

## **CBT numbers should please Creston businesses**

Statistics never tell the whole story but are useful in important conversations. For Creston, recent data presented by the Columbia Basin Trust at its recent symposium in Kimberley provide reason for optimism.

**Growth** – The Creston region is poised for upwards of a 10% increase in population in the coming years – potentially doubling the growth expected in neighbouring Trail, Nelson, Kimberley and Cranbrook regions. While that means more traffic and pressure on the medical system, it also means more business in the valley.

The Chamber's response will continue to be ensuring existing businesses are better represented and served, while also looking for ways to help raise the profile of the region as a business re/location destination. That's why we are strengthening our relationships with other Chambers in the region and with groups like the Economic Action Partnership.

**Youth engagement** – One area for focus in Creston is on its low score when it comes to the number of students on average completing high school. At around 78%, the score is dramatically lower than areas like Revelstoke and Boundary – keeping in mind factors like the ratio of number of students to overall regional population, etc. But in general, fewer high school grads opting to get to work right away also means students leaving the region.

The Chamber's response will be to continue renovating its space for wider community use and to support programs like the International Student homestay program, Jenny Tyler's arduino and robotics workshops and Creston-based Kootenay Film Institute's screenwriting and film production classes put on by Kerry McArthur – engagements designed to encourage kids to complete high school, pursue post-secondary and/or potentially start new businesses in the region.

**Seniors** – Data presented in Kimberley also checked assumptions often made about seniors, despite the fact most of society's wisdom resides in these folks and that more and more are working well beyond the purely arbitrary 65 years of age. It was even suggested we re-define the word "senior" to describe someone well into their 80s.

The lesson for business in this regards how "grey heads" are treated, starting with NOT automatically assuming they're: a) hard of hearing; b) have no idea about technology; and c) need hand-puppet level of instruction on things like swiping a bank card or ordering a part for a broken window. Treat older folks as infirm, in other words, and it will only accelerate their lack of participation in business and the business community.

To thrive, businesses need to draw in energy and then return it with interest. But it also means paying attention to the details and ensuring business is embracing of change – in the world, but also in our own ways of *doing* business. This is the Chamber now, and we're here to be part of the solutions.

Mark Wolfe, President