



Edmonton's Countryside

**Grow your Business: Edmonton's Countryside Leadership
Program**

2010

Funding Partners



Canadian Farm Business
Management Council



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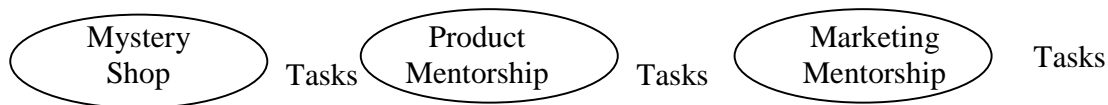
Program Introduction

What is the Grow Your Business: Edmonton's Countryside Leadership Program?

The **Grow Your Business:** Edmonton's Countryside Leadership program is for business people provided by the Edmonton Regional Tourism Group (ERTG). This program supports regional operators by providing relevant training to enhance skills in the following areas: experience development, customer service and marketing. Program graduates will be recognized as leaders offering authentic countryside experiences due to their efforts in taking their local businesses to the next level.

What does this specific program involve?

The main components of the program are a mystery shop/stay, a product mentoring session, and a marketing mentoring session. Each component must be completed with the agreed upon tasks in order to graduate from the program.



Who can participate in the program?

The program is offered to members of the Edmonton Regional Tourism Group. (A ERTG members is anyone who invests funds in the Visit Edmonton's Countryside Guide, or participates in ERTG programs, events /or drives i.e. Spring Drive, Country Soul Stroll, Countryside Drives, Country Christmas or Country Cuisine). A membership fee (\$95) is mandatory to participate in the VEC Guide, programs, events/or drives. Businesses who will gain the most from this specific program are those who consider themselves an accommodation, an artisan, an attraction, or offer a unique experience to visitors.

How does the program work?

Become a Countryside Experience Leader right at your place of business! Our mentors come to you. They work directly with you at your business. There are no large lecture halls, or crowds. As your personal advisors, our mentors ensure that the road to growing your business is one built specifically for your needs and interests.

Why should my business participate?

Grow Your Business: Edmonton's Countryside Leadership Program is not an "off-the-shelf" program. It is a number of "best practices" tools individually applied, involving your participation in your business, by highly skilled personal mentors. Businesses who participate in the program will receive a variety of benefits specific to their needs.

How long does it take to participate in the program?

The program takes about one year to complete all components; the mystery shop, the product mentoring session, and the marketing mentorship session along with the agreed upon tasks. There is potential for 30 businesses to participate in the program, with two start dates - spring and fall 2010. Operators individually work through a series of tourism development activities during the program to become better providers of visitor experiences in Edmonton's Countryside.

Who is sponsoring the program?

Edmonton's Regional Tourism Group
Rural Alberta Development Fund
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
Rural Community Adaptation Grant Program

How do I apply?

Application forms can be picked up at the ERTG office (World Trade Centre 3rd Floor, 9990 Jasper Avenue Edmonton). You can also phone 1-866-622-0740 or e-mail info@edmontonscountryside.com to have an application form sent to you. Please send your completed application form, signed program outline and program fee to Edmonton Regional Tourism Group.

Where can I get more information?

ERTG Office
1-866-622-0740 or
780-761-0062
info@edmontonscountryside.com

OR

Marissa Brewer
Skills Development and Training
Coordinator
780-968-3511 or
marissa.brewer@gov.ab.ca

What is the deadline?

Application deadline for the spring 2010 program is March 31th, 2010.

Program Outline

Mystery Shop/Stay

This component is to give you an idea of a typical visitor's experience at your business. Acting as a typical visitor to your site, shoppers are trained to provide constructive feedback on their experience from beginning to end. A couple of weeks after the shop each business will receive a detailed report highlighting areas of the product and service where the business excels and where improvements can be made. The shops are designed as a business improvement tool for operators who participate, revealing gaps, and areas of success.

"The first stage was to have a mystery shopper come through the studio and report on their experience. They were good.....I had no idea that they were there as the mystery shopper! The feedback was phenomenal. It is always great to hear the good things that they had to say about the studio, but the suggestions they made to improve their experience was invaluable. It was all things that were easily remedied, and without their input, I would probably not have been aware that it needed dealing with. We are so focused on what we have to do to run our businesses on a day to day basis, that we just do not see the fine details that could be changed. And they were cheap and easy to change. Absolutely invaluable."

Heather Edwards
Pottery by Heather

Product Mentoring Session

This session focuses specifically on your tourism product (defined as the activity or experience that a tourist participates in). Professional mentors are hired and work one on one with you at your business. This very interactive session allows you to actively participate and work with mentor to identify improvement tasks and timelines. You will then work to complete those tasks within the given timeline. The participating business operator works for several months to complete the tasks. Task completion will be monitored by the project coordinator.

Specifically what is involved?

Pre-Visit Requirements (approx. ½- 1 hour to complete):

- Participants to complete a pre-visit survey identifying desired outcomes for the on-site mentorship.

- Provide sample of your business promotions: newspaper ads, brochures, flyers, press releases, etc.

On-Site Assessment (approx. 4 hours):

- Owners/operators meet privately at their site with the mentor and skills training and development coordinator or a committee member of the program, where they tour your operation to review layout, products, signage, traffic flow and appearance of your location.
- Review pre-visit survey to fully understand your business, marketing strategies, target customers and ideas for future growth.
- Discuss areas of greatest growth potential and how to make suggestions on how to maximize these efforts.

Following Assessment (depends on chosen tasks):

- You will receive a written report with mentor’s recommendations.
- You will complete and work on the recommended tasks identified in the report and during the session.
- You will provide a plan to complete 3 leadership focused mentorship activities.
- There will be a follow up interview to check in and assist you with your progress.

“I know I needed changes to my business – but I wasn’t sure how to prioritize them. We went through my business plan and made notes on where to do updates and new goal setting. We all have dreams – it’s the daring and doing that sometimes hangs me up on the completion of my dream.”

Carol Maier
Country Road Greenhouses

“I’ve already cut costs by \$1500, and have an action plan to increase sales dramatically!”

Tam Andersen
Prairie Garden & Greenhouses

Marketing Mentoring Sessions

There are two parts to this program component that focus specifically on the marketing aspects of your business.

Introductory overview session (5 hours)

With less than 20 of your ERTG business peers you will be introduced to marketing plans, defining your advantage, clarifying your message, exploring ways to expand your market and more with small business marketing guru.

Individual Onsite Marketing Mentorship (4 hours)

Looking at how to increase 'more bang for your buck'. This will be a very individualized discussion on marketing. Owners/operators meet privately at their site with marketing guru and Skills Training and Development Coordinator or assistant of the program to develop an action plan tailored to your business needs.

"This has been an invaluable program. To access such knowledgeable and capable consultants was not in my economic bracket without the help from the ERTG 'Grow Your Business' Program. Some of the recommendations were so simple and easy to implement, yet will have such impact. Others such as the website were beyond my abilities, but the reports will now make it much easier to find and direct a web designer as to what I need. I would jump in again with both feet if this program was offered again down the road and would give my strongest recommendation to anyone else to jump as well."

Heather Edwards
Pottery by Heather

"I found the ERTG Marketing Workshop with Lori Colborne to be a fun and an exceptional program. To be able to access a marketing specialist for Lori's caliber and to have her devote time and energy on my little store's well-being has been an invaluable experience at both a personal and practical level. I entered this program process completely marketing clueless and now I feel I have marketing knowledge and a good foundation to build upon."

Karen Heinemann
Calico Markets

Program Criteria

Objective of program

The objective of the program is to raise the bar on the full-spectrum visitor experience offered by Edmonton's Regional Tourism Group. The goal is to prepare the variety of member businesses (ag-tourism operators, on-farm/rural retail, attractions, artisans and accommodations) to meet and exceed visitor expectations.

Leaders in **Grow Your Business:** Edmonton's Countryside experiences will show the way by example. Business growth and new visitors will be the result of your efforts to enhance authentic countryside experiences. The cumulative effect of individual business improvement will strengthen the experience offerings of the region as a whole and will ultimately attract new unique and local business to the region and the ERTG.

Program Acceptance Criteria

Prior to acceptance to the program, candidates must meet the following criteria:

- Member of ERTG through participation in: Visit Edmonton's Countryside Guide, programs, events/or drives i.e. Spring Drive, Country Soul Stroll, Countryside Drives, Country Christmas or Country Cuisine. Membership (\$95) mandatory to participate in the above.
- Business defined as locally owned and independently operated
- All legal requirements and all necessary licences and permits for business have been obtained, including business licence, liquor licence, registration of food premises, zoning approval or building permits, where applicable
- Business has insurance, including public liability
- Site is accessible by roads suitable for motor vehicles and provides parking either on-site or in close proximity.
- Suitable on-site signage/interpretation
- Business hours are posted and adhered to ('by appointment only' is fine)
- Accessible through the following communication tools: e-mail, phone, fax.
- Current marketing materials accurately describing business (Including printed materials, website and electronic marketing, business cards and stationery, on-site signage and video/radio broadcasts).
- Be willing to commit to all program components and completed all tasks listed
- Payment of \$350 plus GST (participation fee)

Program Completion Criteria

To achieve recognition as a Leader offering a **Grow Your Business:** Edmonton's Countryside Experience you must complete the following program elements:

1) Application and business profile

2) Mystery Shop/Stay

Candidates must participate in the mystery shop/stay, and have a post-shop mentoring session (could be via phone).

3) Product Mentoring Session

Candidates must participate in a one to one site visit with a mentor and complete the identified business improvement tasks and schedule leadership requirements.

4) Marketing Mentoring Session

Candidates must participate in a ½ day marketing workshop followed by an individualized one on one session with marketing professional (mentor). Candidates must then complete the marketing tasks (agreed by both candidate and mentor) resulting from the session.

Benefits to Leaders in Grow Your Business: Edmonton's Countryside Experiences

- "Recommended Experience" Certificate of Achievement to recognize the investment and professional initiative of the owner/operator and instill customer confidence.
- Opportunity to show case your business at ERTG's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and to complete leadership experience.
- Quality learning and networking experiences.
- One to one mentorships for very individualized learning.
- Detailed reports received from qualified mentors specially tailored to your business.
- Action items and timelines to help you move forward on improvements and enhancement to your business.
- Permission to use the Edmonton's Countryside logo.
- A special "Recommended Experience" logo to follow your business ad in ERTG promotions and on your own publications – to showcase the accredited businesses.
- Graduates will receive a special offer to a specified workshop organized by ERTG (i.e. 2 for 1 offering).
- Additional website listing and link to the **Grow Your Business: Edmonton's Countryside Leaders** section, (member listing includes: location, phone number, short product description and web link to your own website).
- A limited opportunity to receive financial assistance to build or enhance your business website. This benefit is applicable to those who complete their website tasks as a part of their Marketing Mentorship.
- A feature business profile in the ERTG e-newsletter.

Maintain your experience leader designation into the future...

There may be an option in the future for graduates of the program to maintain your designation, from year to year for a small fee. This fee will get you the benefits listed above as well as an additional mystery shop every second year.