

## Local business owners promote economic development and inclusion



By Bill Kilpatrick

The North Hastings Economic Development Committee wants to send a message to those who visit, live, or do business in North Hastings: "Everyone is welcome here." Bancroft Councillor Val Miles, who is the representative from Bancroft on the committee, explained that the committee has decided that one way to promote economic development is to promote inclusion and diversity. "This past summer, we decided as a collective, that one of the things that we could do to promote economic development was to talk about the diversity of our community and the acceptance of our community," explained Miles. Miles told Bancroft This Week that the committee then decided on a sticker campaign that would incorporate what is called the "progress flag" which combines the horizontal lines of the pride flag with vertical, white, pink, blue, brown and black chevrons that represent trans people, non-binary people, people of colour, and those living with AIDS and the stigma that comes with it. The messaging of the sticker says, "everyone is welcome here, courtesy of the NHEDC." The committee printed 1,000 stickers that were designed locally by Upnorthwebs, printed locally at Hannah Lithographers and are being distributed throughout all of North Hastings. Miles wanted to ensure that people know that putting the sticker up is not mandatory and that she does not harbour any ill will towards those who may choose to not put it up, but she believes that having a sticker helps promote more economic development. "Economic development as a whole will have a better opportunity if you promote diversity and inclusion in everything you're doing," said Miles adding that, "we have a diverse community. We have a diverse country, so why would we not take an opportunity to say "you're welcome here?" "Not all businesses chose to participate and that's okay said Miles, "I want to have all my rights so I'm going to respect that you can have all of yours." When asked what seeing the sticker on a businesses door or in a window means to her as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, Miles said, "It makes me smile, it makes me feel like I'm going to be safe in there, it makes me feel like I'm going to be

treated with respect. It makes me feel like I have no worries walking in there?that's what the sticker means is 'no judgement.'