

Capreol: new city gets mixed reviews

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The great amalgamation of 2001. Capreol residents, including Frank Mazucca, the longstanding King of Capreol and former Sudbury regional chairman, largely sneer its promises of cheaper government, equity and development on.

Mazucca runs a furniture shop in downtown Capreol, and owns a palatial home on the town's northeast end.

Business has been slow lately, he says, because residents are carrying too much debt and new furniture purchases are a low priority.

When asked why he has spent his entire life here, one in which he has prospered, the gregarious Mazucca answered jokingly, "stupidity."

Most people with a sharp business sense could easily prosper in a big city, Mazucca said. But family ties — his immigrant father was a shoemaker in the town during the Depression — and loyalties to a community are important qualities, he added.

"This town will never be as good as it was before we became a part of the City of Greater Sudbury," said Mazucca, who has offspring and grandchildren still living in the town. "Bigger is not always better. We used to own our own hydro, then they came along, stole it from us and raised our rates by four-and-a-half per cent."

Gloomy forecast

Water rates in the town have doubled, Mazucca said, and by the time the Greater City of Sudbury finishes costly upgrades to its water system, he argued, Capreol residents will be forced to pay even more for their water without getting more service.

Although Mazucca has a gloomy forecast for the city's public transportation system ("I hope it works, but I wouldn't be surprised if they aren't able to maintain the same rates over time"), other residents see a marked increase in public transit usage thanks to a reduced fare from Capreol to Sudbury.

"My wife Sue and I have been driving around town lately, and we've noticed that more and more people are standing at the bus stop," Bridge said.

"The city equalized bus fares for most of the new city, and Capreol residents can now get to downtown Sudbury for \$2.

"The service is increasing and that's a good thing," he added. "It's good that people are using it, because if they don't use it, they'll lose it."

Since its beginning, Capreol has been a railroad town, and its economic backbone is still firmly attached to the CN tracks that have run through the community since 1915, when Capreol was the principle meeting point of trains running west from Montreal and north from Toronto.

"Capreol has always had a strong identity," said Bob Michelutti, president of the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre, widely thought to be the Sudbury area's finest museum.

"We have always been economical-



Rob O'Flanagan/THE SUDBURY STAR

Susan MacArthur, Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre museum operations co-ordinator, poses with a collection of railroad memorabilia.

ly based on the railroad, and Sudbury is identified as a mining town."

There has always been some mining in the Capreol area — Inco's old Nickel Rim Mine, and the more contemporary Whistle Mine, for example — but it was the trains that distinguished Capreol, and a high percentage of the town's residents are former or current railroad workers.

CN now operates a basic "through station" in the town, a junction where train crews are changed. Crews live in the town, however, while out-of-town crews bunk in a renovated facility in the town's Millennium Centre, once the town's high school.



Mazucca

CN used to run a massive locomotive repair shop in the town, equipped with a roundhouse and fully stocked machine shop. The company sold it off in recent years, and after an uncertain and strike-ridden incarnation as CLN Industries, the operation was purchased by US-based National Railway Equipment and became NRE-ALCO Locomotive of Canada.

"We're holding our own," said NRE-ALCO plant manager Keith Bowness. "Even though the economy hasn't been that strong, we've managed to get a variety of contracts."

Bowness said the operation has the benefit of being associated with a global company, and a number of locomotive repair jobs are coming in from throughout North America. That keeps local mechanics,

painters, electricians and welders busy.

"I don't foresee any reason not to be here for the long-term," he added. "Once there is an (economic) recovery, we expect a brighter future for the company."

The volatile call-centre industry — which is susceptible to economic slumps — entered Capreol in 2000, but Capreol Connex closed just more than a year later, leaving 80 full-time and 120 part-time employees out of work.

But a new owner has stepped in, and as many as 200 jobs could be created. City Coun. David Kilgour, former mayor of Capreol, called the announcement a positive economic development for the town.

But Mazucca said Capreol needs manufacturing in order to sustain itself.

"We got a break with the call centre," Mazucca conceded, "but we have to bring up manufacturing to this area. Enough money has been spent on tourism, now we have to think about making the things that we need for ourselves — mattresses, furniture, coffins — whatever is needed.

"These facilities can be housed anywhere. We have trains, highways and phone lines and these things can be manufactured cheaper in the outskirts than in the big centres."

Michelutti might disagree with Mazucca's assessment of tourist spending. The Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre has hired a consultant to conduct a feasibility study and business plan for an expansion of the facility.

A smaller version of a round-

house could be one component of the expansion, housing train simulators and hands-on displays related to the community's railroad history, aboriginal culture and natural attractions.

"But we still need industry in this town," he said. "Without them, we would become a bedroom community of Sudbury. Slowly, that's what we are becoming and Capreol very much goes the way of Sudbury. If Sudbury grows, we will grow."

Bright lights, big city

But the allure of the big city may be too much to keep young people in the town, especially if their are few good jobs to keep them home.

"Capreol is a small, little, little town," said Angey Laderoute, 17. "There are more opportunities outside, and I can't see myself saying here. I want to be a hairdresser, working with famous people. You can't do that here."

But Laderoute and her friend, Renne Duvall, appreciate the benefits of growing up in a small town.

"Everybody is everybody's friend here," said Duvall.

"When there is a party or something, no one is left out."

Capreol remains a "close-knit community," said Michelutti and Lynn Mazucca (Frank's daughter-in-law), who runs Lynn's Place on the main street. A no man's land of forest separates the town from the urban sprawl of Valley East and Sudbury. As long as that expanse of land remains, so will the small town atmosphere.

"News spreads fast in this town and community involvement is very high. Capreol's identity is still intact," said Lynn.