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SUCCESS: Some of Windsor's finest enjoy themselves at the Made in Windsor/Essex party in Toronto's distillery district on May 14. Windsor Star photo

Windsor on the investment map

DAVE HALL
WINDSOR STAR REPORTER

TORONTO - Filling every corner of the Fermenting Cellar in the city's historic Distillery District, more than 250 high-level Toronto-area executives, site planners and potential investors were treated to a taste of Windsor hospitality Wednesday night.

Billed as the Made in Windsor/Essex tour, the gala event was designed to generate goodwill, put Windsor on the investment map and help change the image of a city battered by job losses and plant closures.

And on this night, all the talk was positive. Former prime minister Paul Martin headlined the Windsor contingent and said "what a night like this does is remind Canada's largest city that Windsor is the heart of industrial Canada and also that it counts in more ways than just manufacturing. "I don't doubt for a moment that some positive news will come from an event such as this because this is where networking starts," said Martin.

The Windsor contingent wasn't just there to attract industrial investment. Windsor is now a major player in the Canadian and North American conference and convention market with the \$430-million expansion of Casino Windsor, which is expected to open June 19 as Caesars Windsor.

David Jewell, regional vice-president of

HelmsBriscoe, an event and conference planning service, said he wished he had brought some clients with him "because the level of commitment to the product, which is Windsor, in this room is remarkable. "If they'd walked in and seen this, they would have been blown away. "There may not be anything closed tonight beyond a handshake but it's events such as this that lead to some serious discussions and future commitments," said Jewell. "When people see the level of excitement and pride in this room, it's definitely something they would want to be a part of in the future."

"Many thanks to all involved that made this trip a success for Windsor."

SANDRA PUPATELLO

One major advantage Windsor has in its favour is its location. Geoff Benic, a former Windsor Spitfire who is now president of the Sofilia Group of Companies which specialize in warehousing and logistics, said "the Windsor market is extremely attractive to our company. "We don't have any projects there now but we believe it has great potential because of its location and its transpor-

der transportation systems which place it close by many major U.S. retailers which are hoping to expand into Canada," said Benic, whose companies have 300 employees. "I'll always have a soft spot in my heart for Windsor," said Benic, who played for the 1987-88 Spitfires squad which won the OHL championship. "It's always been a proud, hard-working city and I'll always talk it up whenever I get the chance."

Former NDP cabinet minister Dave Cooke, who is chairman of the board of governors at the University of Windsor, said the next step will be following up the contacts that were made during the event and speaking with the people who attended to see if there are any leads and investment possibilities.

Joining Cooke on the trip were outgoing university president Ross Paul and incoming president Alan Wildeman, who takes over next month.

Other high-profile area representatives included former deputy prime minister Herb Gray, Liberal MPPs Sandra Pupatello, Dwight Duncan and Bruce Crozier, former UN ambassador Allan Rock, former Ontario premier Ernie Eves and Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis. The event was catered by Koolini Italian Eatery. Other Windsor businesses which participating were Flowers by Phil, Soiree Events and Canadian Club. Providing entertainment was Bigg Wiggle, a well-known Windsor band.