



NEWS LOCAL

Conference's focus on aging, declining population



By [Ron Grech](#), The Daily Press (Timmins)

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Charles Cirtwill, president and chief executive of the Northern Policy Institute, is seen here at Cedar Meadows Resort and Spa during an information gathering session held in 2014.

TIMMINS - A two-day conference being held in Timmins next week will focus on the aging and declining population of Northern Ontario and its impact on the local economy.

The State Of The North conference at the Ramada Inn in Timmins Sept. 27 and 28, is being hosted by the Northern Policy Institute.

Charles Cirtwill, president and chief executive officer of the Northern Policy Institute, said they have lined up several guest speakers who have had favourable experiences working in government and industry in other regions, and who he believes may be able to offer some solutions to be applied in Northern Ontario.

Among them Jamie Saulnier, chief executive officer at Running Deer Resources, who is expected to speak about maximizing economic benefits through cooperative relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

"From my layman's perspective, I feel Ontario has a long way to go in terms of getting maximum benefits for everybody who lives here," said Cirtwill. "Running Deer Resources, run by Jamie Saulnier, seems to be one of those kind of national leaders in terms of building these bridges, recognizing that it's important to have mutual respect on both sides of the table, working collectively and collaboratively to kind of maximize the return for the First Nation communities, the neighbouring non-Indigenous communities and the corporations, and clearly they have a lot of success stories and a lot of, what he calls, tool-kits which I think is going to be very exciting for him to share with the audience."

Another speaker Cirtwill highlighted was Suzanne Ley, executive director of the Nova Scotia office of immigration, who will be speaking about the Atlantic Immigration pilot project, aiming at filling specific gaps in the labour force.

"When you talk about national immigration focus, we always talk about high skills or significant skills, or those kinds of jobs. Yet in Atlantic Canada, and here in Northern Ontario, many of the gaps we're seeing, many of the gaps that are persistent and most hard to fill are jobs that the federal government doesn't currently consider high-skilled jobs," said Cirtwill.

"There are people in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) and people outside of Canada who would be more than happy to come to Canada or look forward to an opportunity to relocate their families here, if we were able as a region to set the priorities and say, these are the jobs we need to fill ... as opposed to finding the people with the most skills, bringing them here and hoping that they get lucky."

The conference currently has more than 150 registrants from across both halves of Northern Ontario.

"Our target was 150 and we're still averaging about three or four registrations a day," said Cirtwill. "Registrations are still open ... and we are encouraging people to continue to register to the end of this week.

"Friday would be the cut-off but I'm betting we're going to have some walk-ups and we're not going to turn anybody away because these issues are pretty important."

Cirtwill said the registrants reflect a great-cross section of organizations and sectors.

"Actually, it's a very good mix

They include industry and economic development officials, federal and provincial civil servants, municipal politicians, First Nation chiefs and councillors, labour union representatives and members of the general public.

"It's exactly the type of people we had hoped would come," said Cirtwill.

Registration for the conference is available online at www.stateofthenorth.ca.