

City council should strongly consider Wi-Fi

In the city of Miramichi logo, rising like the sun from the horizon behind the tall ship sailing along the water, is a golden CD-ROM.

When the city was formed in 1995, the CD-ROM was cutting-edge technology that signified Miramichi's future as the high-tech hub of New Brunswick. Or at least that was what the Liberal government of Frank McKenna hoped would happen.

The province knew, even in 1995, that the key to Miramichi's future was to diversify the economy, and technology was a growing industry with Internet companies and other high tech firms ruling Wall Street as the world jumped on board the information superhighway.

Miramichi's economic survival, it seemed, rested in the growing demand for technology and Internet services. It was hoped Miramichi would attract young entrepreneurs and workers with technology training to area. It seemed the city was poised to be on the cutting edge of the technology revolution.

Today the dream of Miramichi as New Brunswick technological hot-bed seems as outdated as the CD-ROM in the city logo.

But while Miramichi may never become a tech hub, that is no excuse for being left behind when it comes to technology.

In 2009 a person can sit on a park bench in downtown Fredericton and surf the Internet from a laptop, iPod Touch or any other Wi-Fi device thanks to that city's award-winning Fred Zone, which provides free wireless Internet to most of the city.

In Moncton, people who ride on Codiac Transit buses can surf the Internet while on their way to work, shopping or appointments.

In Miramichi no such service exists. In fact there are still places inside the city limits without access to traditional hard-wired high speed, let alone high-speed wireless.

This is why we were so pleased to see Red Ball Internet come to Miramichi last week to speak with city council.

The company, which provides Wi-Fi services in the Moncton area, wants to expand its services to this city. This would mean high-speed Wi-Fi services not only for personal Internet use but for commercial use as well.

And we believe this is a step in the right direction.

We all know Miramichi has suffered tough economic times and the current recession has not helped. But the city, and by extension the region, cannot grow by standing still.

If we are to attract new companies and new people to the city we must be able to provide the same technological advantages as other cities in the province.

An available Wi-Fi network in the city is attractive to tourists wanting to keep in touch while away from home. It's also something businesses like, allowing e-mail and other Internet function without having to find an available hard-wired port.

Courier companies use it to track shipments and truck location. Emergency services can use it to help coordinate their actions.

Want to attract special events and conventions to the city? Wi-Fi is one of the things that will help put Miramichi at the top of the list.

It's also a plus in attracting students to the area. The ability of a NBCC student to step out of his or her apartment in Newcastle, board a bus in our proposed transit system and surf the Internet on the way to class will make the city more attractive to tech-savvy youth and young couples who increasingly rely on technology in their everyday lives.

The more services like this the city can offer, the more attractive it becomes not only as a destination for visitors but for people who are looking to move to the city. And it will help to keep young Miramichiers from moving to places they believe offer more of the services they want in a city.

It is our hope city council will have see the benefit of this technology and move forward as quickly as it can to put us in line with other cities in the province.