

As this is the first time we're all together in 2005, it's appropriate to talk about where we are, how we got there, and where we're going.

By most accounts, 2004 was a good year for North Bay. Our record-breaking building permits tell the whole story, from a business perspective. A good friend of mine in the insurance business said this was their best year ever. And it's no surprise to this Council. Multi-residential and institutional buildings were built in the education field. Huge commercial buildings, such as The Home Depot, were built. Both sectors created new jobs. Those employees needed housing. The boom created confidence. More businesses expanded. Look at Lakeshore Drive where almost every vacant building is occupied. Over 150 new homes were constructed. That created more jobs, and more confidence. And that's what will spur growth in 2005. We believe this will be another record-setting construction year.

The education industry warrants top mention. Nipissing University has been ranked #1 in both Maclean's and Globe and Mail surveys. It's first, out of all of Canada's 46 universities, in Students Services. First choice of universities to Recommend to a Friend or Relative. They were rated A+ for faculty availability, for class size, for residences, personal safety, and for faculty knowledge. This is our Nipissing University the country is talking about. And they historically receive the lowest formula funding per student in the Province.

Canadore College leads Ontario in College enrolment. Of the 24 colleges in Ontario, 13 had declines in enrolment, 10 had very small increases, and Canadore stood alone at the top with a 7.6% increase. Communication Arts up almost 8%; Human Services, 12.5 %; Hospitality, Recreation and Leisure almost 14%; Aviation was up over 20%; and Skilled trades was up a whopping 54%. This is our Canadore College we're talking about.

École Secondaire publique l'Odyssée on Norman and Connaught is a \$15 million French Public Intermediate and High School scheduled to open this September. This unique facility is designed to allow a grade 7 and 8 pavillion to stand on its own, but have access to the state-of-the art high school facilities. This is the first-of-a-kind facility, which we expect to be widely copied by other Boards across the country.

We see increased growth in the education sector this year, as École Secondaire Algonquin rolls out their \$12 million expansion on Jane Street, as Canadore College

and Nipissing University go from concept to reality for their talked-about expansions, and for our grade schools that are in development today.

Our health-care sector has much to be pleased about. This most recent national report revealed that out of 23 hospitals across Canada, including academic teaching centres, North Bay General Hospital's Critical Care Unit ranked first with the lowest mortality ratio. As well, the data showed that the CCU's lengths-of-stay continue to be amongst the lowest of hospitals in the study. In simple terms, if you want the best health care, North Bay is where you want to be.

That leads us to briefly discuss retirement opportunities in North Bay. This year we saw 50 Plus magazine name North Bay in the Top 20 cities to retire in Canada. We're not suggesting that we turn North Bay into a retirement town, but if you want to retire, you will be in the right place. Our medical facilities were listed as one of the reasons, along with great opportunities for establishing home-based businesses, and an active arts community. In fact, while we're bragging, TVOntario named North Bay 3rd in their Most Talented Town in Ontario rankings. This kind of publicity for North Bay makes us the go-to place for retirees from across Northern Ontario, and why facilities such as the Empire Living's Terrace Suites have been developed here. And this is also why Dalron continues to work out the details to build their retirement facility on our waterfront. The City will produce a retirement brochure and do limited marketing to enhance the retirement sector.

On the economic development front we saw Cementation Skanska consolidate their offices and establish North Bay as their head office. This is the model Council is using to convince other Golden Horseshoe businesses to relocate in North Bay. Our buck-an-acre advertising hits the Toronto marketplace this month as part of that effort. We are producing new marketing materials that better explain what North Bay has to offer. We have spent the last year seeking funding from various other sources to produce these materials at little or no cost to the local taxpayers. And we expect results. This is the year we need to deliver another industry to North Bay.

We also need to re-visit our commitment to the Airport. Currently, if we have interest from a business willing to locate at our world-class airport facility, there is no serviced land there. We have a preliminary plan to extend services along Airport Road, past the CFB, but we need the Provincial and Federal governments to play a large role in this development. Growing the Airport is a priority for this Council.

In addition, look to leadership from this Council in terms of marketing the 8 acres of land behind The Home Depot, as well as other valuable City-owned land at the South entrance to the city. We have a commitment to address the city's taxes by growing our assessment base, and we will continue to be aggressive in looking for all forms of economic development.

The Underground Complex is another major economic development initiative this Council is working on. While very little discussion has taken place with DND, the City is undertaking an engineering study specifically geared to the use of the former site as a Data Storage Centre. We will continue to look for prospects on a worldwide basis, exclusively through no-cost PR opportunities, while we negotiate with the Federal government. Once the negotiations are successfully completed, the City will actively market the underground facility, likely in 2006.

Our waterfront continues to be a priority. This year, we have put money in our capital budget to rebuild the watering facility for Memorial Drive. There is simply no way this municipality could have anywhere near the award-winning site without the aid of over 300 of the Heritage Gardeners who turn out every day to tend to the plantings. We need to lead by example, so this season the gardeners will be using Lake Nipissing water to take care of the waterfront's needs, as opposed to using chlorinated water from our treatment system.

On another front, we joined forces with Mother Nature to re-establish the original beach at Champlain Park. This unsafe eyesore has been brought back to its natural state, and we look to it to become a popular beach and picnic site. We continue to re-invest in our arenas and other City-owned parks, recreations and leisure services. Look to plenty of healthy discussion from this Council as we explore new sports field opportunities.

And look for plenty of discussion as this Council tackles the challenge of what to do with the City yards. As we continue to grow, open up new subdivisions, and build city streets, public works will outgrow their current facilities. This Council will be spending \$800,000 a year more, cumulatively, each year until 2009 on infrastructure and sewer and water projects. Re-paving Lakeshore Drive was a start, but that's what you can expect from this Council for the foreseeable future.

We've reviewed quite an aggressive schedule, and there is a lot more that simply could not be mentioned tonight. But none of it could be achieved without the leadership demonstrated by our management and our staff. These are the front-line

people who continue the day-to-day efforts on our behalf. They continue to impress us every day.

In 2004 we pulled the throttle back. This bought us some time to gather strength and to consolidate our gains. And it will allow us to face this year's challenges. We looked for different ways to solve our problems and we changed the way business is done at City Hall. When faced with financial issues, we brought in partners to pay for what has been historically paid for by the City. For instance, when we wanted to explore wind energy, instead of simply writing the cheque, we got the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to put up \$50,000. Then we said to the industry, "hey, if you want to have a chance to sell wind turbines in North Bay, pony up some dough – pay our \$50,000 share". And they did. Soon you will see a test tower erected on the outskirts of the city. When the veterans asked for free bus passes, instead of simply writing the cheque, we used a business-like approach and looked for a corporate sponsor. And we got one, and 70 veterans use a bus pass with an Ontera logo on it. When we needed marketing materials for our industrial park, instead of simply writing the cheque, we approached other levels of government and private businesses who want to see North Bay grow, join us in paying for the materials. We will have over \$250,000 worth of marketing tools at our disposal this year, with a tiny fraction of that amount coming from the City.

This Council is urged to continue their commitment to this approach. Let's not abandon this strategy to solve short-term problems. You lose credibility and your influence over issues when you're not consistent. And Moody's Rating Service certainly likes the new approach, as they upgraded our rating to A1. This means we borrow money at a lesser rate and have much more credibility in the marketplace.

Finally, this Council is urged to continue pressing the Provincial and Federal governments for a fair share of support. The facts show we have fallen far behind when compared to surrounding cities, and the direction needs to change. It's our turn. We all need to leave our political stripes at the door when we enter this Council chamber. We work for the betterment of the local taxpayers, not the advancement of one's party. So let's use our political connections in a positive way in 2005. Let's lobby our friends and senior politicians to bring highways and hospitals, water treatment facilities and infrastructure programs to North Bay. We have sitting members who have the ear of the Premier and the Prime Minister. Let's use our contacts constructively to make 2005 the fabulous year we know it can be.