

Mayor Mike Savage column
Business Voice

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One of the privileges of being Mayor is having the opportunity to visit different businesses and meet new people. For a couple of years I have been working with the Halifax Partnership to visit workplaces of all sizes through the Celebrate Business program.

But, once in a while the request comes in unexpectedly, as it did recently when the talented Julia Rivard asked me to pop by her Gottingen Street Norex headquarters to welcome her latest hire to Halifax. Matt Summers, an entrepreneur who hails from the UK and spent the past couple of years in Colorado, found Halifax through a job posting for Halifax-based web design and invention company Norex.

He liked the creative job posting even if the job wasn't his cup of tea and he struck up a work relationship with the company. When Julia was looking for someone to join the team for another venture, the promising e-learning tool Eyeread, Matt found his fit. He and his young family left Colorado behind for Halifax, a new job in a city that appealed to them.

It's heartening to hear stories like Matt's, of people finding that special combination of interest and opportunity in Halifax. Before they left Colorado, Matt and his family explored their new city through Google Street View, checking out elementary schools, neighbourhoods, where he would work and where his wife would do her graduate degree.

For me, it was a nice way to start a Monday, welcoming a newcomer who is happy to be here. Beyond that, though, it was the perfect way to turn my mind to the days ahead, as I worked to get ready to take Halifax's story on the road to a luncheon with business and industry leaders at the Economic Club of Canada, a sales call I had been contemplating for some time.

As we worked with the Partnership to prepare presentation materials, it was clear that tone would be critical in getting across the message that Halifax is the right-sized, perhaps even the perfect-sized, city to invest in. We poured over competitive costs analyses, reports on start-up communities, housing price comparisons, the latest figures from the airport and Halifax Port, urban GDP predictions, and the city's new five-year economic growth plan.

Halifax has the specialness of place, the deep well of talented people, and a cost-competitive price of doing business. People, place, and thing: something we could confidently hold up. We knew could show that Halifax has helped grow impressive companies such as Emera and Clearwater, while it has also proven to be a good bet for international heavy hitters such as IBM and RBC. And, still, it offers a fit for Matt, someone looking to help a company move from start-up to going concern.

It was gratifying to see how leaders in this business community coalesce around an idea. Whoever I called, whoever the Partnership approached, they all were quick with an offer to help spread the word or to fill a table through their Toronto networks. That's what we do well in these parts, each of us in our own way and collectively working to tell a new story of Halifax.