

Immigration info session held at St. F.X.

RICHARD MACKENZIE

✉ richardmac@thecasket.ca

The MacKay Room at St. F.X. provided the setting for a Jan. 9 information session on the Atlantic Immigration Pilot; a program which is part of the federal government's Atlantic Growth Strategy and developed to, as noted on a release to accompany the event, "help businesses fill labour gaps and grow."

The event took place from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and was officially titled Atlantic Immigration: Opportunities for Your Business. Amongst the dignitaries on-hand were MPs Sean Fraser — Central Nova, and Rodger Cuzner — Cape Breton-Canso, as well as Nova Scotia Immigration Minister Lena Diab — MLA for Halifax-Armadale.

They were joined by numerous settlement provider organizations which set up booths and answered questions on how they can help with the process.

In talking to reporters near the conclusion of the event, Diab described it as a "great opportunity."

"To meet some local businesses and introduce them to the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, in terms of how it works with the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration," she said.

"There is a lot of support that is available provincially in our office but, also, with the settlement service providers who are here locally and throughout the province."

Diab noted one of the presentations on the day was walking an employer through the process,



Nova Scotia Immigration Minister Lena Diab (left) joins Jubanti Dhan Toppo, immigrant support program co-ordinator with the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, for a photo during the Atlantic Immigration: Opportunities for Your Business event, Jan. 9, at St. F.X.'s MacKay Room.

Richard MacKenzie

step-by-step.

"How do you apply, how do you get designated, and then how do you get a candidate and endorse them; the time frame it takes and so on, on a general basis," she said.

"As I said, there is a lot of support available and a lot of businesses may not have the technical expertise; immigration is a complex thing, it's not a simple procedure. It has always been complex but our role, in the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, is to help simplify it and let them know there are supports there for them, locally, that can

assist them to go through that system."

In talking more about the pilot program, Diab said it's about simplifying and expediting the process.

"It has three streams, not just one stream, three different categories," she said.

"One of the categories is hiring international students who are already here. As the employer in the room said, she has hired two students from St. F.X., who are international students. You can, potentially, hire people who are already here in Nova Scotia who could be either international students or who are here on temporary status, for whatever reason. Whether they're working, visiting, whatnot; that's important for employers to know. A lot of employers probably don't know and realize that."

Diab also talked about the "fundamental idea" of providing an action plan to help the person, as well as their family, settle into their new community.

"So we retain them and they make Nova Scotia their home, because that is the number one priority; it's not just to bring someone here to work, we want to ensure they and their family members are feeling welcomed and happy, that they actually stay," she said.

"We want our retention numbers to increase and the way to do that is to plan accordingly. Sometimes, before the individual arrives, or in the case of an international student or someone who is here already; the chances are higher they are going to stay because they already know the

area, the community, have become accustomed to our weather ... which is great."

Diab talked about recent research that points to Nova Scotians embracing immigration more and more.

"Corporate Research Associates did research for us on how Nova Scotians [view immigration]; whether they see it as a positive, and 85 per cent said yes, compared to 2016 when 36 per cent said yes," she said. "We can clearly see we're making a difference and that is great."

Diab was asked if the immigration statistics show rural Nova Scotia population numbers being helped.

"That's the wonderful thing about the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, we're seeing a lot of employers in rural parts of the province who are actually applying to us to be designated and have candidates to be endorsed," she said.

"When we talk, generally, about immigration, most tend to go to the cities; and it's not just Nova Scotia, it's like that all over Canada and the world. People tend to go to cities but when you talk about the pilot, the wonderful thing about it is, that's not the case. There are a lot of businesses

Immigration - Page 11

Immigration

continued from Page 8

and employers outside the city who can't find employees, so it's a matter of getting out there and making sure they feel they have the support ... they know they have the support. We can help them fill the applications and do what they need to do."

Diab said it was Fraser and Cuzner who brought the information session to Antigonish.

"What was encouraging for me was to not only see so many people in the room today, but so many different faces who were showing interest in finding employees and families who could come to Atlantic Canada to help their businesses grow," Fraser said, talking about the event.

"When you see this number of people in a community the size of Antigonish embrace the idea of bringing newcomers to our community, it's a really uplifting thing. And it's no surprise for me, given the very positive experience Antigonish has had with newcomers over the last few years."

Fraser also talked about the pilot program.

"The new Atlantic Immigration Pilot seeks to eliminate some of the red tape employers have had to deal with," he said.

"There is no longer a labour market impact assessment required to bring someone here, the fee of \$1,000 that existed under the Temporary Foreign Workers program is gone so it's cheaper, the processing time for permanent residency is much smaller under the Atlantic Immigration Pilot than it would otherwise be; we're trying to reduce the administrative burden.

"That being said, immigration is a complex subject. Getting into the country and making sure the person coming in is subject to all the scrutiny you would expect them to be, is very important.

"If there are employers who are staring at the potential administrative hassle and view that as a burden, I invite you to contact our office, the Antigonish number is 902-867-2919. I encourage you to call us and if we can help walk you through the process, step-by-step, to get you designated to bring people in, and get more people working in your business and living in our communities, I'm happy to extend that invitation."