

Chamber of Commerce chooses new executive director

Posted By Ronald Zajac, Staff Writer

Anne MacDonald, the former vice-president of sales and marketing of BizXcel Inc., is the new executive director of the Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce.

The business group's board announced Thursday they have chosen MacDonald to succeed Diana Dodge-Phillips, who resigned from the post May 1.

Greg Extence has been the chamber's interim director since then. MacDonald takes over on Monday.

Meanwhile, MacDonald's husband, chamber past president Bob Pearce, has submitted his resignation to avoid any conflict of interest, something the chamber's board has yet to consider.

MacDonald said she is excited at the new challenge.

"I do look forward to leading a strong chamber team," she said.

"I believe that a strong, prosperous business community leads to an enriched quality of life."

Chamber president Mary Jean McFall said the board made the decision Wednesday after considering about 30 applications.

What stood out in MacDonald's case was her people skills, said McFall.

"We were looking for somebody that was going to go out there and make sure that relationships were their top priority."

The chamber is the area's biggest business group, with some 550 members.

MacDonald, 42, a native of Brampton, has been a classified ad manager for community newspapers in Toronto and Edmonton.

She held the job at BizXcel for three years, leaving in the spring of 2008 with plans to start her own garden design business.

Those plans were derailed by the recession, said MacDonald.

As the chamber's executive director, MacDonald plans to help member businesses deal with the recession by continuing with the group's networking role and by "providing quality, relevant speakers and information," she said.

The chamber's role will also remain one of advocacy, especially by keeping an eye on developments on the local municipal front, said MacDonald.

She praised the strong leadership of the past two executive directors, Dodge-Phillips and Sueling Ching, and said she hopes to follow in their footsteps.

Pearce was the chamber's president from October 2006, when he first took over the job on an interim basis, to the end of his eventual two-year term this past March.

MacDonald said his experience with the business group is a definite asset.

"Obviously, I'm going to benefit from that in my new role."

But her work at BizXcel has also put her in touch both with the local business community and the chamber, she added.

BizXcel chief executive officer Gary Gzik said he was the one who encouraged MacDonald to apply for the job.

MacDonald has the leadership skills necessary for it, but also the required "finesse" for building networks and relationships, said Gzik.

"I am really looking forward to seeing what she can accomplish," he said.

McFall said Pearce stepped aside from the entire process of selecting the new executive director and has since tendered his resignation from the board of directors because the board has to deal with staffing issues.

The board now has to consider whether it should accept that resignation.

As past president, Pearce is on his way out anyway as a matter of procedure, said McFall, and the board is not entirely sure how much of a conflict it would pose to keep him on for the time he has left.

"We like to think that we're as objective as possible," said McFall.

At the same time, the chamber will be sorry to lose Pearce's skills, she said.