



## Amazon's new warehouse in Belleville is hiring, thanks to help from Ontario East Economic Development Commission

*Member Quinte Economic Development Commission calls the work they do a "team sport"*

Belleville has a new employer — and a critical link in Eastern Ontario's supply chain — thanks to a hot tip from a commercial realtor.

The tip went to Quinte Economic Development Commission (QEDC), a member of the Ontario East Economic Development Commission (Ontario East), a regional marketing organization representing Eastern Ontario communities

that attracts and retains investment and talent in key employment sectors.

A few months earlier, the QEDC's economic development officer Vicki Bristow Ferguson had put the land where the warehouse now stands on the realtor's radar for another project, but it wasn't the right fit.

When Amazon's developer called a couple of months later in September of

2021, the realtor reached out to find out if it was still available. It turned out to be the goldilocks solution.

"Bringing Amazon to Belleville will create a ripple effect of economic growth and prosperity across the region for years to come," said QEDC's CEO Chris King. "Local small businesses will benefit as they may get work at the facility, like plumbers, painters or electricians."

Once the match was made with Amazon, the QEDC handed it off to the city for the next steps.

"Our role is to bring them those projects," said King. "Then the city engages in conversations with the investors when the time is right."

The process for building a 1.1 million square foot building in under two years went smoothly for everyone involved, with the warehouse opening its doors this fall and sparking hundreds of jobs in the region.

"Developers said they appreciated the process of working with the City of Belleville on permitting and approvals and construction of the project," said Ferguson. "They said they wanted to take our process and apply it to other sites."

The road to success sounds simple enough, but developing the kind of relationships with key local influencers that Ontario East members can nurture into a big project is just one part of the "team sport" of economic development.

### How QEDC and Ontario East leverage industry clusters to attract and retain investment

The team rightly identified Amazon as a good fit for the region due to the existing transportation, logistics and manufacturing clusters in Eastern Ontario. It gives manufacturers another option for putting their products on the market.

Seeing the big picture is essential for teams like the QEDC and Ontario East when it comes to identifying viable prospects. That's why the QEDC conducts target market studies every four to five years to be sure prospects will be a good fit with the region's overall economic landscape.

Bringing community stakeholders

together for these studies is how they can identify opportunities that will bring the most value to the region and its existing players.

Outside of manufacturing and logistics, food processing is another cluster Ontario East and its partners are focusing on. That includes processing plants, a robust transportation and logistics sector with refrigerated trucks, and local agriculture.

"We're very fortunate to have companies in our regions like Lactalis, who have a Black Diamond cheese plant in Belleville that sources milk from local dairy farmers," said King, underpinning the importance of these large industry partnerships to the local community.

The success of these partnerships is no doubt influenced by Ferguson's decade-long presence with the Ontario Food Cluster team, a pan-Ontario membership-driven organization that attracts food industry opportunities to the province. She recently became co-chair of the organization, representing Ontario East.

Ferguson's incredible impact on the local region recently garnered her recognition from her peers, who named her the Ontario East EDO of the Year (economic development officer of the year for 2023).

"I was very flattered and pleased," said Ferguson. "Being honoured with this award was a surprise, but it means a lot and I am very humbled."

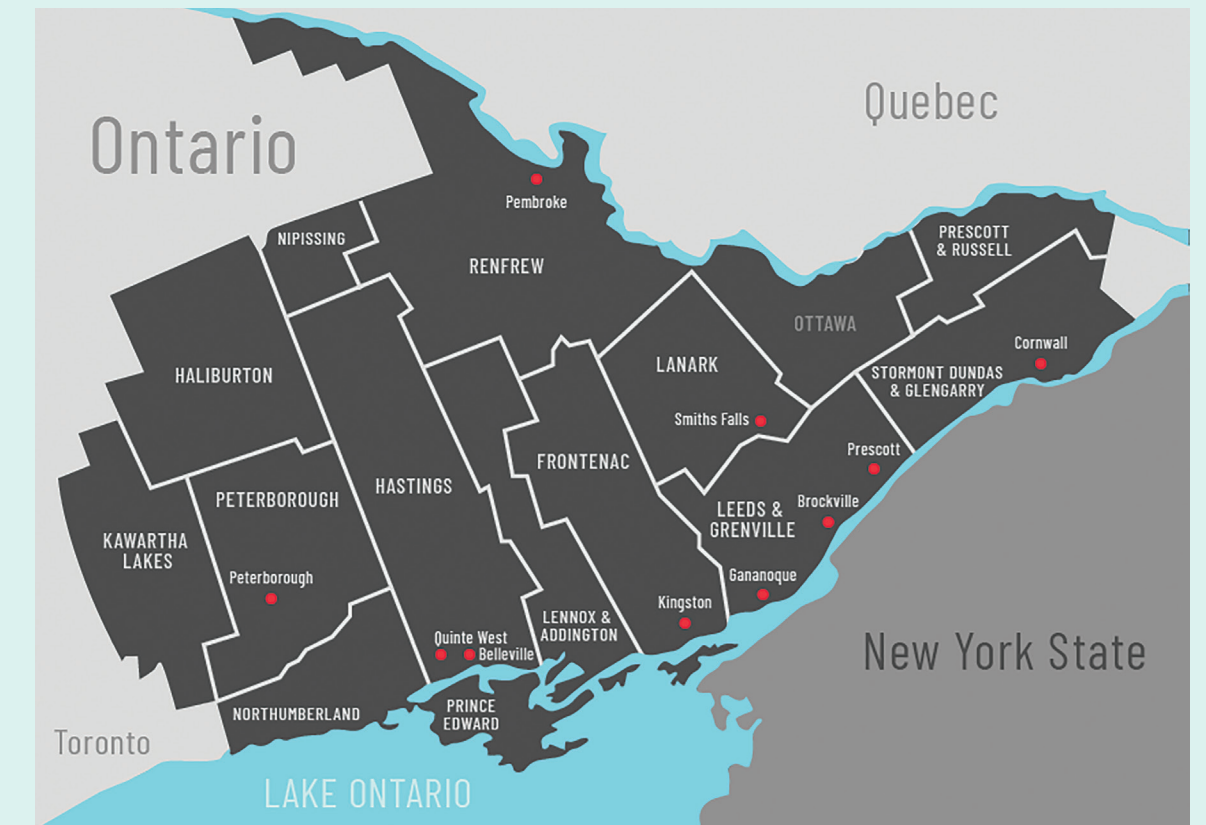
While her extensive background in B2B sales no doubt helps her excel at her job, her passion for Quinte Region may be what has sustained it for more than a decade.

"What could be better than selling than the fantastic place I call home?" said Ferguson.

### Why industry loves Eastern Ontario

It's not enough to attract industry to the region. Ontario East and its members throughout the region also work hard at keeping them here.

One of Eastern Ontario's biggest draws for both attraction and retention is being located on the 401 — a major transportation corridor — and its central proximity to big markets like Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and the Northeast region of the U.S.



*"But no amount of geographical advantages would work if it weren't for the team spirit that stretches from community-to-community within eastern Ontario."*

And what helps keep them here is the kind of affordability and the quality of life young families are looking for, adds King.

"The people these industries will hire want a place where they can raise their families," he said. "In Eastern Ontario, the quality of life and smaller sized communities offer a lot on that front."

But no amount of geographical advantages would work if it weren't for the team spirit that stretches from community-to-community within eastern Ontario.

"We call it 'cooperation,'" said Ferguson. Which means they cooperate while also

competing with each other for the same investments — like working on strategy as a team by deciding which trade shows to attend for lead generation.

One of the core reasons the Ontario East Economic Development Commission's efforts have paid off is their commitment to bringing people who used to work in isolation together to solve problems and share solutions that affect the entire region.

"Having that unified front makes it easier to put our best foot forward," said Ferguson. "The word is out now about Eastern Ontario."