

# Building Your Own Intelligent Community

## A Tale of Two Cities

Louis A. Zacharilla

When the mayor of Waterloo, Ontario, Barbara Halloran, traveled to Japan and met Mitaka, Japan's Mayor Keiko Kiyohara last year, they embraced, greeted each other warmly and began a long discussion that started with a mutual "congratulations Madame Mayor." This was not simply a meeting of two small city mayors looking to find areas of mutual interest or establish "sister city" relations. Her Worship Halloran and Madame Mayor Kiyohara were the leaders of communities that had each been named the world's most Intelligent Community of the year.

Theirs are two remarkable stories, written on the same page of a book (or blog!) that is quickly becoming one of the most studied and considered areas of community economic and social development – the use of broadband to establish what is called an "intelligent community." This refers to the use of technology (broadband being the primary component) as a strategic infrastructure. It is now more widely accepted than ever that broadband will propel communities into the digital age and a new economic era, predicated on

the need to sustain growth and ensure that change is accommodated and serves as a tool for future growth.

### Globalization: How Communities Begin to Adapt

Both Mitaka, in 2005, and Waterloo last year were able to demonstrate to an international jury, working on behalf of the New York-based Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) <[www.intelligentcommunity.org](http://www.intelligentcommunity.org)> think tank, that they were the world's best examples of communities that had transformed themselves into ones prepared to compete in the new era of globalization; an era that ICF refers to as the "Broadband Economy." Mitaka (population 173,000) and Waterloo (population 115,000) each managed to convince ICF that the use of broadband technology was the underpinning of success in five key areas (see sidebar on page 21). These areas included knowledge workforce development, job creation, innovation, and digital inclusion. The criteria were established by the think tank as a means of assessing how communities can withstand the wither-

ing winds of change brought about by rapid changes in communications, finance, and the proliferation of knowledge as a tool for the creation of wealth, and how they can build sustainable intelligent communities to secure their future.

Although located in far different corners of the globe, both Mitaka and Waterloo are truly intriguing stories of how one gets from the 20th century to the 21st. Not necessarily overnight, but over time. Of course it was not lost on the world's news media and observers of politics and business technology that the two municipalities' leaders were female (still a rarity for an elected public official in Japan.) What may have been overlooked, however, is that the two leaders each demonstrated, during their march to the final award, a management style that was most notable for its openness to collaboration, willingness to embrace change, and a familial approach to the daunting task of ensuring that their communities were prepared for the global economy. Becoming an "intelligent community" was an important step.



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### What is an Intelligent Community?

An intelligent community is not the result of accident or luck. It is the product of strong and effective leadership. Sometimes that leadership comes from

elected officials like Kiyohara and Halloran; or even departments of government, as in the case of Hong Kong. In other cases, local leaders emerge from business, academia, non-profits, or a myriad of other areas of a community, where citizens seek to ensure the survival of their community – and are willing to step forward and lead the charge. The source does not matter. What matters is that leaders respected by the community clearly define the challenge to the community's future, persuade their fellow citizens of the urgency, and mobilize the search for the right mix of investment, policies, and telecommunications that will enable change. It is not easy, but over the past six years, ICF and other groups have continued to present best practices and models to assist communities and inform political officials in significant ways.

In many communities studied by the Intelligent Community Forum, the impetus is obvious. There are thousands of communities worldwide, especially in

parts of the United States, Europe, and Canada that were manufacturing or trade centres that have failed to adequately adapt to the rising requirements and value of the service sector. The service sector, which is especially enabled by global connectivity, is a universal response to the globalization of business. This formation of the global services sector is a tremendous challenge, but an even greater opportunity. At no time in human history has the potential for a very small, innovative company (or community) to get a product to the worldwide market been more enabled than in the current era of rapid communications. Communities that commit to creating a new local economy based on this understanding are succeeding. These new local economies are based on the proper implementation and use of broadband.

In the Broadband Economy, the prosperity of a community increasingly depends on the ability to connect at broadband speeds to World Wide Web. The

Internet and IP networks that have proliferated via fibre, satellite, and wireless technologies are now the common platforms for internal and external operations and functions of companies, institutions, and individuals – irrespective of their size. The ability to access knowledge, collaborate, and build networks is now universal – or can be. As a result, communities of the world are assiduously in the process of building their local economies and cultures around this new infrastructure.

It is not unlike classic, historic eras of infrastructure, including the railroad. Once rail connected communities, even tiny towns along the line, were able to get goods to regional and national markets more rapidly and efficiently than at any time in human history. The same holds true for broadband, or so the research from ICF and its partner, New York's Polytechnic University, has revealed. That is why each May ICF and Polytechnic University hold a summit to share best practices and continue the

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global dialogue about the role of broadband to literally transform life in communities everywhere.

It is at this event, inspired by Toronto's Smart95 program 13 years ago, where the Intelligent Community of the Year is named, from a group of seven finalists (The "Top Seven"), each of whom is celebrated on the big stage that is New York.

### Snapshots

What distinguished Waterloo and Mitaka from some other intelligent communities is that both were heading down the path of economic success before plunging into the Intelligent Community program. Their success is more remarkable because each understood that the building blocks that they already had in place were showing results. However, their goal was to maintain that success and build on it, rather than to coast or gloat.

### Mitaka 2005: Consensus, Cartoons, and Intelligence

Culture is capital, and plays an important role in mobilizing people and resources to "future proof" a community. Japan's mayor had an approach that was consistent with her community and her culture. She took advantage of the often puzzling degree of consensus required to make decisions in Japan. However, she added a touch of innovation and pure democracy to the process during her community's run at the Intelligent Community of the Year award. Following its success with a program (SOHO City Mitaka) that promoted small office/home office businesses, which were key to Mitaka's local economy, an organization called Mitaka Town Management Organization was founded. MTMO was the engine that created an incubator for this sector of the economy and supported the rise of its entrepreneurial knowledge class.

Today MTMO's seven facilities are home to over 100 technology businesses, and the organization provides business-matching services and venture investments, which further support the growth of jobs and innovation. The mayor organized a core team of 83 citizens and representatives from every

## Five Criteria for Rising to Intelligent Community Status

In its landmark study in 2001, the Intelligent Community Forum studied the first group of communities to determine what enabled them to rise to levels of success, using broadband technology as the basis of their infrastructure. From this initial report, ICF identified five criteria that each exhibited. The criteria have been the standard tool for evaluating communities for ICF awards, and for communities to use in order to assess their strengths. The five are:

1. Broadband Infrastructure
2. Knowledge Workforce
3. Digital Inclusion and e-Governance
4. Innovation and Investment
5. Marketing or "Story-telling"

Learn more about Mitaka and Waterloo by visiting <[www.intelligentcommunity.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=73](http://www.intelligentcommunity.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=73)>

conceivable part of Mitaka to explore ways to move the community into new areas of technology-related product development. The consensus from among the business, academic and government communities has resulted in several victories, including field testing of new information-centric home appliances and citizen e-projects. Both stir innovation. The field tests took place at the national level, which helped Mitaka "export" its innovations to the rest of Japan. This virtuous circle of collaboration feeds further economic activity locally.

None of this could have been done without access to robust broadband, a skilled workforce, and a spirited leader whose citizens understood how working together could give them an edge, despite having no natural resources to leverage – except their education, cultural aptitude, and willingness to embrace change!

When the large delegation from all sectors of Mitaka came to New York to learn that, from among the Top Seven Intelligent Communities gathered, their community would receive the Intelligent Community of the Year honour and bring back the trophy, the world learned more about this quiet suburb of Tokyo. It was noted that Mitaka is home to significant corporate research and data centres, and 61 educational institutions that employ 3,000 academics concen-

trated on research. It also has a cluster for the design and manufacturing of precision optical instruments. For "fun" (profitable fun), Mitaka has let loose a symbolic sign of its innovation and dedication to new media by way of the creation of cartoons. And, not just any old cartoons – digital age cartoons. Today the 2005 Intelligent Community of the Year produces an estimated 75 percent of all "anime" cartoons seen around the world!

### Waterloo: Home of the BlackBerry and Canada's Technology Triangle

Mitaka's success was not lost on the Canadian community of Waterloo, Ontario. The leaders of Waterloo had closely studied Mitaka's success while attending the "Building the Broadband Economy" summits and visiting the Asian community. In fact, Waterloo shared many of the characteristics of the 2005 recipient, and was a community poised to succeed in the "broadband economy."

Even though it is the smallest, geographically speaking, of the seven cities that make up Canada's Technology Triangle, Waterloo uses broadband and the other criteria that comprise an intelligent community in a big way. The triangle is home to over 330 technology companies, and Waterloo, because it is home to world-famous Research in Mo-

tion (RIM), founders of the ubiquitous BlackBerry, has "marquee value." More important to researchers at ICF, the city creates a phenomenal amount of new job growth. Job creation is the essence of intelligent communities and companies like RIM, which reportedly hires 50 people *every Monday*.

Job creation and innovation also seem to be linked to freedom, in the form of academic and social freedom. One of the most significant aspects of Waterloo's development was a policy established by the University of Waterloo, one of several outstanding schools in the area. In the 1970s it established an intellectual property policy that allowed students and faculty to own rights to intellectual property they developed at the university. This "you made it, you own it" initiative was truly visionary. Like Silicon Valley in the US or the Teheran Road in the Gangnam District of Seoul, South Korea, the information and communication technology wave coupled with the enlightened policy spurred technology-based business growth, which established a new culture of development whose fruits are harvested today. Over the past eight years, Waterloo companies have made up 10 percent of all of the successful IPOs on the Toronto Stock Exchange.

Like Mitaka, Waterloo also has a sense for collaboration and reinvest-

ment. The cooperation among business, academia, and local government is so successful inside the 2007 Intelligent Community of the Year that a community ethos has been sustained, encouraging people who have done well to give back to the community. This has manifested in many ways, including venture funds, think tanks that explore the potential of innovation in international governance, and a pure research centre, the Particle Institute, that brings the world's leading quantum physicists to Waterloo to study, think, and design new concepts for this remarkable area of science. There will ultimately be connections to the University of Waterloo, which has begun to teach quantum computing. Many believe that the breakthroughs at this level of science will transform medicine, manufacturing and perhaps even the study of human consciousness in the future.

It all takes place in a community where nearly 80 percent of businesses use broadband and a culture of innovation and success breeds more by design.

### Summary

Neither community has taken its trophy, put it on a shelf, and gone to the park to tell stories of its grand success in the world.

In Waterloo's case, the effort to be-

come the Intelligent Community of the Year took at least two years. The Ontario community, with the inspired support of city councillor Mark Whaley and Mayor Halloran, formed a working group called Intelligent Waterloo <[www.intelligentwaterloo.com](http://www.intelligentwaterloo.com)>. Its members include the founder of Research in Motion, the president of the prestigious University of Waterloo, and representatives from groups as diverse as the public library and the community's international think tank, the Centre for International Governance Innovation. The I-Waterloo group followed a creative "Imagine Waterloo" campaign, which inspired citizens and achieved the near-term goal of becoming the world's most intelligent community in May 2007. Like Mitaka, which goes around the world touting its award and its capabilities, Waterloo has continued to build its future.

If there is one truth of the "Broadband Economy" it is that it is dynamic and moves faster than even the famed Japanese "bullet trains" around the world. It's all because of broadband, the "new railroad." Broadband is the new infrastructure, and those who learn how to use it (and ICF reports that more and more *are* using it) witness the results as their best and brightest have a reason to stay home, and to build, grow, and give back. *MW*

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