

A business event series presented by the Greater Halifax Partnership and The Chronicle Herald



Immigrants are welcomed at Pier 21 by N.S. Premier John Hamm; Geoff Regan, federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and Jamie Muir, N.S. Minister of Education. Immigrants to Nova Scotia become employees, business owners, consumers and taxpayers, as well as adding to our social and cultural fabric.

# A bridge to the Middle East

By donalee Moulton  
Contributing Writer

Thriving communities are immigrant communities – and immigrant communities are a bridge to the world. The Canadian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry Nova Scotia is helping businesses throughout Nova Scotia reach out to the Middle East and building a stronger base here at home for itself.

“Our aim is similar to that of a trade commission. We work to promote a cultural and economic exchange between Canada and Lebanon. We help Lebanese interests in Canada and Canadian interests in Lebanon,” explains Bassam Nahas, chair of the Canadian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce in Nova Scotia.

The Canadian Lebanese Chamber has its roots in Montreal, and the Nova Scotia branch, now two years old, is the only one in Atlantic Canada. Ultimately, the goal is to have a chamber up and running in every province across the country.

The Nova Scotia Chamber, now celebrating its second year in operation, provides relevant information free of charge to members and for a nominal fee to other businesses, government and individuals.

“We help with locating sources of supplies, finding agents, identifying distribution channels, understanding customs and excise, learning about the tax environment, and providing investment assistance,” says Mr. Nahas.

“We are hoping to successfully serve Canadians and Lebanese in Canada with pride,” he adds.

“We understand how the Middle East operates, and we can help to open doors.”

Those doors are open to all Nova Scotians in business. The Chamber will host an event with the Greater Halifax Partnership in the fall that features Raymond Baaklani, the Lebanese Ambassador to Canada. He will provide an introduction to business in Lebanon as well as economic opportunities in Lebanon for businesses here.

“This is an important resource for our business community,” notes Stephen Dempsey, president and CEO of the Greater Halifax Partnership and a member of the board of directors of the Canadian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Nova Scotia.

By supplying information, hosting special events, offering specialized services, and providing insight and expertise, the Chamber will help business to resolve problems, says Mr. Nahas.

Ultimately the key to success, he notes, is collaboration and partnership.

“We bring people together.” Indeed, the Canadian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Nova Scotia helps to build bridges.

# The Immigrant Advantage: Enriching our lives, our communities

By donalee Moulton  
Contributing Writer

The global economy is usually envisioned as an international marketplace into which business contributes ideas, products and services. But that contribution is dependent on having an educated, engaged labour force. In Canada, such a labour force can only be built and sustained by reaching out to the global marketplace, by encouraging immigration.

In return, says Gordon M. Nixon, president and CEO of RBC Financial Group, our lives and our communities are enriched.

“Canada is standing at a crossroads,” he notes.

“We must not only attract, but improve how well we integrate new immigrants. If we don’t, we will lose more than we can imagine.”

The situation is this: Canada’s standard of living is on the edge of transformation. It has, for example, lagged behind that of the United States for the last 25 years, and there is no indication this long-term trend is reversing.

“If we want the world’s best healthcare and most livable cities, then we need to become one of the world’s most competitive nations,” says Mr. Nixon.

“We must grow our economy.” Such growth is inextricably linked to immigration. Here’s how. Immigrants are, or can become, skilled employees. They also play a critical economic role as consumers, business owners and taxpayers. Finally, they enhance our social and cultural fabric.

Immigrants have always played such a role locally, regionally and nationally. But the tempo has changed.

“Canada is standing at a crossroads.”

Gordon M. Nixon  
president and CEO  
RBC Financial Group

“There has seldom been a time in our history when immigration has been so important,” says Mr. Nixon.

“Our competitive advantage is no longer driven by the resource industry, or by capital assets like plants, equipment and machinery. It is being driven by our ability to tap human capital.”

Fact is, the national birth rate is at an all-time low, and the workforce is aging – and nowhere is it aging as quickly as in Nova Scotia. In Halifax, the situation poses a serious economic risk: the city faces a shrinking workforce, a smaller business-economic base, and a declining tax base.

Any one of these factors could have a significant impact. Together the impact may be unprecedented – and it is not just Halifax that will feel the impact. All of Nova Scotia, and the entire region, will be affected. New workers, new energy are needed now.

Also needed is a plan to guide immigration at the local level.

“Immigration is crucial to the future growth and development of Greater Halifax and Nova Scotia. In coordination with the newly released Provincial Immigration Strategy, our community needs a focused action plan. We took the lead on collaborative efforts to develop a community-based approach to immigration,” says Greater Halifax Partnership president and CEO

Stephen Dempsey.

“The Halifax Region Immigration Strategy lays out a plan that identifies how the municipality can transform itself into a centre that draws – and retains – immigrants. It is a plan whose time has come,” says Mr. Nixon.

The current target for HRM is to attract 2,800 newcomers annually, and have 70 per cent of them continue to call Halifax home.

One such new Haligonian is Binoj Daivasahayam who arrived in Halifax last year from India with a Bachelor of Commerce and Masters in Business Administration in his back pocket, as well as the ability to speak three languages and eight solid years working in financial services.

A year later, after a stint working in a grocery store and working nights to get his Mutual Funds license, Mr. Daivasahayam is a personal financial service representative with RBC.

“There were two keys to my settling in so well and welcomingly,” he says. “MISA, the Metropolitan Immigration Settlement Association, and the vision of companies like RBC, which not only sees the value of diversity in its workforce but also acts on it.”

Indeed, RBC sets a high premium on diversity. It has established a Diversity Leadership Council, chaired by the president and CEO and comprised of senior leaders from across the company.

This Council sets RBC’s strategy and goals for diversity and employment equity, as well as monitoring progress.

“Currently, about 24 per cent of our workforce is comprised of visible minorities, as is 10 per cent of our executive management team. Those numbers are still too low, so we’re developing programs to help better integrate new employees into our workforce,” says Mr. Nixon.

One of the largest barriers to employment for skilled immigrants is in the area of foreign credentials. The federal government’s Internationally Trained Worker Initiative has an entire program dedicated to this – but businesses can do their part as well. For example, RBC has contracted a firm whose expertise is focused solely on evaluating the Canadian equivalents of foreign credentials, so it can make sure good prospective employees aren’t falling between the cracks.

Then there are the products and services that RBC provides directly to immigrants as customers. One of the most significant barriers immigrants face when they first arrive – and spelled out in the Halifax Region Immigration Strategy – is access to financial services. RBC has developed a full cultural markets strategy to better serve diverse markets right across the country.

“For example, we reviewed our credit policies, created a secured VISA card, especially to help new immigrants build their credit history, and simplified our mortgage process to ease up on an immigrant’s credit requirements,” says Mr. Nixon.

“We’ll be providing easy-to-understand application forms and information in multiple languages, and specialists who understand the needs of diverse communities.”

In October, the company will launch a new website for newcomers with information on some of their first priorities: housing, employment and education.

“We’re even developing a way for immigrants to open bank accounts before they arrive in Canada,” says Mr. Nixon.

It’s just another way to say, “Welcome.”