



OICRD hires economic development officer

Paul Frey, Olds Albertan

The Olds Institute For Community and Regional Development has hired a new economic development officer.

Gail Scott comes to Olds with 20 years of experience in public and private sector regional economic development.

Scott is due to begin her work on August 17.

"I'm looking very forward to moving to Olds. It's going to be tremendously exciting and a lot of fun," she said from Kamloops, where she was most recently the chief executive officer for Venture Kamloops.

"We couldn't be more pleased with the outcome of our search," said Stirling McLeod, chair of the OICRD. "At this point in our institute development, she's just ideal to be able to come here and share her experience with us."

Three members of the board, along with Debbie Rogers, a human resources official with the town, interviewed five candidates for the position before settling on Scott. Approximately 20 people applied for the position. Scott accepted the position in the last week of July.

McLeod said Scott fit the need of the OICRD, which is creating the position from scratch. Because of her extensive government and private-sector experience, McLeod said Scott has a good grounding of what it will take to build networks and help the region grow economically. The challenge for Scott, McLeod said, will be to become familiar with the OICRD and the community.

McLeod said he hopes that Scott will be able to follow through on some of the plans the OICRD has put in place, such as the Fibre-to-the-Premise project and others in which volunteer time has gotten the organization to where it is now.

With Scott on board, the heritage program and the sustainability plan will also benefit.

"To have a person that's there working on these things as part of a coordinated effort tying everything together, that's what the impact is going to be," McLeod said.

McLeod said he also hopes that with Scott's arrival, some of the volunteer effort put forward on OICRD plans from town administration will be lessened so they can go back to concentrating on municipal business.

The OICRD began searching for a candidate in about mid-May, but the town had allocated money in its 2009 budget for the position earlier in the year.

Scott has worked in government as well as in community economic development. For a time, she worked with the community of Elkford, following the closure of the mine. She also worked with First Nations and coastal communities through her Government of B.C. position, developing over \$6 million in projects to help build community capacity. She also worked on economic development in Vancouver's downtown east-side, often cited as Canada's poorest neighbourhood. Her most recent work involved helping the City of Kamloops sustain economic momentum.

Scott said her previous experience is directly related to her position in Olds because it will be developing regional partnerships among several different communities.

"In order to keep a community sustainable and vibrant, you have to understand what is ... just outside your municipal borders, because an awful lot of partnerships need to be made with those regional communities and those regional industries because they sustain your community," she said, adding that the OICRD model strongly supports those concepts. "There's always indirect benefits that come back from a regional basis."

Scott said she was drawn to the position precisely because it will allow her to work at both the community and regional level. Another consideration was the considerable reputation Olds College has for innovation, which will benefit the town.

"We have to develop a model that will incorporate community and regional stakeholder partnerships ... strategic planning that will look at how we can attract and build more industry," she said, adding that the Fibre-to-the-Premise will be a key component of drawing more business and residents to town.

Scott said her biggest challenge will be learning who the key decision-makers are and what industries currently drive the community. Once she gets a handle on that, she can then collaboratively develop plans to further everyone's interests.

She said she believes that most economic development planning is now moving away from specific industry-based challenges to more of a challenge about how all industries can adapt to changing technologies, particularly environmental ones.

Scott's office will be located in the town office.

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