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# The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

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From: Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development  
Report: #2024-INFO-22  
Date: April 5, 2024

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**Subject:**

Invest Durham Annual Report, 2023

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**Recommendation:**

Receive for information

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**Report:**

**1. Purpose**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a brief overview of the Region's Economic Development and Tourism Division's 2023 activities and programs. Included as Attachment #1 is the Invest Durham Annual Report 2023.

**2. Background**

2.1 The Annual Report summarizes activities undertaken by the various sections of the Division which include Business Development and Investment, Agri-Food and Rural Economic Development, Marketing, and Tourism.

2.2 In addition, the Annual Report provides an economic snapshot, and contains spotlights on specific initiatives, sector development projects, highlights from programs and activities, as well as awards or recognized achievements.

**3. Previous Reports and Decisions**

3.1 A Year-in-Review report from the Economic Development and Tourism Division is provided annually.

#### **4. Relationship to Strategic Plan**

4.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

a. Goal 3: Economic Prosperity

- 3.1: Position Durham Region as the location of choice for business
- 3.2: Leverage Durham's prime geography, social infrastructure, and strong partnerships to foster economic growth
- 3.3: Enhance communication and transportation networks to better connect people and move goods more efficiently
- 3.4: Capitalize on Durham's strengths in key economic sectors to attract high-quality jobs
- 3.5: Provide a supportive environment for agriculture and agri-food industries.

b. Goal 5: Service Excellence

- 5.3: Demonstrate commitment to continuous quality improvement and communicating results.

#### **5. Conclusion**

5.1 The Invest Durham Annual Report will continue to be produced on an annual basis.

5.2 This report will be delivered to Durham Region area municipalities.

#### **6. Attachments**

Attachment #1: Invest Durham Annual Report 2023

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Brian Bridgeman, MCIP RPP, PLE  
Commissioner of Planning and Economic  
Development



# 2023

## Economic Development and Tourism Annual Report



### 2023 Year in Review

- Economic Snapshot
- Business Investment Highlights
- Business Investment and Attraction
- Tourism
- Sport Tourism
- Agriculture and Rural Economic Development
- Film Durham + Creative Industries
- Marketing Activities – Invest Durham
- Awards



In 2023, our team focused on supporting and growing the things that make Durham Region an incredible place. Everything that we worked on was to build Durham’s distinct creative identity, grow its vibrant and diverse downtowns, make us a magnet for talent and investment, and enable our innovation community to continue to solve global challenges.

**Our creative identity:** The Film and Television industries continue to expand into Durham, with Oscar-nominated movies being filmed here. We helped promote arts and culture by celebrating talented local musicians at the Oshawa Music Awards, and supporting the Durham Region International Film Festival. Meanwhile, we totally reimagined our Discovery Guide with a fresh new look, and sent it to tens of thousands of potential visitors. It flew off the racks, and we ran out of our “two-year supply” in a matter of months.

**Our vibrant and diverse downtowns:** Our team supported events and festivals in our downtowns, from small to huge, like Convergence Oshawa, the Downtown Whitby Beerfest, Scugog Culture Days, and many more. Trent University Durham GTA opened a second campus called the Advanced Learning Centre, which offers Masters and post-graduate certificates, and is bringing even more students into Durham’s largest downtown area. The more we can connect students with our incredible local businesses and attractions, the stronger their bonds will become; making it more likely that they will stay and grow their career in our local community.

**A magnet for talent and investment:** Durham’s talented workforce is growing quickly, driven by our world-class college and universities. Ontario Tech University has higher application and enrolment rates every year, and Durham College is opening new facilities, including their Electric Vehicle Training Centre. Queen’s University also partnered with Lakeridge Health to train new family doctors. Our team is collaborating with the area municipalities to welcome these students to the community, and to attract new family doctors to Durham Region.

**Our innovation community is known for solving global challenges:** Invest Durham is trusted by both Canadian and international businesses. To attract great companies, our team put together a stunning booth at Collision Conference, which is one of the world’s largest tech businesses audiences. We worked with the eight area municipalities, and with Durham College, Ontario Tech University, Trent University Durham GTA, Spark Centre, 1855 Whitby - Technology Accelerator, Ontario Power Generation (OPG), and the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association, to proudly showcase the first all Canadian electric concept car, Project Arrow, which was built in Durham Region at the ACE Climatic Wind Tunnel. Our booth attracted thousands of leads and connections in the electric car and tech sectors, and was even featured on CP24, Autoweek, and more.

Focusing on **PLACE**, our results are grounded in our on-going investment success stories. Durham Region is more in-demand than ever. From Wonderbrands’ new campus in the Pickering Innovation Corridor to OPG’s new corporate headquarters in Oshawa, thousands of new innovative and high-tech jobs are joining Durham’s economy.



**With an incredible year of delivering on our new strategic plan, Ready Set Future, we continue to drive towards our bold, long-term vision.**

Simon Gill  
Director, Economic Development and Tourism



## Economic Snapshot



### Booming Growth

- Durham Region’s population grew 9.3 per cent between 2018 to 2023 reaching 750,000 and is forecast to grow to 1.3 million by 2051.
- OPG began their project to relocate their corporate headquarters to Durham Region, bringing thousands of jobs into the region, with an expected opening in 2025.



### In Demand

- Plans are underway to build four new GO transit stations for the Lakeshore East GO Extension, opening new opportunities for transportation and development.
- Durham Region’s hotel occupancy has recovered and grown above 2019 levels, reflecting strong tourism interest in the region.



### Talented

- Two new post-secondary campuses opened in Durham Region: Trent University Durham GTA in downtown Oshawa and Queen’s-Lakeridge Health MD Family Medicine Program at Lakeridge Health in Oshawa.
- Ontario Tech University was named 2023 Canadian Research University of the Year.



### Innovating the Future

- The Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture’s Ajax Urban Farm (led by Durham College) was officially unveiled.
- Project Arrow—built at Ontario Tech University—was named one of the biggest Canadian tech stories of 2023 by the Toronto Star.



## Business Investment Highlights

The following non-exhaustive list details some key new businesses, strategic investments and retained/expanded businesses in Durham Region in 2023. Please note that this list does not include any retail, franchise, or housing opportunities and may include opportunities that our team did not have the opportunity to directly support.

**Adamson Systems Engineering** - Building addition in Port Perry

**Ajax Industrial on the Park** - One million square foot development

**Barrett Centre of Innovation in Sustainable Urban Agriculture** - Ajax Urban Farm opening

**Bestco Fresh Foods** - Grand opening, Ajax

**BOND|ST Event Centre** - Grand opening, Oshawa

Durham College opens **PROTO and EV Lab** at the Whitby campus

**Global First Power** - Office opening, Whitby

**H&M Warehouse and Distribution** - Opening, Ajax

**Hopkins Logistics Hub** - 293,000-square-foot development, Whitby

**Innova in Canada** - Office opening, Oshawa

**Lakeshore Cider** - Opening, Newcastle

**Lactalis Canada Inc** - Development underway, Oshawa

**Lakefront Skate and Market** - Port Perry

**Lakeridge Logistics Centre** - 1.2 million-square-foot development, Ajax

**Martin Brower** - Development underway, Oshawa

**Tru by Hilton** - Under development, Oshawa Airport

**New Office Building** - Under development, Oshawa Airport

**Olympia Steel Fabrication Shop** - Courtice

**Ontario Power Generation Corporate Headquarters Renovation** - Oshawa

**Oshawa Clinic Group** - Whitby Health Centre development underway

**Panattoni** - 773,000-square-foot development underway, Whitby

**Powerline Plus Manufacturing** - Clarington

**Queen's-Lakeridge Health MD Family Medicine Program** - Oshawa

**SkyCanoe** - Facility development underway, Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation

**SmartCentres Industrial Building** - Pickering

**Tessera Group** - Development underway, Scugog

**Trent University Durham GTA Downtown Oshawa Campus** - Grand opening, Oshawa

**Wonderbrands** - Development underway, Pickering



## Business Development and Investment Attraction



Responded to 229 Business Investment Inquiries – 50 per cent increase over previous year



Directly landed three investments: Electrical Distributor (confidential), Innova in Canada, and Tessera Group

# 199

leads remain open

14 national and international investment attraction missions

22 industry events, conferences, and trade shows

15 inbound delegations and site tours

In 2023, Invest Durham focused on priority clusters as defined in the division’s strategic plan Ready Set Future. As a result, 91 per cent of inquiries handled by the team were in the targeted sectors. Strong relationships with important partner organizations were bolstered, further creating awareness of Durham’s reputation and value proposition for investment.

### Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Invest Durham supported a wide range of innovation and entrepreneurship organizations and initiatives, including:

- Spark Centre
- Synergy Pioneer Program
- 1855 Accelerator
- Business Advisory Centre of Durham (BACD)
- Brilliant Catalyst Innovation Challenge
- 1855 and 360insights Hackathon
- Durham Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Forum (DEEF)
- Collision Conference
- Durham Region International Film Festival Emerging Filmmaker Incubator
- Digital Main Street
- The Durham Regional Technology Development Site (DRTDS)

#### Boost Your EV IQ Event

Invest Durham in partnership with Durham College Corporate Training Services (CTS), Ontario Tech University, ACE Climactic Wind Tunnel, NGen, OVIN, and Ontario Centre of Innovation hosted a hybrid event to promote Durham’s competitive advantage for investors looking to grow in the advanced mobility sector.



## Tourism



**7,650**  
monthly e-newsletter subscribers



**4,246**  
monthly industry e-newsletter subscribers



**93,076**  
engagements on social media



**X**  
8,432 followers  
4,184 engagements  
.5% follower growth



**Instagram**  
12,799 followers  
42,890 engagements  
36.8% follower growth



**Facebook**  
7,754 total audience  
46,002 engagements  
14.9% growth



- Relunched the Durham Region Discovery Guide in 2023, a refreshed publication with dozens of stunning photographs showing destinations across Durham Region. The magazine was distributed to subscribers of Toronto Life Magazine, and in tourism travel destinations across the province.
- The A is for Adventure campaign promoted culinary experiences related to apples, including cideries, fritters, and apple picking. The campaign included a double page spread in Food and Drink magazine, digital promotions, and blog posts.
- The Downtowns of Durham website grew to reach 64,209 page views in 2023, an increase of 3.5 per cent over 2022.





# Tourism

## Other key initiatives include:

- Partnering to support and promote events such as, Springtide Music Festival in Uxbridge, Culture Days, the Downtown Whitby BIA Christmas Market, Convergence Art and Music Festival Downtown Oshawa, the OMAs – Celebrating Music in Durham Region, the Oshawa Student Orientation, Uxbridge Holiday Trail, Canoe the Nonquon, Small Town BIG, Uxbridge Scottish Festival, Port Perry Beer & Cider Festival, Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation Powwow, and Sunderland Maple Syrup Festival.
- Partnership formed with North Durham Pride, which is dedicated to promoting visibility and representation of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals in north Durham. Support and promotions provided to host one event in the townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge.
- Support to business-led initiatives such as, the Sideroads of Scugog, Backroads of Brock, and the Leaskdale Loop, to drive further visitation to north Durham.
- Downtown visitor data collection completed for Durham’s 14 downtown and main street areas.
- Various promotional campaigns promoted through new photography, blog content, television promotion, and social media.

## Agri-tourism Initiative

Durham Tourism and Durham Farm Fresh collaborated to launch a month-long campaign “Gather at the Farm.” The program included print and digital advertising, and promoted fall activities and events at farms across the region. The campaign reached more than one million impressions and saw 14,000 visitors to a landing page.





## Sport Tourism Featured Initiative: Durham Region 2023 Ontario Parasport Games

From February 3 to 5, Durham Region hosted the 2023 Ontario Parasport Games, building on the momentum from hosting the Games in 2019.



9 sport venues across  
**5 municipalities**



**11 sports**

**Over 400 participants**  
(about 300 of these were athletes)

**336**  
volunteers

**4**  
demonstration sports

**\$872,991**

**Economic Impact in Ontario**

\$702,853 of which occurred in Durham Region

**\$267,000**

**Sponsorship (59 community partners)**

\$179,774 cash  
\$87,028 in-kind

**\$145,579**

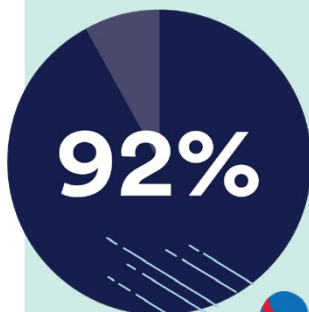
**Games Legacy Fund**

surpassed initial target by about 240 per cent

The Games Legacy Fund will be distributed to the following:

- Durham Community Foundation “Durham Region Adaptive Sport & Recreation Legacy Fund” (\$112,000)
- Adaptive Sport Festival (\$30,000)
- Community Tree and Shrub Planting (\$3,579)

### Post-Games Survey results



**Participants** – 92 per cent of respondents rated their Games experience as good or excellent

**Volunteers** – 92 per cent of respondents said they enjoyed their Games experience

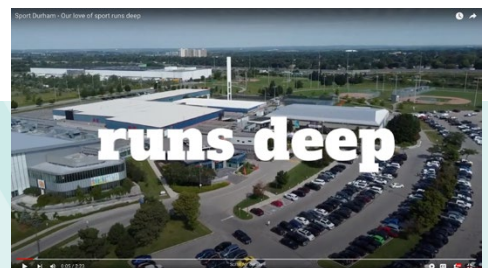
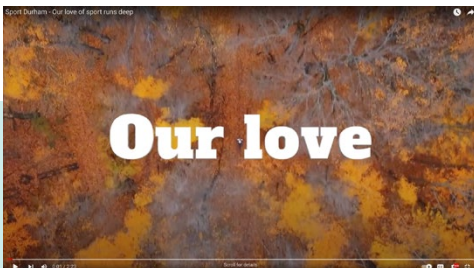




# Sport Tourism

## Other key initiatives include:

- Successful bids to host the 2024 Quadball Canada National Championship in collaboration with City of Oshawa and the 2025 Canadian Wheelchair Basketball League Women’s Championship in collaboration with Ontario Para Network.
- Developed bid to host the 2026 Wheelchair Rugby Championships in collaboration with Ontario Para Network (decision pending).
- Partnered with Ontario Tech University on their successful bid to host 2024 U SPORTS Men’s Soccer Championships.
- Supported 2023 events, including Canadian Tire National Skating Championships; YONEX National University and College Badminton Championships; Canadian 4-on-4 Ultimate Championships; Canadian High School Ultimate Championships; Dodgeball Toronto Mid-Season Clash; HiSports Canadian Cash Cup Pickleball Tournament; Special Olympics Hometown Games Softball tournament and Track and Field Meet; and the annual ten-day Ontario Lacrosse Festival.



Completed and launched new sport tourism video



## Agriculture and Rural Economic Development



**1,054**

bi-monthly industry e-newsletter subscribers



**29%**

growth in number of social media followers



**102**

attendees at north Durham Building Business Forum

### Three successful Rural Economic Development (RED) grants completed in collaboration with partners:

- Uxbridge Downtown Revitalization
- Brock Community Improvement Plans updates
- Durham Farm Fresh – Durham Farm Connections Joint Coordinator

### 42 local business interviews

conducted for Scugog Business Program (88 businesses participated)

### Other key initiatives include:

- Online business toolkits developed and launched in Scugog, Uxbridge and Brock.
- 50 secondary school students attended the Precision Agriculture Field Day.
- Four precision agriculture videos developed for secondary schools across Durham Region in partnership with Durham Farm Connections.
- Supported delivery of Agriculture 101 presentations and training to Regional Council and municipal councils by the Durham Agriculture Advisory Committee.
- Shared Best Practices for On-Farm Diversified Uses Report to Planning Directors from Durham’s eight area municipalities. Initiated project to encourage and enable Agriculture-Related and On-Farm Diversified Uses across north Durham.



The 2023-2027 Growing North Durham: Rural Economic Development Action Plan was endorsed by Planning and Economic Development Committee and three north Durham councils. The Plan supports a community-driven approach to economic development, and is structured under three pillars: People, Places and Prosperity.



## Film Durham + Creative Industries

Film and Television productions in 2023 included Botanical Jungle, Cross, Fairview, Matlock, Reacher, Rogers, Thanksgiving, The Madness, The Umbrella Academy, The Way Home and Lipton, Nissan and Toyota commercials.



### “Thanksgiving” by Cream Productions – Economic Impact Case Study:

- Filmed in downtown Port Perry from March 21 to 25
- Directed by Eli Roth, starring Patrick Dempsey, Gina Gershon, and Rick Hoffman
- 160 cast and crew plus 150 local extras
- 104 hotel rooms for six days

**\$300,000 production spend** for accommodations, community donations and compensation, location fees, products and services

### Durham Region International Film Festival (DRIFF) 2023:



Two venues



37 films included in program

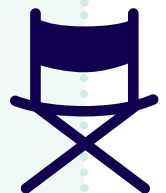


146 films submitted to festival

**850+ attendees**

at 2023 Film and Television Industry Career Fair hosted with 24 partners

Those films represented the work of 22 male directors and 12 female directors inclusive of 11 BIPOC directors





## Marketing Activities – Invest Durham

Promoting Durham Region for new investment and job creation.



X

2,605 followers  
904 interactions  
18% follower growth



LinkedIn

5,129 followers  
8,578 interactions  
31% follower growth



Instagram

2,437 followers  
3,197 interactions  
21% follower growth

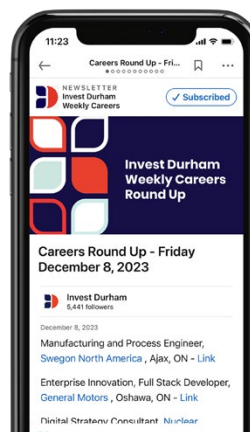
2,542 subscribers to Invest Durham Enews

## Invest Durham Marketing Initiatives



Teamed up with Durham’s local innovation community—including the eight local municipal economic development teams; three post-secondary institutions; as well as 1855 Accelerator, Spark Centre, Brilliant Catalyst, Ontario Power Generation, and the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association—to showcase Durham Region’s exciting development potential to businesses and investors at Collision Conference, resulting in more than 1,300 connections.

Supported the Access IO event to foster entrepreneurship and promote innovative technological solutions in the community.



2,682 subscribers to the Weekly Careers Round Up LinkedIn Newsletter



## Awards

### Economic Development Awards

- In February 2023, the Economic Development and Tourism Division was named as an **Honourable Mention for the 2022 EDCO Awards of Excellence for Investment Attraction for Durham At Collision.**
- Economic Development and Tourism Division won a 2023 EDCO Awards of Excellence **Planning and Strategic Development – Urban Award** for the Ready Set Future A PLACE Blueprint for Durham project.

### MarCom Awards:

- Apple Adventure Ad - Platinum Winner
- Amp Up Your Business Video - Gold Winner
- Honourable Mention – Strategic Communications – Digital Marketing – 10K Giveaway

### Sport Tourism Canada (STC) PRESTIGE Awards

- The STC PRESTIGE (Program Recognizing Exceptional Sport Tourism Initiatives, Games & Events) Awards, now in their 15th year, have honoured exceptional sport events, people and organizations since their inception in 2007. The awards honoured Canada’s best in the Sport Tourism Industry. In March 2024, the **Durham Region 2023 Ontario Parasport Games were awarded the Legacy of the Year PRESTIGE award.**

### Viddy Awards:

- The Sunflower Farm – Instagram Reel – Durham Tourism



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