

University/college/business co-operation

## A business incubator on the Acadian Peninsula

Since last fall, Acadians in New Brunswick's Acadian Peninsula have been testing the Centre de développement d'entreprises (Business Development Centre), where business, university, and community college work together to find and train potential entrepreneurs in the region.

The experiment is a popular one: 12 people have been receiving training two nights a week since last November. A new training cycle started in late January, and 25 applications were received for 14 places. The first firms incubated at the Centre will be starting up in the spring.

The idea for the Centre de développement d'entreprises came from the business commu-

nity. The Commission d'expansion économique de la Péninsule acadienne (CEEP) had been working on setting up a business incubator for several years. "But study tours outside the province made us realize that budding entrepreneurs were more in need of training than space," explains Claude Chartier, the director of the Centre de développement d'entreprises.

A meeting between the Centre universitaire de Shippagan and the Bathurst Community College was enough to get things rolling. The groundwork for the future Centre de développement d'entreprises was laid, and the official opening was held on October 26, 1992.



The Business Development Centre plays a important role in the business life of the Acadian Peninsula.

### Low wages, few jobs for high school dropouts

A lifetime of low wages and few opportunities generally is the outlook for people without a high school education. It is not just their standard of living that suffers, the ripple effect touches the lives of all other Canadians.

Yet, more young people are leaving school than 10 years ago, even though more new jobs require high school graduation. With 30 per cent of students leaving school before graduation, Canada is losing its edge competing with other countries.

Faced with a shortage of skilled workers, the federal government has launched a national Stay-in-School initiative. It has encouraged community groups to become involved in education and work with schools and young people directly.

In some provinces, federal-provincial projects are stimulating community action. National organizations ranging from the Conference Board of Canada to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada are taking part. This year, more than 1,000 projects to help young people further their education are under way in Canada.

### Ease the transition to learning

Ever think about going back to school? How about taking a university course to meet new people, gather new insights and pursue a life-long interest. Each year, the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University team up to offer Transition to Learning, a special one-day workshop for adults who are thinking about going back to school.

If you are an adult who wants to explore the possibility of university study, or if you have decided to attend university in either a full- or part-time basis, the workshop is designed especially for you.

Scheduled for early May, Transition to Learning will help answer the most basic questions adults have about taking university courses and programs, such as how to gain admission. What program of study to choose. How to decide between part- and full-time studies. How to select courses. Who to contact for information and guidance.

In addition, the workshop offers small-group sessions on issues such as: Learning Strategies for Adults Returning to School, Federal and Provincial Student Aid Programs, Life Transitions, How to Use the Library, Financial Survival for Mature Students and Career Planning.

Transition to Learning will give you access to a variety of university resource people, from admissions officers to faculty representatives.

Pre-registration is required. For information or to pre-register, call the Department of Extension and Summer Session, UNB, 453-4646. Ease your transition to learning!

### MUST BE A JUGGLER

The Centre de développement d'entreprises is located at the entrance to the Centre universitaire de Shippagan (CUS). It is not a school, but rather a detection and preparation centre. Its mission is to incubate new firms. Like radar, it scans the region, searching for potential entrepreneurs. "Lots of people dream about opening their own business," explains Chartier. "Our goal is to make them realize it's possible."

The Centre finds potential entrepreneurs among professionals searching for a new challenge, unemployed workers tired of being... unemployed, the many people in the region with a second job that is likely to become their first, and mothers tired of staying at home.

The Centre relies on the tradition of resourcefulness and entrepreneurship the Acadian Peninsula, which has never had large battalions of salaried workers, because it has no large employers. It is a region where almost everyone has always held down several jobs just to survive.

To test the motivation of potential entrepreneurs, business leaders explain that they have to become "jugglers," able to keep eight plates in the air at the same time. If one falls and they stop to pick it up, everything goes. Some drop out; others draw up a business plan.

### A NEW APPROACH

For small and medium-sized businesses in northeastern New Brunswick, the approach is new. Drawing up a business plan (in

other words, being prepared) before getting started is something new. "Entrepreneurs from here are pioneers, go-getters who don't worry about paperwork," says Claude Chartier.

Nonetheless, those who have been the most successful have used modern management methods. The Centre de développement d'entreprises has made the region realize that its entrepreneurs need training. The business community helps find future entrepreneurs, who are instructed by experienced business leaders, such as company heads, business professionals (accountants, lawyers), or professionals who work closely with business (tax experts).

The Acadian Peninsula's Centre de développement d'entreprises also makes use of the know-how of the Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP) Beauce-Appalaches, in Quebec, which developed a similar model to stimulate business development. The rights to use its methods and materials were purchased when the Centre was established.

### NEW UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBILITIES

The university, like the community college, provides space. Both ensure the quality of the training. "All the organizations that provide funding or training in the Acadian Peninsula are members of the Centre's board of directors," explains Claude Chartier. "When a particular training need is brought to our attention, we find a solution."

Both the community college and the university are depending on the new Centre de

développement d'entreprises to help them assume their new responsibilities for economic development in northeastern New Brunswick. The business community has long complained about the region's high illiteracy rate and poorly educated labor force, implicitly reproaching the education system for not doing its job. Last summer, the Centre universitaire de Shippagan received a development budget of \$8.8 million to give it more influence over the level of education and economic development in the region.

Emphasis is placed on working directly with entrepreneurs. The Centre universitaire de Shippagan already has two research centres, one for peat, the other for seafood, related directly to local industry. The Centre de développement d'entreprises is working to diversify the region's economy. Although all projects are eligible, the Centre de développement d'entreprises stresses projects in the manufacturing sectors, which generate more jobs. It is also hoping to develop new industries outside peat and especially fisheries, the decline in which has greatly affected the region.

University and community college are spreading the message throughout the region. They are prepared to use every means available to encourage those who, like the potential entrepreneurs at the Centre de développement d'entreprises, are taking charge of their future by investing in their own training. That is a message the region needs to hear.