

Alberta cities score high on economy

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Last Updated: 21st May 2009, 3:01am

CALGARY -- Cowtown is Wowtown but Edmonton isn't far behind, says a report released yesterday that gave Calgary a top-of-the-class grade on a global scorecard for overall economic prosperity.

Calgary was the lone metropolis in a survey of international commerce heavyweights to earn an A grade in the Calgary Economic Development-commissioned Conference Board of Canada report.

Edmonton was third. Dallas was sandwiched at second between Alberta's two major centres in the 23-city ranking.

Such results aren't surprising for Calgary, which accounts for 5% of national gross domestic product, despite a local economy cooled by the recession, said Cowtown Mayor Dave Bronconnier.

'ECONOMIC ENGINE'

"Calgary was seen, on the economic stage, as the economic engine of Canada (in 2008)," said Bronconnier, calling last year's GDP growth "astonishing."

Low tax rates, affordability and high incomes weighed heavily in the stellar grade, said CED president and CEO Bruce Graham.

"Calgary's impressive standing in this report is a direct result of our continued collective investment in our community and its businesses," he said.

The report noted Calgary's 3.2% unemployment rate was comfortably ahead of second-place Hong Kong, while it still resided in the top half of the pack in terms of residential building activity.

GOOD STEAD

And while the oil and gas sector remains the main lubricant turning the local economic wheel, Graham said increased diversification has Calgary in good stead.

Yet that's not to say the city isn't without challenges to maintain its enviable global status.

The report cited labour shortages and mediocre productivity growth as significant issues.

"The Calgary of the future must aspire to be a global business centre," said Graham.

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