

Local

# Folks in Dauphin make it happen

## Steakhouse latest community-funded result

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Dauphin residents invested about \$1.5 million to make a steakhouse a reality in the city located in the Parkland region.

There are no digital devices or mobile apps involved, but the citizens of Dauphin have used their own version of crowd-funding to get what any small community wants.

Like, for instance, the opportunity to go out for a nice dinner and a movie.

The city was without a movie theatre for about 10 years until the Countryfest Community Cinema opened in 2011.

The non-profit enterprise cost close to \$5 million to develop, with 25 per cent of the funds coming from local donations, including \$400,000 from Countryfest, the last not-for-profit major country music festival in North America.

Earlier this summer, the dinner part of the night out became a reality in Dauphin with the opening of an upscale restaurant -- Mr Mikes Steakhouse

Casual

cash.

It's a for-profit business, but it came about through the collective efforts of a large group.

With a group of about 35 investors, it was a unique scenario for the Vancouver-based franchiser of Mr Mikes that has 26 locations in Western Canada.

Rick Villalpando, vice-president business development with RAMMP Hospitality Brands Inc., Mr Mikes's franchiser, said it is unlike any of their other locations. But he said they really like to work with franchisees who are already committed to the community.

"I would call it a community effort in Dauphin," said Villalpando.

"But they did their homework. They hired a consultant and determined the community could support a restaurant."

In the last several years, in addition to the cinema and steakhouse, the city of about 8,500 has also built a new hockey arena and recreation centre, both of which were aided with \$1 million-plus in non-government donations with Countryfest as a financing force.

"You have to use the resources available to you, and the major resource we have in Dauphin is great people. We've shown if you work together you can get ahead," said Eric Irwin, the mayor of Dauphin since 2010 and the longtime president of Countryfest.

While a steakhouse would typically be considered a luxury in a small city, it only came into being because of a collective will.

"People wanted somewhere nice to go that they could come as they are from the farm or wherever, but also if they do feel like dressing up they can," said Marisa Phillippe, who manages the restaurant with her husband, Benjamin. They are also investors.

"The idea was for the restaurant to be unpretentious, but you could treat yourself to something more upscale that was not intimidating," she said.

They raised about \$1.5 million in \$30,000 units.

"To get around 35 investors, considering the size of Dauphin... that is a large group," said Benjamin Phillippe. "It is a big project. Lots of investors gathered to make it happen."

In addition to ensuring at least 35 dedicated customers, the presence of the restaurant after the successful development of community-funded projects helps raise community spirit.

"There is no doubt about that," said Irwin.

That track record has leveraged other potential developments. Last year was a record year for building permits in Dauphin and several other developments have happened or are in the works:

-- A new \$10-million, 36,000-square-foot Dauphin Co-op Food Store opened earlier this month.

-- The Dauphin Regional Health Centre is in the midst of a \$24-million upgrade that will include the first MRI north of the Trans-Canada Highway in Manitoba.

-- Late last year, Richardson International Ltd. announced plans to build a \$20-million-plus high-throughput grain elevator to replace its current facility in Dauphin; and

-- The province is building a new correctional centre to replace the Dauphin Correctional Centre, which is nearly 100 years old.

Service organizations and the local credit union, Catalyst Credit Union, are major players in the community-investment efforts. Back in the 1990s, the community raised about \$2 million from local donations for a community foundation, because the big banks and large corporate investors prefer to shy away from smalltown investments.

Irwin said a survey done a few years ago indicated people in Dauphin really wanted a movie theatre.

It turned out they didn't need the big theatre chains to make it happen.

In Dauphin, they've proved they can do it themselves.

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