

Initiative hoping to spur growth. City firms to contribute.

By Martin Cash

A newly launched effort to attract more businesses to the city is being touted as an ideal public-private partnership. And to top it off, it's going to have a big enough budget to really make a difference.

The premier, the mayor and a hotel ballroom full of business leaders were present early Tuesday morning for the launch of Yes! Winnipeg, a new initiative that will act as the revved-up marketing arm of Winnipeg Incorporated. Charlie Spiring, the CEO of Wellington West Capital, is leading a fundraising campaign that's looking to raise \$6 million to give the organization a five-year budget.

Spiring said at least one-third of that is already committed and all the big-15 companies in the city have agreed to invest, many of them at six-figure levels. Asked why he believes this initiative will generate better results than others that have attempted to spur growth and development in the city in the past, Premier Greg Selinger said, "The difference this time is that there is substantial private-sector commitment up front." Selinger believes the targeted, focused approach that will be used will help it produce the ambitious targets that are being set.

Yes! Winnipeg hopes to help create more than 4,200 jobs and \$1.4 billion in economic output over the next five years. Bill Morrissey, vice-president of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, has been leading an 18-month undertaking called Selling Winnipeg to the World that has evolved into Yes! Winnipeg. Morrissey and the chamber have mobilized a large team of senior business leaders in the

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province to market the city to their industry contacts. But he's also researched best practices around North America and used the services of an Atlanta consulting firm called National Community Development Services (NCDS) that has helped many smaller Midwest cities in the U.S. beef up their own marketing.

Tom DiFiore, president of NCDS, said they have found a successful approach for cities is not dissimilar to a company's approach. "You've got product development, R&D and sales and marketing," he said. "In Winnipeg, your product development is well ahead of most places. There's great quality of life, great schools, good infrastructure, people love to live here. All that is great but if you don't have the sales and marketing function you won't sell as many widgets."

On top of that, he said, the public and private sector need to be working together. One-third of the budget is expected to come from the three levels of government.

Yes! Winnipeg will become a division of Economic Development Winnipeg with a dedicated staff of 10 people.