

Consultant says Moose Jaw is a good tourism model

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An American consultant on business development says Moose Jaw has a wonderful story to tell about downtown recovery and themed tourism.



Consultant Tom Tresser says Moose Jaw tourism is a model for cities. Ron Walter photograph

Tom Tresser of Chicago and 22 delegates to an international business conference, were in Moose Jaw Tuesday to pick up hints on how to bring prosperity to their communities.

"The wonderful city of Moose Jaw has used the arts and culture quite extensively," said Tresser, whose development credits include the Chicago arts-based downtown revival. Part of the fascinating Moose Jaw story "is people are coming here to try to figure out how they can take what you've done and apply it in their own communities."

He described the use of tourism — spa, tunnels, casino, cultural centre — as an anchor to create jobs, as brilliant. "Pictures of the downtown from the '90s show a sad-looking business area. Your community leaders could have just given up and said we don't have any reason for putting an economic development plan in place," said Tresser.

But a key core of leaders with vision saw potential, never gave up, rediscovered geothermal mineral waters and pursued development, he said. "Soon it became hundreds and hundreds of people. If you think in a collaborative way — not, it's not my business — you can work together."

To those who claim tourism is seasonal, Tresser points to 230 year-round jobs at the spa as well as the casino, the impact of 150,000 annual tunnels visitors and other operations.

Moose Jaw is just in the second chapter of exciting development, according to Tresser. Plans for the multiplex and spa expansion are a start, he said. Events like the Festival of Words drawing 2,000 visitors annually "just grow and grow until you have hundreds employed."

The former actor-director turned development consultant especially praised leadership that preserved the Capitol Theatre. "Many communities have jewel assets like that and throw them away. If you have a great asset like an old vaudeville place, you need to do something to save it," said Tresser. "It could have been pulled down for a parking lot. Notable performers playing there have lauded it."

Once communities have chosen a theme like Moose Jaw's old buildings, they need a plan to keep construction in line with existing buildings, he said. "We don't want somebody erecting an ugly structure right in the middle of our beautiful downtown."



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