

# ACCESS

## ALBERTA

July - September 2002

### Government of Canada Info-Fair Visits Grande Prairie in October

If you're looking for the best opportunity to reach all Government of Canada departments that provide assistance to business, then mark Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup> on your calendar.

The Grande Prairie Small Business Info-Fair is a one-stop source of business information for small business. It will showcase over 30 federal government programs and services available to small and medium-sized businesses at the Grande Prairie Inn. Doors will open at 9:00 a.m. and representatives will be available to explain program details.

Throughout the day, business seminars will be offered on various topics, and you'll have the opportunity to hear success stories from area entrepreneurs.

The seminar schedule will be available online beginning in September at: [www.wd.gc.ca/eng/events/ab.html](http://www.wd.gc.ca/eng/events/ab.html).

The Info-Fair and business seminars are open to the general public from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and are **free-of-charge!**

Register to attend the Info-Fair and seminars by contacting SMEDA Business Development Corporation at (780) 354-8747. You can also register online at: [www.wd.gc.ca/eng/events/ab.html](http://www.wd.gc.ca/eng/events/ab.html) beginning in September.

For further information, contact Barb Steele at (780) 495-4982 or 1-888-338-WEST (9378). ♣

## Take a Seat at the Rivers Edge



*Stuart Grant is right at home at The Rivers Edge Log Works in Blairmore.  
(Photo courtesy of Crowsnest Pass BDC)*

The Crowsnest Pass in southern Alberta is famous for the Frank Slide. But a stone's throw away from the Crowsnest River in Blairmore you'll find an "all Canadian made shop" looking to build its own legend in the old mining town.

After managing a store in Jasper that sold log furniture, Stuart Grant caught the entrepreneurial bug. He knew he could build similar furniture of even a better quality and liked the idea of owning a shop and being his own boss.

Along with his wife Akiko and their young family, Stuart relocated to Blairmore in 1998 and opened **The Rivers Edge Log Works**. Stuart cuts his own logs, peels them and produces beautifully handcrafted log and pine furniture – beds, chairs, tables, chests and benches. Akiko manages the retail store

which features Stuart's furniture, as well as unique gifts and collectibles from home-based businesses from across Canada.

Success didn't come easy and it wasn't until the couple had the opportunity to purchase their own building that the business took off. They visited the **Crowsnest Pass Business Development Corporation** for help. "For a while things were touch and go. We didn't know if we would survive," indicated Stuart. "Without the assistance of the Crowsnest Pass BDC, we would not have been able to buy our own building. Now we control our own destiny."

Today, Blairmore's Pass Powerkeg Ski Hill features Stuart's unique benches, as well as ski/board racks, and the Cinnamon Bear Bakery & Café has included his furniture as part of their décor.

As The Rivers Edge evolves from a seasonal tourism business to a year-round success thanks to the increased sales and repeat customers for Stuart's furniture, the Grant's are looking to expand in order to increase the floor space and feature more Canadian artisans they currently can't accommodate.

The Crowsnest Pass BDC is a partner in Western Economic Diversification Canada's business service network. For more information about the Community Futures office in your area, call 1-888-338-WEST (9378) or visit [www.wd.gc.ca/eng/pos/cfdc/alberta.asp](http://www.wd.gc.ca/eng/pos/cfdc/alberta.asp) for a complete listing.

For more information about The Rivers Edge Log Works, contact (403) 562-2724 or visit their Web site at: [www.logfurniture.ca](http://www.logfurniture.ca). ♣

## Thinking Outside the Box

Since 1999, the **Olds College Centre for Innovation (OCCI)** has proven that “thinking outside of the box” really works. Now in its third year of operation, it has successfully built an exciting new organization dedicated to meeting the rapidly changing requirements of Alberta’s agri-business and resource sectors.

Established as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Olds College, OCCI develops new products and technologies for the agriculture, horticulture, forestry and resource sectors. In business terms, it offers applied research services in four key areas: composting and waste management, development of new products from crops and processing, research and testing services for natural fibre producers, and equipment design and development.

Their vision is to be recognized as a dynamic, flexible and virtual organization. Lofty goals perhaps, but just a few years after they opened their doors, the Centre has already generated \$1.1 million in contract research. In addition, it has secured an \$800,000 contract with the Canadian Foundation for Innovation for three applied research infrastructure projects and recently received approval in principle for a \$3.5 million micro-processing facility for new products from crops.

The Centre offers scientific staff, Olds College students and industry partners with enhanced learning opportunities that will help Alberta’s agriculture industry expand. OCCI is strategically located in central Alberta and has the potential to become a valuable resource to rural entrepreneurs and businesses.

The Olds College Centre for Innovation’s success can be traced to strong support from the Alberta government, as well as college, community, industry and other government stakeholders.



*Perhaps the biggest highlight so far for OCCI has been the official opening of the \$1.2 million Dr. Robert Turner Research Centre in November 2001.*

However, OCCI also acknowledges the important role of Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), particularly in the start-up phase. “WD’s support was absolutely critical to the OCCI in our early stage,” said Rick Tofani, CEO. “WD funding has helped us lever other funds from both government and industry.”

The Centre is strengthening its research capacity through operating funding agreements with various provincial and federal agencies, as well as through research partnerships with private industry. WD also assisted the College to acquire key laboratory equipment used to perform microbiological analyses in the areas of plant stress and physiology, and quantity control.

For more information about the Olds College Centre for Innovation, contact (403) 507-7970 or 1-877-815-OCCI, or visit their Web site at: [www.occ.ab.ca](http://www.occ.ab.ca)✻

# Greater Edmonton Competitiveness Strategy

by Carmen Carvajal

In the Greater Edmonton region, industry and public sectors know that internal competition is not necessarily the key to forging a strong and sustainable economy. By working together they will have a better chance of securing prosperity for all. But, to arrive at that point, they need a reliable road map. That is why they are enthusiastic about the **Greater Edmonton Competitiveness Strategy**.

The primary goal of the Competitiveness Strategy is to help transform Greater Edmonton's already booming resource-based economy into a "next generation" economy, one based on regional clusters exporting their expertise to the world. This collective effort has mapped the economic strengths of the area and outlined many cooperative actions to build on those strengths.

Led by **Economic Development Edmonton (EDE)**, the economic development initiative is a partnership between Edmonton and 22 surrounding municipalities, and is engaging over 1,200 participants from the private and public sector. Western Economic Diversification Canada has been a major financial and consultative contributor since the inception of the initiative, providing \$1.69 million.

The Competitiveness Strategy uses an industry cluster approach. Each cluster is comprised of three levels: similar companies with related products or services, their joint suppliers, and supporting economic foundations (e.g. educational institutions, physical infrastructure, human resources, business climate and quality of life). The cluster teams meet regularly to develop a common vision and generate new initiatives, and can become economic drivers for a community.



*A recent KPMG Consulting report ranked cities within the G-7 countries*

The Competitiveness Strategy identified eight clusters: advanced manufacturing; agri-food and forest products; biomedicine and biotechnology; engineering and technical services; information and media services; oil, gas and chemicals; tourism and entertainment; and transportation and logistics. Not only are cluster teams generating new economic initiatives, but their respective sectors are benefiting from an increased level of cooperation, networking and communication, and enhanced entrepreneurial energy.

Flagship initiatives constitute another important aspect of the Competitiveness Strategy. These initiatives will identify and address problems and opportunities common to multiple clusters.

Since its official launch in January 2001, the initiative has seen many positive outcomes. "The Greater Edmonton

# Strategy Builds on Economic Momentum



*Edmonton came out on top as the best city to do business with.*

Competitiveness Strategy has made substantial progress, particularly in the engineering and technical services, biomedicine and biotechnology, and oil, gas and chemicals industry clusters. The skills pipeline and transportation infrastructure flagship initiatives have also made significant progress in the very short term for which they have been operating,” says Allan Scott, president and CEO of EDE. “Looking ahead, further work on behalf of the Competitiveness Strategy in 2002 will lead to more longer-term benefits throughout Greater Edmonton.”

It is clear that the strategy is quickly evolving thanks to the commitment of the region, private and public sponsors, and industry leadership in the various clusters and flagships. The Competitiveness Strategy cluster teams delivered 31 major achievements in 2001. Among them are:

- Selection of Edmonton as the site of Canada’s new \$120 million National Institute of Nanotechnology
- Execution of a Biomedicine, Biotechnology and E-Health Investor Forum in October 2001
- Planning for an International Winter Construction Symposium and Exhibition for November 2002
- A report and action plan to help develop a more balanced and responsive labour pool
- Sponsoring of initiatives to aid in technology commercialization and investor/entrepreneur education

The Conference Board of Canada predicts that Edmonton will lead the nation in the year 2002 with a 3.2 per cent growth rate in GDP. A report recently issued by KPMG Consulting ranked Edmonton as the best city to do business, within the G-7 countries. Edmonton’s housing market, manufacturing and construction sectors are booming. Nonetheless, despite such an outstanding economic outlook, the Competitiveness Strategy participants are working harder than ever. They know that it is necessary to build on this momentum in order to secure sustainable prosperity.

For more information about the Greater Edmonton Competitiveness Strategy, contact Economic Development Edmonton at (780) 424-9191 or by e-mail at: [edinfo@ede.org](mailto:edinfo@ede.org). ♣

In addition to the growth that the Greater Edmonton region is already projected to achieve in the period of 2002-2005, the Competitiveness Strategy expects to achieve:

- 38,000 new jobs
- \$2.6 billion increase in GDP
- \$1,840 increase in per capita annual buying income
- \$60 million in property/business tax benefits to Greater Edmonton

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# Hotline Connects Job Seekers from Across Canada to Fort McMurray

The oil sands in Fort McMurray are gaining a national reputation as Canada's major energy source. In August 2000, community organizations identified the need for an information hotline to deal with inquiries about employment, business and contract opportunities, housing and the community.

The **Fort McMurray Regional Business Development Centre** took a leadership role and secured assistance from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) to get the **Fort McMurray Hotline** up and running.

The service was launched in June 2001 and is a huge success. Over 4,000 calls were received in the first nine months of operation. Eight out of 10 callers are looking for work.

"Hotline operators present a positive impression of Fort McMurray as the first *real* voice a caller hears," indicated Gwenneth Lauder, Hotline coordinator. "They help steer job seekers in the right direction by providing them with the information they need."

Potential employees are asked a few questions about their qualifications, education and experience. Unskilled individuals are given a realistic picture of job prospects and salary expectations. The operator makes referrals to job postings and to employers who may be hiring in the future. Applicants are encouraged to check out Web sites of the oil sands companies and carefully follow the instructions for submitting resumes. And as an added service, operators will contact the caller if they become aware of a future job opportunity.

Employers looking for workers with a certain skill set often contact the Hotline, who act as a facilitator for both employers and prospective employees.



*Fort McMurray is a growing, progressive, prosperous region, boosted by an oilsands driven economy, as well as forestry and thriving small business.*

*(Photo courtesy of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo)*

One caller later wrote the Hotline, commenting: "Thank you for sending me, in detail, the requested information about the job contacts and accommodations in Fort McMurray." Another said: "I was offered a job with one of the companies you referred, and will be moving my family to Fort McMurray in two weeks. Thanks!"

The Fort McMurray Hotline is truly a community-based partnership service. It maintains a positive working relationship with organizations representing government, education, business, health care, social agencies, employment services, First Nations, housing, unions, industry, economic development, recreation and non-profit groups.

To reach the Fort McMurray Hotline, call 1-877-791-0979 toll-free or (780) 792-5200. ♣

## Catching Up with Old Friends

Since our first newsletter in the Fall/Winter 1988, Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has featured many Alberta clients. Where are they today and what are they going? Here are just two companies that we caught up with.

In the Summer 1989, WD introduced **Educo International Inc.** of Sherwood Park who had discovered the original bead and wire mazes we see so often in doctor's offices. Company President Kathy Klaus acquired a licence to manufacture and distribute the original collection.

Today, 14 years later, they have designed over 70 innovative models, including a line of activity table centres for public play areas, and developed a new line for Toys R Us. The Original Super Maze was inducted into the Parenting Toy Hall of Fame in 1994, and they have received 40 other international awards for their educational toys.

"Because the toy does not require language or translation, it has universal appeal," indicated Klaus. "That is part of what makes it a huge success." She also noted that the quality of their product is respected worldwide.

"WD's **International Trade Personnel Program** is excellent," added Klaus. "It has helped us to cover the substantial costs in training a new person in issues surrounding international marketing." Exports to the U.S., Japan, the U.K. and a dozen other countries account for 90 per cent of Educo's sales.

**Educo International Inc.**  
(780) 467-9772 [www.educo.com](http://www.educo.com)

**Calcana Industries Inc.** was just getting started in Cochrane developing new low intensity infra-red gas heaters when they appeared in the Fall 1990 newsletter. In 1994, they developed a second line of heaters and obtained CSA certification. Today, Calcana enjoys steady sales increases in Canadian and U.S. markets.

"Our heaters are better designed and engineered for extreme conditions than other products on the market," indicated John Vancak, Calcana president. "We offer our clients quality products and service support, including a 24-hour staffed service line."

The Sunray™ and SR Series heaters are economical and durable, generate fuel savings up to 40 per cent, provide quick heat recovery and are easy to service and install. They can be installed in industrial buildings such as aircraft hangars, depot style stores and warehouses, residential garages and ice arenas, and are being introduced into outdoor restaurant and home patios.

Vancak noted that WD's early support helped them build a stable platform that was critical to getting started. Calcana has since moved to Calgary in order to better service their clients and reduce transportation costs.

**Calcana Industries Inc.**  
(403) 777-0808 [www.calcana.com](http://www.calcana.com)

# From Fine Dining to Baskets, Strategic Alliances are Helping Women Entrepreneurs Across Alberta

by Shawna Bourke

*Alberta Women's Enterprise Initiative Association*

On opposite ends of the province two ambitious female entrepreneurs pursue their business vision. One has converted a century old church into a fine dining restaurant and the other publishes an industry magazine and runs a corporate gift basket business. Clients of the **Alberta Women's Enterprise Initiative Association (AWEIA)**, both ladies demonstrate how strategic alliances have improved their businesses and created economic development.



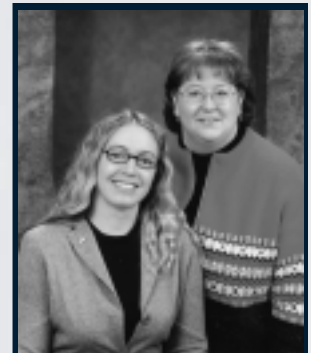
*Tidbits and Tea – (L to R)  
Loralee Jackson,  
Kevin Jackson and  
Kathy Bowtell*

Loralee Jackson, owner of **Tidbits and Tea**, started a teahouse with partners Kevin Jackson and Kathy Bowtell in 1998 in Vermillion. Their business has since transformed from a teahouse featuring light lunches, to a fine dining restaurant and local tourist attraction. Jackson's AWEIA business coach matched her up with industry mentors who served as her strategic alliances, and she now offers the same opportunity to others

through the Trans-Vocational Program at Lakeland College.

Cathy Papp has owned and operated **Basketry** in Lethbridge for 13 years. She works closely with other owners of basket businesses from across Alberta to exchange ideas in a formal alliance that encourages them to work together to achieve greater individual success.

Papp also participates in monthly Networking Links and Enterprise Circles, hosted by AWEIA Business Coach Bonnie Elliot. These events bring female entrepreneurs together to build business skills, while creating networks and referral opportunities.



*Basketry owner Cathy Papp  
and AWEIA Business Coach  
Bonnie Elliot*

***InTouch Lines of Learning Teletraining*** is a series of one-hour interactive business training sessions offered over the phone.

AWEIA joined forces with its sister organizations in B.C., Saskatchewan and Manitoba to offer *InTouch* as an opportunity for women entrepreneurs to learn from business experts and share ideas with women from across Western Canada.

For more information on creating strategic alliances through the services offered by AWEIA, visit their Web site at: [www.aweia.ab.ca](http://www.aweia.ab.ca), e-mail at [info@aweia.ab.ca](mailto:info@aweia.ab.ca) or call 1-800-713-3558.

AWEIA is a non-profit organization helping Alberta women start and grow their own businesses. It is supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada and corporate sponsors. ♣