

Stelmach to speak in Park

By Ben Proulx News Staff

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The Sherwood Park and District Chamber of Commerce is preparing for a visit from Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach in December, as he is set to speak with chamber members.

At the Dec. 14 chamber luncheon, which will take place at Festival Place, Stelmach will be the guest speaker and Todd Banks, executive director with the local chamber, is hoping the event benefits members, the province, and the community.

"I think it's very important for the community to hear what's going on from the head of the (provincial) government, and also for him to hear what's happening here in the community," Banks said. "It's very valuable and important, and hopefully very beneficial, too."

One of the issues Stelmach has been asked to address is the value added strategy prepared by the chamber, in which the process of creating a solid bitumen-based industry in Alberta's industrial heartland is the main goal.

Banks said that would be possible through constructing additional upgraders, adding to refineries or creating new refineries, although he does not believe new ones will be built.

"Once you get that critical mass of upgraders here in the heartland, you get enough by-products that a chemical cluster could be built in the heartland," he said.

Banks added the value added strategy is in association with the Brick Program, which could create thousands of local construction jobs.

Stelmach will also speak to the progress of the application for a new courthouse in Sherwood Park.

Banks said the new building would be beneficial to local businesses, who often work through the courthouse.

"It's going to help businesses a lot to go through the courthouse here to get cases put through in a more efficient manner, and there will be mediation rooms," he said.

"A lot of the mediation for businesses ends up in Edmonton right now, when it could be done right here."

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On top of that, Stelmach will address the controversial issues of Sherwood Park's hospital project and the debated transmission lines.

"The hospital, obviously, is a subject that everybody wants to hear about, as is the transmission lines," Banks said.

He added that one of the main purposes for having invited Stelmach to next month's luncheon is to increase communication between local businesses and the province.

"There seems to be so many different projects, and once you have the premier come and speak, it kind of clarifies the government's position," Banks said. "I think (Stelmach's) an honest, ethical guy. I think if he says something, he's going to do everything he can to ensure it's going to get done."

He is hoping for a large turnout for the event, saying that many people have already signed up to attend.

That's not surprising to him, as chamber luncheons have steadily been growing since executives decided to improve attendance over the past few years.

"The more numbers that attend the luncheons, the better our communication is with people, and it's a great networking opportunity for each member to come and hook up with other members on the business side," Banks said. "Obviously, it's gotten bigger and bigger every year, and we're succeeding in the numbers. There's a lot of networking and business happening at the same time."

He added that he is excited and honoured to have Stelmach coming to Sherwood Park to inform chamber members of provincial initiatives, including projects within the community.

This will be Stelmach's fourth visit to Sherwood Park at the request of the chamber of commerce since he became Alberta's premier.

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