

# **The Role of a Community Business Network in Building Stronger Communities**

**Derek de Vrieze**

## **Abstract**

People networking together have created many successful community enterprises; a Community Bank is one such example.

Why is a community business network integral to creating successful communities? A community, networking together, identifies the needs and issues relevant to a particular community and in the process identifies solutions. Showcasing local product produce and services in a networking environment creates awareness of local skills and capacity.

The presentation will include the experience of (1) participating in the NSW Regional Investment Tours in highlighting local capability and (2) the establishment of and logic behind the Central Victorian Business Network and why this has received wide community support. In addition, how this model is helping other communities become united is also covered.

Particular emphasis will be on applying a collaborative approach to creating a business network and how collaboration contributes to community success. Derek will also outline the benefits of participating in networking programs and the expected outcomes.

Private/ Public partnership, education being a vital part, will also be discussed and why this partnership is an important ingredient to a successful business network and community. To understand the behavioral needs of a community, Maslow's Hierarchical needs model will be discussed.

Inclusiveness is the key, that is a business network needs to bring all silo's of business government, healthcare, education, not for profits employees and youth together into a networking forum, after all, all those silos are in business. Bringing those silo's together helps create import replacing towns & cities and in the process a more successful community.

Increasing local sales, production and employment instead of importing production and exporting jobs, is just one outcome, more broadly it is about creating opportunities for business and community growth and success.

## **Biography Derek de Vrieze**

Derek de Vrieze: B.Bus (Accounting) La Trobe University Bendigo

Derek is Bendigo Bank's National Manager Business Partnerships. Derek is a Director of the Central Victoria Area Consultative Committee, a position he has held since September 2002.

In 2004 & 2005 Derek assisted the Victorian Government with its commercialisation strategy for small to medium enterprises in Regional Victoria. In 2006 he was invited to be a Panel member of the Victorian Government's Vicstart Regional Technology Commercialisation Program.

In June 2005 he was appointed to the Federal Government's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Advisory Group considering Regional Food Processing Grants.

He is also a Director of Land Partners, a business which, specialises in civil & structural engineering, environmental consulting and surveying. He is a former Director of the Bendigo Stock Exchange and has presented on a range of topics and written a number of articles on business and community enhancement.

Derek was the founding Chairman of the very successful Central Victorian Business Network (CVBN), which was established with other community minded citizens in August 2002. Derek was also the Chair of the La Trobe University Alumni – Bendigo Chapter in 2003 and 2004.