

Healthkick Huron wins top economic development award

Winning top honours for the Healthkick Huron project from the Ontario Economic Development Conference shows that Seaforth isn't the only place to realize that physician recruitment is pivotal to a healthy local economy, says Paul Nichol, manager of the Huron Business Development Corporation (HBDC).

"Someone sees the connection between strong healthcare and economic development," he says, following the award's presentation in Toronto over the weekend.

The Huron East-Seaforth Community Development Trust and the HBDC were co-recipients of the award in the new category of physician recruitment.

Healthkick Huron, originally known as the six-pronged Skills for Healthcare Attraction and Retention Pilot (SHARP) project, received \$300,000 in provincial funding in 2005 as well as a contribution of \$150,000 from the Seaforth Community Development Trust to



Susan Hundertmark photo
Gwen Devereaux, Paul Nichol and Laura Overholt pose with the Ontario Economic Development Conference award won this weekend by Healthkick Huron.

promote healthcare careers in Huron County.

The project aimed to encourage high school students to consider a healthcare career, provide experience for youth at local health facilities, provide nursing training for the local workforce, create temporary work placements for recent health graduates, make the area attractive to international medical grads and create community

ambassador teams to promote the area.

"It was the innovation of what we were offering. The whole strategy is around doctor recruitment - you need all of that to attract doctors to the area," says Gwen Devereaux, creator of the project and physician recruiter for hospitals in Huron and Perth counties.

Nichol adds that another strength of the project is the fact that it was community-driven.

"All small communities are facing the same issues and we set out to set this community apart. We were trying to create a buzz. We wanted to say, 'If you want to practice medicine in a rural community, you want to do it in Seaforth,'" he says.

Devereaux says she's

made sure that physicians looking for a practice know all about the Healthkick initiative, adding that projects like MedQuest - which gives high school students a taste of medical careers during a weeklong summer camp - are particularly exciting.

"Everyone recruiting doctors speaks to their beautiful communities but we've shown them something innovative and new," says Devereaux.

Close to 20 Seaforth community members representing the hospital, the trust and the municipality, attended the awards ceremony over the weekend.

"Quite a hoot went up when we were announced," says project manager Laura Overholt.

"This award provides recognition that we are doing something special here in Huron County and to receive this level of award is outstanding," she says.

by Susan Hundertmark