

## Media Articles

### ***When economic development is like going the Foxtrot***

(Saskatchewan Business Unlimited Summer 2007)

Monica Knight isn't afraid to do things differently. This Saskatoon based conference speaker and economic development consultant, former teacher in India, and human resources manager in South Africa, shares her world experiences in a vibrant and memorable way.

Through her company, Shosholoza Productions, Knight helps communities develop “intrapreneurship”, or post-entrepreneurial activity. Intrapreneurship encourages new economic development under the shelter of an established core business. It's a philosophy adopted by entities such as Kodak, Apple, IBM and Microsoft.

Shosholoza derives from the music and oral culture that Knight experienced in South Africa. “When I was explaining courage, determination, tenacity, the only way I could explain it was through dance,” she says. “My speeches involve music and dance as a metaphor for the way economic development is approached.”

Knight likens the “partners foxtrot” to the economy: slow slow quick quick. “I encourage people to just keep moving forward, to have the courage to keep adapting to change.”

Currently, Knight is leading a project in North Battleford that will result in a new venture for “at risk” youth while revitalizing the old RCMP building. The core business focuses on collecting, refurbishing and distributing used furniture to new immigrants in the community.

Proceeds from the business will be used to support youth in establishing other new ventures, including a daycare, community kitchen, office area, school room, beauty salon, and car wash.

### ***Look out Earl, there are a few women out to get you*** (Shelby Parker, Moose Jaw Times Herald)

I met a woman a few weeks ago. A woman who made an impression on me.

March 8 was International Women's Day, a day where women around the world unite and fight for women's eights and equality. On that particularly day., I went to a luncheon at Zion Untied Church, Monica Coneys was the speaker for the day.

Women of different ages, races and backgrounds gathered for a light afternoon meal with the typical pasta salad and cold cut sandwiches. Coneys stood at the front of the room, introduced herself and told us about her life in Africa and how hard it was when she first came to Canada.

“I didn't qualify” she said proudly. Her teaching methods of singing and dancing were too bizarre; she was too outspoken and honest for most people.

After a time of sadness, she realized what to do. She killed her Earl; which became the theme for the day. She wanted all the women to try to kill all their Earls.

Obviously, she was not encouraging the women to go kill a man named Earl . She got the idea from the Dixie Chicks song, Goodbye Earl, that Earl had to die. But she wanted all the women to think about the negativity in their lives – whether it was a bad job, low self esteem or a fear of doing something. She called all those negativities ‘Earl’. And on International Women's Day, she told us to all kill our Earls. To liberate ourselves and to lean on each other for support, as the women do in the song.

She sang and danced and told fun stories. After a few nervous glances around the room, all the women seemed to relax and embrace the new liberating attitude.

The change in the room was unbelievable. Women danced and screamed, and played the drums. Some women threw streamers at tables across the room, others stood on chairs and moved their hips from side to side. They were free to let go of their programmed etiquette, their proper manners, their shyness. Even if it was only for an hour, those women were unleashed.

I'm not sure how many Earls actually kicked the bucket that day. But I guarantee that most of the women left the lunch considering pulling the trigger.

***African Woman Inspires Community*** (Christalee Froese Regina Leader Post)

South Africa. It took a woman from South Africa to make me believe in Saskatchewan. “Very Strange,” you may think. And believe you me, I thought that too. Especially when I observed this robust woman of 50 or so enter the hall – her vibrant African print outfit capturing the attention of all and her strong sense of self fill the room. She paraded back and forth for a few minutes carrying armful after armful of Africa paraphernalia, costumes and music.

None of us in the packed high school gymnasium knew what to expect after all what could a woman from South Africa teach us about the Prairies. What could she possibly know of our -40C winters, our pioneer history and our Prairies spirit.

“Entrepreneurial heaven” were the first words out of her mouth. That’s it....entrepreneurial heaven. We were in shock – what could she be talking about? Had she fallen and bumped her head on the way to this engagement? She must be talking about Johannesburg after all, she surely couldn’t believe that about Saskatchewan.

While our fine province is known for many amazing things (like skies, friendliness and grain production, we are certainly not on any Forbes list as “No 1 place to start a business” – of this I am fairly certain. So imagine how puzzled we all were when she reported that Saskatchewan was indeed entrepreneurial heaven. Monica Coneys went on to explain how her new home of Gravelbourg had tackled project after project, initiating new businesses, refurbishing a theatre and creating a vibrant tourism industry.

This South African woman, with her steadfast belief in focusing on the positive and working together cooperatively, had evidently helped Gravelbourg residents discover their entrepreneurial spirit, and now, here she was trying to convert us too. I watched her unique African dances and listened to her optimistic view of the Prairies business landscape with skepticism. I just wasn’t sure....I knew many businesses had succeeded on the Prairies....but “entrepreneur heaven?” I just wasn’t sure

Well call me a sucker for a confident woman who is brave enough to dance alone in front of a crowd or call me an unrealistic optimist, but whatever happened that day in the gymnasium some two years ago changed the way I viewed our province.

Since that fateful day, I personally have started my own business, our community has started very successful arts and continuing education business and we’re seeking to embark on two other community owned businesses. And I know of several other people in that room on those days who also were inspired to improve their rural communities through projects like creating community murals and starting their own rural business.

This Monica Coneys really had an impact on us. So this last month, I was thrilled to see that she has writing a book declaring her rural development philosophies and espousing the notion that rural Saskatchewan is indeed ripe with economic opportunity. There are many amazing messages for all rural dwellers in this book, whether you are business oriented or not. Here are a few of my favorites:

“Firstly, I must stress that whatever you do in work and life, surround yourself with positive people, and read the writings of positive people. Actively seek to recharge your emotional batteries by searching out those who focus on solving the problems, not complaining about them”. I just love this quote and do admit that us rural dwellers sometimes go heavy on the ‘ho-hums’, myself included. But in Monica’s world, that’s not good enough. And having been fully converted, if it’s not good enough for Monica, it’s not good enough for me either. No more complaining.

“When you can’t change the direction of your wind, change your sails”. This basically says, we’re adaptive folks. Always have been...from the time our ancestors left the ports of their home countries, to the time they arrived in Canada and crossed this large country to stake out new lives. We’re adaptive and entrepreneurial and we shouldn’t be afraid to capitalize on those qualities.

“Live your dream”. People who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it. I interpret this as a resounding “go for it”, no matter what others think and no matter where you live. Monica encouraged all rural residents to pursue their passions even in the face of fear and even in the face of social pressure not to.

The book is called *Shosholozza Dance to the beat of your own drum*. The message is - Saskatchewan is entrepreneurial heaven. The woman is South African native Monica Coneys. And the results have been vibrant rural communities that have reached discernible levels of business and community development success. Thank you South Africa for sharing Monica Coneys with rural Saskatchewan.

***In Change, use advantages*** (The Battlefords News Optimist) February 26, 2006)

Look down at the soles of your shoes. You've got diamonds on them, That's what Monica Coney says. She's the consultant who spoke about managing change during a luncheon sponsored by the Battlefords Chamber of Commerce. Coney danced and used music and humor to convey her message that change isn't scary, it's an opportunity to improve your life and your community.

Each person has diamonds on the soles of their shoes – advantages they just need to be aware of and utilized, she said, as Paul Simon's 'Diamonds On the Soles of Her Shoes' played in the background.

The luncheon held in the auditorium of the Civic Center on Tuesday attracted about 65 people from various businesses and institutions in the community. It lasted about an hour and 40 minutes. Coney likened change to swinging from one trapeze to another. "You've got to let go of this bar and swing on over to that one" she said. But, she conceded, most people are afraid to take that leap. "They're scared they'll fall into the unknown while leaping from one bar to the other. "look back at your life", she said. "You've always caught the next bar... When you catch the next bar you'll know you've grown."

She said the key is to learn to "enjoy the transition" from one bar to the other. "that's when you're free" Coney said. "Now you're living".

Coney, originally from South Africa, used everything from traditional African mask and shield to a Mexican sombrero to accentuate her message. As an economic advisor, Coney travels across Saskatchewan and Western Canada advising communities on how they can boost their economies. But that involves change, which is something many people resist. Coney talked about one community where she advised residents to freshen up the place with a coat of paint. She said she was asked "if we paint it, will they put the taxes up?"

Coney said people have to get rid of the idea that they are competing with surrounding communities. The more a city, town or village grows, the greater the spin-offs for surrounding communities, she said. "if Wilkie grows, North Battleford grows. If Saskatoon grows, North Battleford grows. If North Battleford grows, Saskatoon grows" she said. "I am attached to your town. You're only an hour away; why don't you invite me?" she asked.

Sometimes communities miss obvious opportunities to cash in on things that make their place distinctive. Coney noted she was recently asked to give the residents of Sangudo, northwest of Edmonton, some ideas on how they could spur economic development in their community. Sangudo means "little Mexico" Coney noted. With that, she put on a sombrero and held a couple of maracas.

Coney suggested a way the Battlefords could spur business in the community. She said all toilet paper in Canada appears to be white. In her home country of South Africa, it comes in a variety of colors. As she said this, Coney distributed little squares of toilet paper to everyone in her audience. "Imagine North Battleford as the colored toilet tissue capital of Saskatchewan" she yelled as "We're Not Gonna Take It" by Twisted Sister blasted out over the sound system, members of the audience waved pieces of toilet paper and threw coloured ribbons at each other. A couple of audience members obtained maracas and shook them. Most members of the audience wore big smiles. "You are in the transition time" Coney said. "You will catch that other bar".

***The Seven Wonders of Mortlach*** ( Ron Walter, Moose Jaw This Week October 2 2005)


The Seven Wonders of Mortlach newsletter is compiled by seven young people, also now as the Severn Wonders of Mortlach. The grasp of young residents stirred up a lot of wondering three months ago when its pilot program began operating with rural consultant, Monica Coney as overseer.

"At first residents were kind of Whoa. what's going on here, said Heidi Patterson, a former Moose Jaw fitness center employee now helping in a recently opened second hand store and studying online to be a teachers assistant

From what I've been told and heard hey are really impressed with us./ We're accomplishing something

In three months the group's community and business activities under the Human Resources Development Canada Life Skills pilot program have helped build a Centennial garden, organized a slo-pitch tournament – and opened Second Time Around, a second hand store in the former village office. More is in store.

But Mortlach residents are getting used to new things. The village, 34 kilometers west of Moose Jaw, has seen numerous developments in the last five years. It's come a long way said Patterson, a lifetime resident. It needs some TLC. Where that restaurant is, that was completely empty.



Tender Loving Care from the group is transforming the rundown second story of the library building into a beehive of busyness activity with plans for a candle making factory, recording studio, photography shop and relocation of a day care center from a church basement.

The beehive concept, says Coneys, involves a cluster of business operations sharing work on renovations, costs of facilities and, more importantly sharing encouragement.

“Any money that’s made from the shop goes back into the project” says Coneys. The skills program pays the member’s minimum age for six months as they develop their business or career. Kelly Sapergia is completing a Braille course to instruct other blind folks. And he will partner with Skyler Caffertata in the recording studio. Sapergia, who has built the village website and is working on one for a craft business, says the studio will do demo tapes for artists. “Around here, some people would like to get their record produced here” he said.

Chad Neal, 23, plans to get his driver’s license by Christmas so he can supplement a part-time job at the store with odd jobs. Once the beehive is complete, the group will assist Blayne Gilbertson with conversion of his two-car garage into a mechanic/auto body shop. Gilbertson, supervisor of the renovations, says he has customers waiting for oil changes that will be his first service offering. He can fix just about anything. “I never used to have a lot of money for cars, so I just bought 10 old ones and built one” he said.

During October, he will attend a Community Futures session to write his business plan. Meanwhile, his focus is trying for the GED (General Educational Diploma) so he’ll be able to get into mechanic/auto body school.

Some people might say someone’s got rocks in their head” says Coneys. “Through here is another business center to try out rent free, utility free for a little business idea”. Each member is involved in something he or she is passionate about, she said. Businesses are mostly ventures the community had identified as a need. Loans of \$15,000 or \$20,000 to help each person start a business would still leave them without needed support and encouragement, said Coneys.

Providing the support of an elder is Else Rollie of Moose Jaw, helping some people with reading, and “putting out fires” in the project. “It’s an absolutely terrific project” says Rollie, who grew up in a small town. “it’s a pilot project but it’s coming together very nicely. It’s not only teaching them skills, it’s also teaching them how to get along together. I would be proud to call each and everyone of them my children”.

Not all has been peaches and cream. Two weeks ago Friday, a letter from the village told the group to stop work on the library building as it was being sold. On the following Monday, when Coneys did her twice weekly visit, she was surprised the group wasn’t more downcast. “I am so impressed”, she said “I expected to be coming in here and they’d be “Grrr!”

Instead of renovating the old library building they started to prepare Gilbertson’s garage for his business.

Within a week, the group was back on schedule. A meeting of village council and the development committee cleared the air and dealt with some misconceptions of what of what the renovations amounted to. In retrospect, that was the best thing that could have happened” said Coneys. “life doesn’t go smoothly”.


### ***Women raise their energy – and the roof*** (Western Producer November 6, 2003)

After a day-long workshop, the women at a rural women’s conference in Camrose Alberta were standing on their chairs doing war whoops that wouldn’t be out of place at a hockey arena.

The more than 100 women had been broken into four teams and were cheering on their teammates who were using a child’s golf club as they tried to shoot a plastic ball through an obstacle course to a plastic flowerpot at the end of the room.

Even with the cheering from their teammates and encouragement from the team mascots, the women who started out at the tenth, and farthest bowling pin, couldn’t hit their target.

The game was about setting realistic attainable goals said one team captain, Tina Myles of Camrose Alberta. “The people trying to start at 10 were disappointed every time,” said Myles. Earlier in the day, Saskatchewan rural development guru Monica Coneys told the women to take the 10 step approach to success. If a farm woman wants to start a new business or career, it will likely take 10 steps over two years. It can’t be accomplished all in one shot.



“To me it was also about celebrating victory and the little milestones” said Myles. As part of a study on rural women’s needs, the Camrose Consulting Group hired Coneys to talk to the central Alberta farm women about how to change their lives or set up their own business.

Coneys’ energy had been key to transforming the Town of Gravelbourg in southern Saskatchewan to a vibrant tourist community.

The enthusiastic South African now travels the Prairies teaching others to recognize the gems they have on the farm or in their community and how to make them shine.

During one exercise, Coneys divided the women into small groups and had them draw a daisy like flower on a piece of paper. The center of the daisy would be what Coney’s called the winning racehorse.

In Gravelbourg, Coney’s winning racehorse was a local theater. After it was restored, several other businesses sprung up around it. For some of the women that winning horse was the farm; for others it was their own local theater.

Out of the center the women attached petals or ideas that could spring from the winning horse. “You’ll be blown away with the ideas that are right under our noses and don’t cost a fortune” says Coneys.

The petals around them included ideas like music festivals, dance classes, kitchen rental; teen raves or a costume shop. The petals surrounding the farm included ideas like bird watching, community garden, petting zoo, bed and breakfast, motocross bike course, corn maze or tea house.

Even though the grain elevators have been torn down in many communities and the town isn’t as vibrant as it once was, there are plenty of gems still on the Prairies.

The search for gems brought Vicki Argula of Wetaskiwin AB to the conference. Argula runs a riding arena in the nearby community. While the riding arena is a success, she felt she was missing out on more things she could do with her place.

Liz Rolf was also trying to tap into the energy and the enthusiasm. “I feel like I’m stuck in this box”, said Rolf, a nurse with five kids and 300 cows back on the farm. “I want more out of life and I don’t know what I want and I don’t know how to get it and it’s frustrating,” said Rolf. “I know I want something more.”

Her dream is to take young kids around the world. Recently, she took her daughters to Turkey to show them there was life beyond rural Alberta. Marian Williams with Alberta’s Agriculture’s ag-entrepreneurship division said she could feel the optimism growing in the room all day. “I’m hoping the women take some optimism and energy away from today”.

If rural communities are going to be transformed, it will be from within, not because there is a government grant or loan, Coneys told the group “Imagine the energy in this room to say the cavalry is not coming” she said. Coneys also used the African term Shosholoza or ‘move on’, throughout the presentation that she danced through. Most women know the grain elevators are not going to be rebuilt and life isn’t going to be like it once as, but the families owe it to the young people to look to the future and not dwell on the past. “We have dreams and ideas and energy and talent and room,” said Coneys.