

BUSINESS

City at 'a critical stage' says Chamber CEO

David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, is pictured addressing a crowd at the 35th annual Outstanding Business Awards gala held at the Saint John Trade and Convention Centre in 2019. Duplisea said events were part of the reason the chamber saw an increase in its membership last year.

Photo: Noushin Ziafati/Telegraph-Journal



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Noushin Ziafati | Telegraph-Journal

It's been a record year for the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce.

A total of 85 new members in 2019 was the most ever over a calendar year in 200-year-old organization.

"That's a record number for us, and we're really, really excited to see the rise in that," said Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce CEO David Duplisea.

"It shows, I think, that we're maintaining relevancy in the region and becoming even more relevant, particularly in these shall we say challenging times, with municipal, federal and provincial governments."

Currently, the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce membership sits just under 700 businesses.

According to Duplisea, a lot of the new companies that joined the chamber as members last year are from the hospitality sector, as well as financial services and financial solutions companies.

"We haven't seen that growth for a while, and I think it speaks volumes to the business climate in our region and people wanting to be a part of it, and recognizing that they can help and they can influence policy and legislation by working with us through our lobbying efforts," he said.

Duplisea also credited the chamber's increased visibility in the region due to the chamber's lobbying efforts, events and educational programs, social media presence and collaborative

efforts of regional organizations, in contributing to the uptick in the membership.

He said the chamber was able to "take a leadership approach" for its membership by lobbying on various issues including tax reform, elimination of double taxes, regionalization and economic development.

The chamber was also able to get exposure through its events and educational programs, Duplisea said, such as hosting the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's annual general meeting, which took the chamber "six years of lobbying and a tremendous amount of effort" to secure. The AGM brought more than 450 delegates from all across Canada to Saint John in September 2019.

"We have been very, very fortunate that we've had a lot of exposure over the last few years, but particularly last year," he said.

Collaborating with other organizations, such as Economic Development Greater Saint John and Opportunities New Brunswick, have also allowed the chamber of commerce "move the needle on the whole region," Duplisea added.

"There's some tight deadlines coming up in terms of what's happening with the city and the province, so we're really looking for some concrete actions on there. The time for reports and consulting and town halls, that ship's sailed a long time ago, and we're at a critical stage where some of these changes have to start being implemented now."

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