



Greenstone's new municipal building stands as a symbol of the community's new direction.

MUNICIPALITY STATS

LOCATION

GREENSTONE, ON

INCORPORATED

2001

AREA

2,780 SQUARE KILOMETRES

POPULATION

4,906

PROJECTED POPULATION IN 2015

15,000

MAJOR INDUSTRIES

MINING, FORESTRY & TRANSPORTATION

"Municipalities being put into a position to amalgamate is never an easy process," Blanchard says. "Each used to work independently—if not competitively—and now has to work together. As much as it was probably a very difficult transition, however, there's been a wave here: things are turning and people are now stepping up and working very well together."

Of course, the municipality has a very strong motivation for teamwork: in 2009, mining companies operating north of Nakina, Greenstone's northernmost ward, happened upon the world's largest—and North America's first major—deposit of chromite, a mineral that's used to make stainless steel. A crescent-shaped deposit that's since been dubbed the Ring of Fire, it promises to fortify Greenstone with billions of dollars that will be spent on new mines, processing facilities, and infrastructure, including a 350-kilometre railway that will annually transport four million tons of ore from the Ring of Fire to Nakina, where it will connect with the Canadian National Railway's main line.

"The municipality, which is still very young and is just now learning to live together, is suddenly poised to go through a major transition to become one of Canada's busiest up-and-coming municipalities," Blanchard says. "The mining industry here has an aggressive timeline. They want to open their first mine in 2015, wherein the population has been anticipated by the province as going from 4,900 to possibly 15,000 people. Right now,

RING OF OPPORTUNITY

A decade after incorporation, the amalgamated communities composing the Municipality of Greenstone are collaborating with each other, with industry, and with First Nation partners to turn the Ring of Fire into Canada's newest economic hot spot **BY MATT ALDERTON**

Some 1,200 kilometres northwest of Toronto, Highway 11's pavement intersects Canada's largest municipality: the Municipality of Greenstone in the District of Thunder Bay. It's a far cry from the traffic and tumult of the province's capital city, for Greenstone is as expansive as it is remote. The municipality totals 2,780 square kilometres, which means it takes approximately two and a half hours to traverse by car.

Comprising the former municipalities of Beardmore, Geraldton, Longlac, and Nakina, as well as the unincorporated settlement areas of Caramat, Macdiarmid, and Jellicoe, Greenstone was one of many amalgamated municipalities

incorporated in 2001 by the provincial government, which has famously—and controversially—consolidated communities in pursuit of a low-cost, high-efficiency government.

Given its loose geography and its contentious origins, one might expect Greenstone to be as divided intellectually as it is physically. But in fact, it isn't, according to economic development officer Vicki Blanchard. Despite the challenges of amalgamation, she says that the residents of Greenstone have united in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration in order to collectively pursue big plans for their small-town communities.

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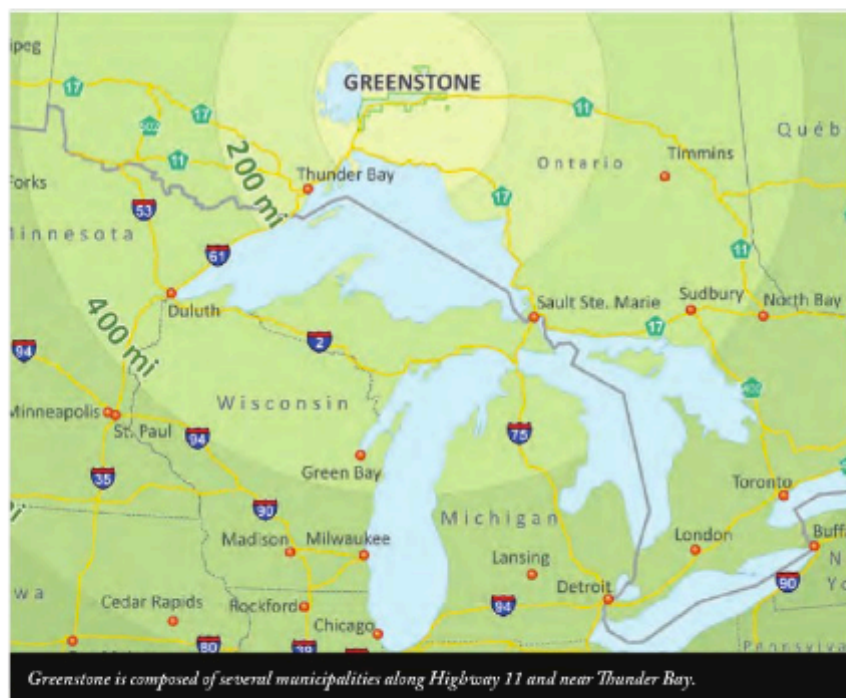
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COLLABORATION | THE MUNICIPALITY OF GREENSTONE



we're working toward creating strategic plans and partnerships to make sure we're prepared."

To accommodate so much growth so quickly, Greenstone will have to significantly and rapidly expand its resources and its infrastructure, generating new supplies of energy and labour while creating new sources of housing, healthcare, transportation, technology, and services. Success will require capital, but more importantly it will require cooperation, partnerships, and teamwork. "That's the approach we're taking: one of collaboration," Blanchard says. At the municipal level, the key to collaboration is representation. Although Greenstone's population is just 4,900, its Municipal Council includes nine councillors that speak for each of its local communities, including outlying rural areas. These councillors have worked with Blanchard to develop a strategic blueprint that identifies key partners, priorities, and plans for moving Greenstone forward.

According to the blueprint, the most important partnerships are with industry—since it will be driving all the growth—and with First Nation communities—since their traditional lands will be required for new infrastructure and development. To establish relationships with industry, Greenstone has created working groups and is engaging on a daily basis with the area's major mining

companies in order to develop near- and midterm solutions to its most significant obstacles. Meanwhile, the municipality is signing memoranda of understanding with First Nation communities to involve them in the planning and site selection for future developments, and committing itself to professional training and education initiatives that will allow First Nation people to share in the Ring of Fire's economic fruits as part of the new mining workforce.

"All of the mineral is on First Nation traditional land," Blanchard says. "To extract and transport the mineral, however, you'll have to come through Greenstone. So there's a lot of opportunity to support and benefit from partnerships."

Once bustling hubs for rail service, gold mining, and forestry, Greenstone's wards have been depressed for the better part of 10 years. Their newly amalgamated community is therefore counting on its partnerships—and the chromium they'll produce—for revitalization and resuscitation.

"We have a very large job to do, and the whole world is watching," Blanchard says. "The municipality is going to have to make some very quick decisions, but I think we're prepared to do that, because everyone's working together." —a