



**Presentation to the Niagara Workforce Planning Board
AGM, Celebrating the launch of the
Niagara Labour Market Plan - “A Vision in Action”**

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Presentation by:

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Prepared by the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce



Good Afternoon,

It is a pleasure to be with you today celebrating the launch of the Niagara Labour Market Plan – A Vision in Action.

As a member of the business community and the president of the board of directors of the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber of Commerce, I would like to thank the members of the Local Labour Market Planning Committee, and Trudy Parsons and her staff at the Niagara Workforce Planning Board for their collective efforts in working to create a vision for Niagara's workforce in the coming years. You have created a plan that provides us with the tools to develop a workforce that is best suited for Niagara's labour market moving forward.

When I was asked to speak at tonight's event, I asked 'why me' – I'm just a tax guy – and we all know how engaging tax people can be – but after thinking about it for a while, I came to understand that my remarks today are not really about – nor from - Rob DePetris – a tax practitioner at Deloitte.

It's from me as a person who believes in Niagara's future, and has seen the opportunities that are before us as the chair of the St. Catharines – Thorold Prosperity Council.

So, as I promise to keep my remarks brief – I want to start with a quote by Rosabeth Moss Kanter:

A vision is not just a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more.

To me, Professor Kanter's quote captures what is happening in Niagara right now. There is unprecedented cooperation between business, academia and government that has created the environment in which visionary plans can be crafted. With the collapse of the traditional manufacturing industries in Niagara – there's been a clarion call to become something more – and for the first time in a long time – we seem to be on the same page.

With plans like the St. Catharines – Thorold Prosperity Council's Paths to Prosperity, Niagara Economic Development's Growth Strategy to the release of today's Niagara Labour Market Plan – there's been one consistent factor – COOPERATION.

When you get beyond the words on the page of each document – what you see are the willingness of men and women in our community coming together to appeal to our better selves. More and more, you are seeing Brock University, Niagara College, chambers of commerce, community organizations, government leaders and institutions and private enterprises coming together to create a vision that will set Niagara's compass for the next 25 years.

Early today I listened to Brigadier General Hilary Jaeger speak about teamwork and one of the keys to building effective teams is that there must be trust between the team members. I see all of us who are working towards an economically vibrant Niagara through cooperation and a common goal building this trust and thus building an effective team.

For the first time in Niagara's modern history – we have consensus about

our collective future. That achievement alone is something to be proud of. But, consensus doesn't mean success.

As I say about the Paths to Prosperity Report, and I will say today about A Vision in Action – a vision is only as strong as the plan, and those willing to implement it.

Similar to Paths to Prosperity, A Vision in Action is about action. The Niagara Labour Market Plan clearly outlines the emerging workforce needs in Niagara. Through consultation with people in business, labour, academic and public sectors, a clear map emerged about Niagara's future opportunities – and what it will take to fully realize those goals.

For example – Niagara is becoming a region of entrepreneurs. Between 2001 and 2007 – 3,800 new businesses were started in Niagara. In fact, we have double digit growth in small and medium size businesses – almost triple the average rate of Ontario. We need to understand the needs of SME's – which are different from traditional industries – and more widely diverse in employment needs and requirements.

Tied into this growth of SMEs in Niagara is the re-emergence of innovation as a strong under current in Niagara transitioning economy. Niagara has a long history of innovation – yet we somehow lost our way as our economy thrived on large-scale industrial outputs.

Now, we have expanding professional companies in the areas of interactive media, engineering, biosciences, technical processing, environmental

technologies and health and wellness that are all tied into the knowledge-based economy that will be critical for Niagara's economic future.

And, as our population ages, there will be workforce shortages, and as A Vision in Action points out – Niagara will need to attract and retain both our youth and recently arrived newcomers to Canada. In each case, there are actions that must be taken to ensure that we have the abilities to capture the attention of both young people and immigrants.

From a business perspective, the St. Catharines – Thorold Chamber is working with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and CAIPS in Niagara to create a program that strengthens the links between business and newly arrived professionals to ensure that the talents of those who are new to our community are full utilized for everyone benefit.

So, as you can see – A Vision in Action will be an important guiding document to assist us with mapping our future labour market needs.

But, before I finish, I would like to draw your attention to a startling fact. The number of public sector jobs has grown by 22 per cent since 2001 in Niagara, with a corresponding loss of more than 30 per cent in the private sector. We need to address this.

A lot of the careers mentioned in the report are public sector based – and largely taxpayers – personal and business, finance those jobs. The balance has swung too far to one side – and we must focus on generating more private sector activity.

The tools are here in the Action Plan – but we must be mindful that to grow a strong Niagara – we will need a strong private sector. We need to organically grow businesses from the commercialization of research to the incubation of business through organizations like nGen – and we need to develop an environment where companies like Canadian Tire Financial Services can grow and expand right here in Niagara – not Burlington, Oakville or Mississauga.

Really, we can only afford a public sector if we have a strong and robust private sector.

In closing – we have a vision – but it will remain only a vision until it is realized. The Niagara Labour Market Plan, the Paths to Prosperity to Niagara Economic Growth Strategy – they are all linked into the same vision – one that is prosperous, vibrant and diverse.

There's been a call to be something more, something better in Niagara. I will work to realize our collective vision in my small way – and my hope and my trust is that you will too.