

Montreal mayor encourages young job seekers to stay

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Mayor Denis Coderre delivered an upbeat message to young people who hope to stay in Montreal and find employment, especially those who are immigrants or from ethnic communities.

"We are not building walls, we are building bridges," he declared to applause from the standing room-only audience of over 400 at Agence Ometz's annual "Cocktails and Conversation" event, an opportunity for its clients to network with prospective employers and circulate their curriculum vitae. Ometz is Federation CJA's social services agency.

The Jewish community, Coderre declared, is "part of our DNA," and he asked that it continue to "believe" in Montreal's future. He reiterated his "zero tolerance" for anti-Semitism and all forms of racism. "Diversity is our asset," he said.

As Coderre has frequently said in the past, "Montreal is back," and he cited as proof the changed attitude of his friend, retired senator Leo Kolber.

"He used to say to me, 'I don't like what I see [happening to Montreal].' Now he's smiling again. He is my barometer," said Coderre, who will be seeking a second term in the November municipal election.

Unemployment in Montreal decreased by three per cent last year and the city has become a hub for startup businesses, he said.

"The strength of our city is people," Coderre concluded. "Let's work together and make a difference together."

Coderre got a boost from Stephen Bronfman, who called the mayor "a true friend of the Jewish people, who goes out of his way for us."

Bronfman was a member of the trade mission to Israel and the West Bank that Coderre led with Toronto Mayor John Tory in November. Many of the 70 Montrealers on that trip, largely from high-tech and knowledge-based industries, were present as well.

Bronfman is co-chair of Federation CJA's centennial campaign to raise \$320 million to ensure the Jewish community's presence in Montreal "for at least another 100 years."

He is also co-founder of Ometz's PME Fund, which provides up to \$50,000 in startup capital and mentorship to Jewish entrepreneurs under age 40 committed to building their business in Quebec.

Employment services are an important part of Ometz's work. Its president, Saul Carliner, said that of the more than 4,000 clients of various backgrounds the agency saw last year, more than 1,800, spanning all ages, came for job training,



Mayor Denis Coderre

counselling, or placement.

While the federation is its main source of funding, Ometz has had a beneficial 30-year relationship with Emploi-Québec, Carliner said.

This year's Cocktails and Conversation was co-hosted with the Jewish Chamber of Commerce, which is part of the federation's GenMtl department, aimed at those between 25 and 40 years old.

As is the custom at these events, job seekers had one minute to make a pitch to the entire room explaining why they should be hired.

Nineteen men and women presented themselves, including a significant number of recent immigrants, especially from France. In October 2015, Ometz launched Initiative France-Montreal, a program tailored to the needs of the expected influx of French Jews.

Others were originally from Israel, the former Soviet Union and one from Hungary, and the remainder were native Montrealers.

Their qualifications and ambitions are varied. Some have graduate university degrees, others more modest educations. They sought jobs in a wide range of fields, from the professions to sales and marketing to computer technology.

Recent Université de Montréal law graduate Amanda Bercovitch is looking to continue her legal career; Erin Lumer would like to make a change in career after eight years teaching elementary school; Samuel Obrand wants to build on his early foray into radio, and freelance writer and translator Dinah Zeldin seeks to put to greater use her skills in social media and marketing.

Among the French were a mechanical engineer, a graphic designer, a construction project manager and a medical secretary.

Gilles Douieb, who settled in Montreal last year, came with 17 years of experience in advertising, specifically digital marketing.

Since it began almost 25 years ago, Cocktails and Conversation has helped over 1,400 Ometz clients secure jobs in Montreal, the agency says. ■

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