

How times have changed

By Chris Drost

It seems that throughout most of my adult life, jobs were in short supply. While still in school I got a number of summer positions by simply visiting employers in person and asking to speak to the manager. The days of opening the newspaper and seeing job after job advertisements, dried up a long time ago. This is why it was so refreshing to cover the recent Big Small Business Job Fair at Loyalist College, a joint effort between the College and Hastings County. Much to my surprise, the largest room at Loyalist was filled with 15 different employers who were there together, all seeking employees to fill positions across a number of different sectors. Who would have thought? Judging by the excitement of the Loyalist staff, they couldn't believe it either after years of too few positions for too many job seekers. Some of the employers cited the pandemic as the reason for a surge in retirements during COVID-19, while others I spoke to, seemed to recognize that the baby boomers reaching retirement age is finally catching up with us. For 20 years there has been talk about the shortfall of labour when the boomers all retire, but it appears it has been all talk and little action to find a solution to the problem. Immigration has to be a part of it, as Canadians have not reproduced at a rate that will fill those jobs in the years to come. The fact that many of the shortages are in the health care field, is somewhat alarming. As we all age, where will all the personal support workers and nurses be to look after us in our declining years? Equally alarming is the understanding by employers that a surge in retirements has created a skills shortage in the labour force that will be difficult to recover from. While organizations such as Loyalist College are watching where the shortages are and have been trying to add training to their offerings to fill the void, it appears that this is not something that can be rectified overnight. This means that there is going to have to be more openness to bringing in skilled workers from other places through targeted immigration, or we may find ourselves without the goods and services we need on a daily basis. This doesn't just mean healthcare. At the recent job fair, it was noted that it is proving very difficult to find and hire qualified auto mechanics. Since most of us, especially in rural areas, are dependent on a vehicle to get around, what will happen when we can't get an appointment for a repair for weeks because of the shortage of labour? While those in lower paying jobs might not have enthusiasm to head back to school or take additional education, this shortage of skills means that there is opportunity for people to re-train and find jobs that offer a new career they will enjoy with greater monetary and other benefits. This is also something for the youth in our region to consider as they are nearing the end of high school. It appears there will be little excuse to be either unemployed or underemployed in the years ahead.