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Speaker: Maine and Canada must organize so global wealth can be tapped

By **DAVID GRIMA**

ROCKPORT - Globalization of the economy is of huge and growing value for regions connected to its international trade network - but Maine and Atlantic Canada are not among them, and they should be.

Brian Crowley delivered this message in his keynote speech to more than 100 local business people attending the annual Business to Business Showcase at The Samoset Resort, Tuesday morning. Crowley is the founding president of the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

He argued that northern New England and Atlantic Canada is a relatively impoverished region whose participation in the global economy is hindered by the U.S.-Canada border, and by the absence of modern east-west transportation systems including a highway and railroad.

In his view this region should organize itself to provide a road and rail communications network that would link the Canadian port of Halifax with Boston, New York City, Chicago and Buffalo, thereby placing eastern Canada, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and upper New York State firmly on the global network and able to reap the economic rewards that would follow.

This international region Crowley calls Atlantica, and Atlantica is characterized by above average unemployment, emigration to other regions, and low incomes, he said.

Other regions in North America are already organized and are doing much better than Atlantica, Crowley warned. The Boston-Albany-New York City triangle is the wealthiest part of the entire world, he said, and people in Maine who look to Boston as an economic hub are missing the boat. "Boston and New York do not look in our direction," he said.

The Canadian corridor reaching from Windsor, Ontario, through to Quebec City is another powerful economic region with strong internal lines of commercial transportation and communication, he said.

The rewards of the global economy are there to be taken, if only Northern New England and Atlantic Canada could find a way to put in the roads and rail systems it needs, he proposed. It already has some things going for it.

Halifax is the only port north of Virginia with a harbor whose minimum depth - 55 feet - will accept the new generation of super cargo ships now being built, he said. Authorities at the Port of New York and New Jersey are busy blasting out their harbor in the hope that they will be able to accommodate what Crowley called these ocean-going behemoths.

Forty percent of world trade is carried out between the European Union and North America, Crowley continued. If this trade could be attracted to Halifax, and distributed by land through Maine and beyond, the positive economic impact would be felt through the entire region, he believes.

But a lot will need to be done if this is to happen. The only U.S.-Canada Interstate connection through Maine, I-95, has a weight limit that will not allow any truck on it to carry the size of container that ships are starting to deliver.

Maine and the region have few east-west highways, meaning that truck drivers have to rely on secondary roads. Canadian railroad authorities have not invested in a system adequate to distribute goods from Halifax on the same large scale that it can import. Yet he said it would be "an unmitigated disaster" for the region if the port of Halifax were not exploited.

Among the many things Maine people should realize is the fact that New England is an historic idea at best, he said, while in contemporary terms "New England is an economic fiction."

The idea of thinking in continental terms is only slowly beginning to dawn on planners, Crowely said. He suggested that we need to change the way we think, and urge state and federal governments to invest in this region.