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Pushing the envelope: Town of Smiths Falls embraces role as hub for innovation

The town of Smiths Falls is celebrating its role as a hub for innovative industry and business enterprises, a role that has its roots in the community's history and has made Smith Falls a desirable location for forward-thinking businesses for more than 200 years.

"The people of Smiths Falls have long embraced innovation and have been willing to take some risk to build a better future for their community," Mayor Shawn Pankow said.

Historically, Smiths Falls has been a welcoming destination for smart, creative businesses looking for a community to call home. Pankow pointed to Smiths Falls' decision in 1886 to donate land and \$25,000 to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) as incentive to locate its divisional centre in Smiths Falls.

"That \$25,000 investment, which would equate to almost \$600,000 in today's dollars, established Smiths Falls as a major rail hub and led to thousands of jobs in the decades to follow," Pankow said.

Another cutting-edge business leader that settled in Smiths Falls was the agricultural equipment manufacturer, **Frost & Wood**. In the mid-1800s, Frost & Wood was Smiths Falls' largest employer, and maintained its strong manufacturing presence until its closure in 1955. In its day, the manufacturer was known around the world for producing the most technologically advanced machinery of its time.

The same welcoming spirit that was shown to CPR and Frost & Wood was in full force when Smiths Falls welcomed **Tweed** (now Canopy Growth Corp.) to town in 2014. At the time, medicinal cannabis was in its infancy in Canada, and the faith Smiths Falls placed in Tweed's vision has paid off.

“Smiths Falls has a longstanding history of fostering innovative industry, so it made sense to wholeheartedly welcome Tweed to the community in 2014,” Manager of Economic Development, Jennifer Miller, said, “As legalization introduces itself across the country, now is an excellent time to punctuate the national conversation with our capacity to expand, grow, and support cannabis enterprises.”

Besides industry giants like Frost & Wood and Tweed, a succession of other pioneering initiatives have also found their way to Smiths Falls in recent years, drawn to the small town with big ideas.

A relative newcomer to Smiths Falls is **William Bond Ai**, a cutting edge business with its roots in the cannabis industry, and its eye on the future of artificial intelligence. Nate Morris, founder of William Bond Ai, explained that he believes in the coming years artificial intelligence is going to transform the way we buy, grow, and study cannabis. His company is using robotics to offer solutions and improved efficiency to the cannabis industry.

“We’re trying to position ourselves as one of the trailblazers in merging the cannabis industry with the new artificial intelligence space,” Morris said.

Morris’ robot, named “William,” (named for an early Canadian hemp expert) is capable of looking after cannabis plants by planting, watering, and monitoring plant health. Morris himself has been involved in the cannabis industry for 20 years, and decided that Smiths Falls, or as he calls it, the “cannabis capital,” was the ideal place to be to develop this technology.

“Canopy is actively recruiting the best and brightest cannabis experts on earth to Smiths Falls,” Morris said, “This influx of expertise into a relatively small town has resulted in a fun and exciting new culture developing. The synergistic capacity of a town like this to launch a bunch of businesses and new technologies is incredible. It feels like the new silicon valley for cannabis technologies.”

Another business with the potential to further cement Smiths Falls’ reputation as an innovation hub for innovative, precision manufacturing is the world-class, industry-leading manufacturer, **Guildline Instruments**.

Founded in Smiths Falls in 1957, Guildline operates in a specialized field, designing, manufacturing and marketing specialized instruments for use in metrology and oceanography. Guildline’s instruments are now considered to be the gold standard for the metrology or measurement science industry, and according to Industry Canada, are the official standard instruments in at least 55 countries around the world.

Smiths Falls offers companies like Guildline a prime location only a short drive to the nation's Capital and the centre of research and innovation for the nation, the National Research Council, while also situated close to universities and colleges in both Ottawa and Kingston.

Guildline Instruments' President, Richard Timmons, explained that Smiths Falls has a substantially lower housing cost which is helpful in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, along with a lower cost to do business overall. All this, according to Timmons, in a town that still has a small town community feel that has been "very supportive" to Guildline Instruments.

"Honestly, we are not lacking for anything here. There is an advantage to being located where we are with respect to transportation, but being part of a small community also brings its own benefits; for one thing it means that it's very easy for municipal politicians to interact with Guildline and address any concerns that may arise," Timmons said.

Another innovative newcomer to Smiths Falls, is **Cyclone Blowers**. Owned and operated by inventor and entrepreneur, James Mackenzie, Cyclone Blowers manufactures an innovative commercial pull-type snow blower that Mackenzie claims will speed up the snow removal process by 25 per cent and burn 30 per cent less fuel.

"This snow blower is the high-performance contractor's choice for residential snowblowing," Mackenzie said, "It's caught on like wildfire, it's a real game changer."

Miller noted that the town of Smiths Falls' staff and council, have demonstrated their commitment to encouraging and fostering pioneering business concepts like these through every stage of business development, by providing information, resources and support.

"Innovation is highly valued in Smiths Falls; we are an inventive community, we have reinvented ourselves on more than one occasion, so it seems natural that businesses with a similar innovative spirit would be drawn here," Manager of Economic Development, Jennifer Miller, explained.

Miller added that Smiths Falls "is a community on the rise" and the pioneering spirit that has withstood the test of time, is once again positioning Smiths Falls' as a sought-after location for industry leaders and innovative entrepreneurs.

"In terms of unique economic development opportunities, we're definitely open for business," Miller said.

Cutlines:

WilliamBond1: William Bond Ai is using robotics to offer solutions and improved efficiency to the cannabis industry. Founder Nate Morris (center), is looking to position his company as one of the trailblazers in merging the cannabis industry with the new artificial intelligence space. Morris is shown here with partners Alexander Shaw (left) and Jen Provost, and their robot, named "William."

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