.

Combined with these urban amenities is the cozy feeling of a small town, a safe place for families where people volunteer and where parents drive their children to hockey practice or the dance studio no more than seven minutes from home. ►►





► A warm welcome

Sveinbjornson can speak from experience as to just how welcoming the City of Yorkton and its various development organizations are. “I grew up in a community east of Yorkton,” he tells us, “and I started my construction company (residential, small to medium size commercial, and renovations) here 18 years ago, but I was very green to business. I joined the Chamber of Commerce, put an advertisement in their magazine, and that one small \$30 ad brought me a lot of business and recognition,” he says.

“When we have a challenge, our organizations and our businesses step up to decide how to solve it.”

“There are many stories like this that other local businesses can share of the help that’s provided by the Chamber and the good relationship it has with the City Council, with Michael, and with our Mayor, who are all open and receptive to the community.”

For Goulden, “What resonates with me is the collaboration and the cooperation within our city. It is the Chamber, the City Council—the administration and the Mayor—the downtown business association (the Yorkton Business Improvement District), and our major stakeholders, who all work together to solve anything that comes across our desks and to be welcoming to new businesses,” she says.

“My time on Council goes back to when Walmart was looking to come in; when big box stores want to come into a community, it can sometimes be divisive, because there are concerns they may negatively affect smaller businesses. But working together brought everyone to understand that Walmart would be an addition to our retail sector that could grow the whole economy for us as a regional hub,” says Goulden. “When we have a challenge, our organizations and our businesses step up to decide how to solve it, and that is a huge plus.”

The joys of business—or simply being—in Saskatchewan

Welcoming investors, new businesses, business expansions, and families to Yorkton is something the various organizations have put a lot of time and thought into.

The City’s economic development website clearly explains all the advantages of doing business in Yorkton, and these include the broader advantages of doing business in Saskatchewan: a low cost of living, no payroll tax for employers, a 10 percent refundable tax on scientific research and development expenditures, no levied health premiums, and a provincial sales tax rate of only six percent.

And people looking to relocate to Yorkton will find that housing prices are the lowest compared to other cities in Saskatchewan with a similar population; that the municipal tax rates are competitive; that the City has robust infrastructure, utilities, and high-speed internet capabilities; and that there are affordable, vacant, and serviced commercial and/or industrial lots available for sale.

In addition to the City website’s detailed resource guide to help investors and entrepreneurs work their way through business licencing, the City has a number of incentives. For a limited time, Yorkton is offering a 50 percent rebate on the purchase of any City-owned residential lot for anyone looking to build a new home, while the Residential Construction Incentive gives a 100 percent tax rebate over five years to the owner of a new one-, two-, three-, or four-unit dwelling. The Rental Housing Incentive Program offers tax abatement to create new rental units in order to accommodate new workers and their families moving to Yorkton.

The City also has incentives that apply to commercial properties, including:

- the Façade and Site Improvements Program (for existing buildings)
- the New Commercial Building Tax Abatement Program
- the Vacant Commercial Building Tax Abatement Program, which is intended to offset the cost of bringing vacant buildings up to the National Building Code.



Tourism Yorkton, above and beyond

The City's website is not the only one welcoming newcomers to Yorkton; Tourism Yorkton is also doing its part.

The organization is unique, Goulden tells us, in that it operates the only year-round Visitor Information Centre in Saskatchewan. As one might expect, it offers a visitor guide detailing activities for every season, including golf, snowmobiling, access to two provincial parks, events, and accommodations. Goulden's organization, however, has gone above and beyond showcasing an agri-tourism program where people can learn about the various crops grown in the region and their potential uses.

Tourism Yorkton also offers a complete relocation guide. Its 16 pages are chock-full of information for newcomers—about health services, education, recreation, housing, transportation, places of worship, law enforcement services, media, employment, shopping, entertainment, culture, clubs, and organizations.

In summary, Goulden says, "A well-educated and skilled workforce, moderate property taxes, stable commercial, industrial, and residential sectors, and the good fortune of having sunny, clear blue skies, even on the coldest days, have fostered Yorkton's emergence as one of Saskatchewan's most promising economic regions, where a warm welcome awaits." ■

Content Developed by Erin McWhinney | Designed by Natasha Crawford


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