

Milk River's Rebirth

Alberta SuperNet helps turn around a small town's fortunes



Under 8 Flags Campground in Milk River, Alberta. Photo courtesy of Vic Haddad.

Two years ago, the Town of Milk River was in serious decline: people were moving out and businesses were suffering. Today, the town is undergoing a rebirth – and at least one local businessman credits the arrival of the Alberta SuperNet and high-speed Internet access as a key factor in that turnaround.

"The level of development we've seen as a result of the Alberta SuperNet is shocking," says Vic Haddad, a local Real Estate Associate Broker. "Two years ago we had 30 empty homes and 60 for sale. Now we have no empty homes, two for sale, and five new homes being built in town this year." Vic is also a director and President of the Milk River Cable Club, the non-profit society that offers high-speed Internet service as well as cable TV to area residents. He adds "Businesses are doing well and hiring, and young families are now moving back to our small town to raise their children in a crime-free and drug-free community."

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Prior to the arrival of the SuperNet, dial-up Internet access was the only option in Milk River, a town of approximately 1,000 people 90 kilometres southeast of Lethbridge. The Cable Club also serves approximately 3,000 people in the surrounding area. "If you wanted a dedicated telephone line for your Internet you had to wait for a line to be available, or you were sharing

your calls and 'Net access on the same line," Vic states.

When residents approached larger companies about high-speed Internet service, they were told their community was too small to offer that type of service. "It was like there was a big brick wall when it came to who cared about our town," says Vic.

The Cable Club directors realized that an innovative solution was the only way to solve the problem, and decided to become their own Internet Service Provider. Today, the community owned cable system has 100 customers in town and 40 on rural farms. "By the end of 2007," Vic says, "we will have over 250 town and 75 rural Internet customers."

Now that high-speed Internet is readily available, people from larger centres like Calgary and Edmonton are taking advantage of the benefits of small-town living. "The manager of two of Calgary's largest retail grocery stores and his wife, a long-time corporate banker, recently retired and moved to Milk River," Vic states. "They have been so happy that their daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren have made the move as well. Their son programs air traffic planning for both Canada and the U.S., and because our Internet service is so fast and dependable, he is able to work from home. His wife is also home-based, booking corporate



Writing on Stone Provincial Park, 25 kilometres east of Milk River, Alberta. Photo courtesy of Vic Haddad.

travel throughout the world for an international corporation. And best of all, now Grandma gets to see her grandchildren every day.”

Residents are using the Internet more for personal reasons, Vic adds. “Families are sharing pictures with friends and relatives all over

the country. Seniors are using chat services and gaming sites, and Skype (a free Internet phone application) with web cams is big.”

Local businesses are also enjoying the benefits of high-speed Internet. Most are now able to use their head office websites to place orders, do reporting and much more. “We can offer real-time commitments to customers, ranging from instant parts orders for the agricultural sector to instant banking requirements to all the services the big centres brag about,” Vic says proudly.

But the business growth doesn’t stop there. Imperial Oil’s Southern Alberta agency has moved its head office to Milk River, adding approximately 20 new jobs for local

residents. The head office of a large trucking company is now located there, and a major Calgary oil company is using a Milk River travel agent to book all their internal travel.

Community residents in need of medical attention will also reap the benefits of the SuperNet. “Last month the doctors at the clinic joined a province-wide computer system enabling them to share medical records,” says Vic. “They were told to use our service as we are on the SuperNet, and they needed all 28 computers using the same system to diagnose patients’ problems. Tkachenko Pharmacy, the local drugstore, also went on a similar system.”

Thanks to the Alberta SuperNet, Vic sees nothing but good things in store for Milk River, Alberta. “We and all of our local businesses keep on growing.”



Tyrannosaurus Rex standing outside the Milk River Interpretive Centre. Photo courtesy of Vic Haddad.

Axia is the manager and operator of the Alberta SuperNet.