

Kite festival about more than economics

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Community pride, international exposure also benefits of Dieppe Kite International

For the up to 50,000 people who attend Dieppe Kite International each year, there's no question the event provides great entertainment and a fun day out for families.

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COLE BURSTON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Kevin Reynolds tries to get the wind to carry his kite, called the four-corner eclipse, during Dieppe Kite International at Dover Park yesterday.

But hosting the successful festival has many positive benefits for the community, both tangible and intangible.

Pierre Dupuis, general manager of the Economic Development Corporation of the City of Dieppe, says the festival definitely provides economic spinoffs for the city.

"Overall, it draws about 50,000 people and we have representatives from eight different countries, so if you have people coming to the community, they are spending money in the community," he says.

"But the end-all goal of the festival wasn't necessarily from an economic development point of view, but more a cultural point of view and it serves that purpose."

That's where the intangible comes in. One may not be able to put a dollar figure on it, but there is great value in an event that builds community pride.

"This is the largest kite festival in North America and it is now being held on an annual basis," Dupuis says. "There is that whole feeling good component. If people feel comfortable in their shoes and have some sense of pride in their community, they feel better and probably spend a few more dollars in the community as well."

More than that, it is something that economic development officers can point to as an example of the type of community Dieppe is, a family-friendly city that people are proud to live in and which offers plenty of activities for residents.

"It is another tool in our box of tools, if I can put it that way, along with other recreational and cultural activities happening in the community. It has that positive effect on people wanting to establish their businesses," Dupuis says. "It's another event that you can (point to and) say, 'Choose Dieppe to come and locate your family or retire to.'"

It also gives the city positive international exposure, which is always a good thing,

Whether or not they can put a price tag on it, Dieppe Mayor Jean LeBlanc says the festival is a valuable addition to the city.

"Governments and municipalities in particular are there to provide services and create a sense of community and give opportunities for your community to be known," he says. "That is part of providing services to your community, that dynamism, that excitement that percolates and infuses into all sorts of things."

LeBlanc says the kite festival is a great fit for Dieppe.

"I think it represents Dieppe fairly well, the fact it brings an artistic component, a creative component," he says. "And it is something for the young and the young at heart to get pretty excited about."

LeBlanc says almost everyone has flown a kite at some point, making the festival something that brings together people of all generations.

"It lets adults recapture some of that excitement of first seeing something fly in the air at the end of a string," says LeBlanc, who says he too used to fly kites as a child.

"We were a little innovative," he says, explaining he and his friends used to tie tin cans to the kite tails and rig up a second set of strings to them so they could drop things out of the cans once the kites were aloft.

"We had little plastic soldiers and we would try to get them to come down with a handkerchief (as a parachute)," he says, proving your imagination is the only limit when coming up with creative ways to use a kite.

Although the festival is about far more than economic spinoff, it definitely has benefits for businesses.

Mooser's Pub on Champlain Street is one local establishment that is seeing a direct economic impact from the festival, having won the contract to supply meals to the kite flyers.

But while it's nice for any business to have some guaranteed clientele, for Mooser's this is about way more than the bottom line.

"We're happy to see that our community is having big events like this and we like to try to participate as much as we can in our own community," says general manager Nadine Breau. "We've been supplying meals on site and they've also been coming to our establishment, which is great because we get to meet all these people from all around the world."

Although Mooser's has provided the food for the kite flyers for the last three years, for the past two years, it was all transported out to the site. This year the kite flyers have been coming to the pub itself for their supper.

"It's more of an experience for them when they are able to come here and meet some people from this country other than the people who are going down to Dover Park to see the kites," says manager Ryan Melanson says. "We want them to be almost like a friend, to get a chance to know a few people."

Breau says its been a challenge to create a menu that accommodates people from many different cultures.

"Everything is homemade, so it is a lot of work, but it gives a lot of hours to our employees and they love the challenge," she says.

She says they try to include at least one Acadian dish in each meal or something that is currently in season, like corn on the cob. And, of course, they're planning a seasonal must: a lobster and steak supper.

"We want to give them a taste of what we enjoy around here," Melanson says. "We want them to come here and go back home with good things in mind, feeling that they had a good time."

Melanson says the festival brings the world to Dieppe, a boon for those who haven't had the opportunity to do much travelling of their own.

"This is a chance to see what the rest of the world is about," he says. "And when people from other countries come here and share their culture with us, it can motivate us to visit other places. It brings culture to the community that may not have been there before."

That's an example of the type of dynamism LeBlanc is talking about and a reason why he pushed to have the festival become an annual event, rather than carry on being held every two years.

"We have to build momentum and tradition," he says. "We need that continuity."

He says having the event every year helps people make it part of their vacation and travel planning, plus provides more opportunities for local artists to perform for the large audiences the festival attracts.