

## 'Powerhouse' of GTA leaders promise economic plan

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There will soon be an action plan for stimulating the economy in the GTA, uniting the 416 and 905 regions like never before. That was the message delivered today in Markham by Mayor Hazel McCallion, at the first-ever GTA Region Economic Summit.

"I'm proud we've all made the decision to work together, as one collective greater region," McCallion said before hundreds of public and private sector leaders.

"Today is really a call of action to all three levels of government. A call of action to business and labour, and to academics to work together," said Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti, welcoming attendees to the summit, which was held at Seneca College.

He introduced the event's co-chairs, McCallion and Torstar chair John Honderich.

"Around the globe a perfect economic storm is taking its toll . . . we don't see the recession from a global perspective, we see it locally," McCallion said.

"This is a powerhouse, folks, we've assembled here today," she said of the labour, business and political leaders attending the event, which was organized in only 10 weeks.

"We have high hopes for today. We are here to solve the things which fall within our circle of influence and control," Honderich said. "The people who live and work on our streets are counting on us."

He and McCallion emphasized the one-day summit will lead to an action plan and ongoing meetings.

Toronto Mayor David Miller also spoke about the increasingly important role of governments in investing to create 21st-century cities.

"There is regional collaboration that needs (to) be done, particularly in industries that depend on our educational sector," he told reporters following his speech.

He pointed to Markham's and Toronto's thriving technology sectors, adding investment in regional programs, such as the Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance, is also important.

Delegates broke into morning and afternoon panel sessions focusing on manufacturing, human capital, research and creativity and financial services.

Premier Dalton McGuinty was a surprise guest at a session, staying on to address the entire conference.

"We are at our best when we work together," McGuinty said. "Our responsibility is not only to protect, but to nurture, protect and champion."

The morning kicked off with a presentation by Nanos Research president Nik Nanos, who said "there are two words that encapsulate where we are right now: Uncharted territory."

Nanos presented results of a poll taken in late April showing Ontario residents are very open to government intervention, as long as taxes don't rise.

He was followed by Toronto Board of Trade president Carol Wilding and Burlington MP Mike Wallace, chair of the GTA Caucus.

"People are looking to southern Ontario to make a difference; to make the economic turnaround happen here first," Wallace said.

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