

# ACCESS

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

July - September 2002

### Vancouver Agreement Lays Foundation for Economic Growth

*Vancouver Mayor Says Downtown Eastside "Open for Business"*

by Norine Pike

A broad range of business and community revitalization initiatives developed under the Vancouver Agreement were announced in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) on June 28<sup>th</sup>. They are helping to create a safer, cleaner, more business-friendly environment in one of that city's most historic neighbourhoods.

Stephen Owen, Secretary of State for Western Economic Diversification; George Abbott, B.C. Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; and Vancouver Mayor Philip Owen, announced funding totaling \$4.5 million in support of five new projects aimed at stimulating economic development and creating a healthy, safe and sustainable community in the DTES.

The DTES – home to the cobblestone streets of Gastown and Canada's largest Chinatown – has a vibrant history dating back to the mid 1800s. Yet this once proud working class neighbourhood has fallen into decline.

Like many urban neighbourhoods, the DTES has experienced an influx of problems such as drug addiction and dealing, HIV infection,

prostitution, crime, lack of adequate housing, high unemployment and the loss of many legitimate businesses. In fact, it now holds the dubious distinction of being ranked as one of our nation's poorest neighbourhoods.

The Vancouver Agreement recognizes that economic growth cannot occur in isolation. Complex problems – such as those experienced in the DTES – require a multi-faceted approach that acknowledges how a community's health and social well-being affect its economic viability.

These initiatives are part of a five-year collaboration involving the federal, provincial and municipal governments. Signed in March 2000, the Vancouver Agreement focuses on three main areas: community health and safety, economic and social development, and community capacity building.

*continued next page*



*Stephen Owen (LC), George Abbott and Philip Owen (RC), along with leaders of Downtown Eastside Chinese community, at Chinatown Lights unveiling.*

## ***Vancouver Agreement Lays Foundation for Economic Growth***

*continued from page 1*

### **New Programs Increase Awareness and Build Pride**

*Neighbours First* is a three-year program that will train, equip and supervise volunteers to patrol the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and keep the streets clean. The program provides training for residents and businesses about security, safety and hospitality. It will also provide visitors with greater access to information, and promotes the DTES to increase awareness among visitors and residents of the changing environment in the area. *Neighbours First* is funded by all three levels of government and several local community organizations.

The *Community Historical Markers* project builds on what was achieved through the successful joint Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) and City of Vancouver Living Footprints pilot project. The project provides street people with pre-employment training and work experience, while building pride in the area's rich and colourful history.

### **Safer Streets Improve Business Environment**

Efforts to stimulate economic development in the DTES have been hindered by adverse street conditions. In order to create a more favourable environment for business revitalization, a series of *Business Development* initiatives – designed to make tourists, shoppers, businesses and their employees feel safer in the DTES – were also announced. These include improved street lighting, physical improvements to streets to enhance heritage sites and encourage tourism, and upgrading the security of parking lots.

Economic revitalization efforts will also support training programs for Single Resident Occupancy hotel managers and tenants to improve living and working conditions. A business advisor will help stimulate economic growth by assessing the training needs of residents interested in owning or managing a business, and helping residents develop proposals for new businesses.

These projects are an important signal to the Downtown Vancouver business community that positive change is occurring. The City of Vancouver, EasyPark and community partners joined WD on these initiatives.

### **Skill Development Improves Quality of Life**

WD also provided funding to a non-profit society, the Greater Vancouver Housing Corporation, to renovate space for a *Lifeskills Centre* in the Downtown Eastside. This daytime education centre provides pre-employment skills that will help prepare people on the street for full employment. Links to health and community services – including addiction treatment, mental health services, health and education, and assistance with housing, transportation and legal issues – will help improve the prospects of some of the areas most disadvantaged residents.

Finally, WD announced funding to the *Vancouver General Hospital Society* for the purchase of new software at the leading edge of integrated patient care. The software, PARIS, tracks patients so that, no matter who sees them,

# ACCESS BRITISH COLUMBIA

information about the services they receive is known. PARIS will allow a more comprehensive approach to monitoring services and ensure that gaps and overlaps are removed in addressing the needs of people in severe living conditions.

## **Partnerships the Key to Healthier, More Sustainable Communities**

These new initiatives will build on the progress already achieved under the Vancouver Agreement in the areas of economic development, improvements to the neighbourhood, housing, and health and safety.



*Carnegie Centre at Main and Hastings – one of the most recognized intersections in the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.*

“By coordinating our efforts and working with the community over the last two years, we have laid a strong foundation for a healthy and safe community,” said WD Secretary of State Stephen Owen. “This unique partnership is giving a much-needed push to economic revitalization of the Downtown Eastside and creating employment opportunities for its residents. It puts people first.”

Western Economic Diversification Canada is proud to be part of the shared leadership that is helping create a more sustainable community and build a better quality of life for residents of the Downtown Eastside. It's a new approach to inner city revitalization that may well become an important model for all of Canada, and cities around the world. 🍁

# Columbia

WESTERN ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION CANADA

## Essential First Steps in the Renewal

by Erin Bigelow

A wide range of economic, social and health challenges have dampened the rich cultural history and economic vitality of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). Commercial and demographic changes and the overt illegal drug trade have created safety concerns, causing an exodus of businesses, residents and tourists. Hundreds of street people are caught in the chaos of this drug and poverty ravaged area, further handicapping the community's ability to restore itself.

The initial stages of the Downtown Eastside's renewal are taking root in the partnerships created by the **Vancouver Agreement**. In March 2000, the three levels of government signed the five-year agreement in recognition of the need to foster a healthy, safe and sustainable community. The broad scope and long-term nature of the agreement allows for analysis of project outcomes and the continuation of successful programs.

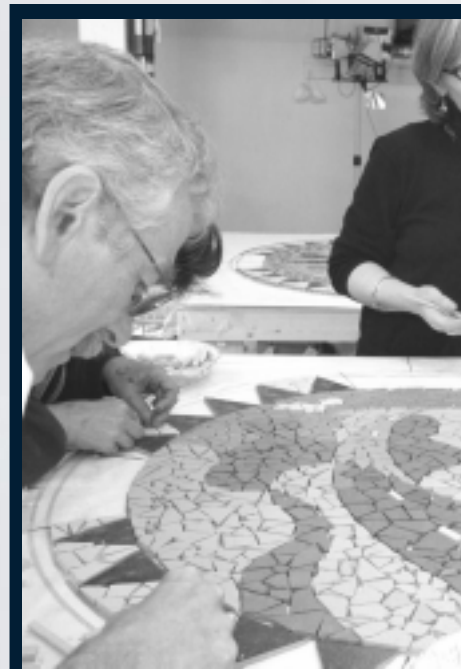
The **Living Footprints** project, an outreach initiative aimed at street-involved people in the area, exemplifies a program that combines artistic work and life skills workshops in a unique approach to community economic development. Participants are recruited off the streets to work with artists to create tiled designs that are placed in sidewalks, and to attend health and employment strategy workshops. The end result was the walking tour made up of beautiful mosaics identifying landmarks and events within the historic Vancouver townsite.

Phase one involved 170 residents of the area over six weeks in the spring 2001. The Carnegie Community Centre, the central

administrator of social, recreational and educational programs in the DTES, oversaw the creation of 17 mosaics, as well as an accompanying walking tour and guidebook. Dedicated volunteers and staff worked with the participants on the projects, and local artists, historians and businesses played an integral role in researching and creating the artwork.

The overall response to the mosaics that were placed into the community's sidewalks was extremely positive, and many called for further development of the historic Vancouver Townsite Walking Tour.

While the improvements brought about significant positive changes, program leaders observed even more dramatic benefits in the individuals. The flexible drop-in environment gave street people the opportunity to connect with support systems and meet street nurses and social workers. The mosaics provided a focus for skill development and became a source of self-confidence and motivation for many individuals to start the



*Artistic Director Jane Cameron working on a mosaic.*

## of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside



*with Living Footprints participants.*

process of re-integration. This novel project also marked the first time residents of the area were encouraged to explore and take pride in the rich history of their community.

Living Footprints was launched in August 2001 at the unveiling of the mosaics and walking tour attended by the Honourable Hedy Fry, Mayor Philip Owen, project leaders, participants and the DTES community.

While the program was successful in bringing people off the street, the end of the program marked the closing of

the drop-in centre and the end of social networks that had been formed. In an effort to build on this highly successful project, the Carnegie Community Centre requested and received funding to continue the project and explore self-sustaining business opportunities.

From February-April 2002, coordinators focused on the strengths of the first phase and worked to develop other areas of the program. Phase two concentrated on community network

development by involving more neighbourhood groups in the street beautification project. The coordinators fostered business support and increased consultation with schools and ethnic associations about the design and placement of the mosaics.

Project leaders also altered the structure of phase two to create a better support network reflecting the needs of the 100 participants. The leaders created teams which rotated through more extensive training, and individuals with personal experience on the downtown streets were recruited to act as team leaders and peer supporters. Several participants from the first phase assisted in leading the second phase of the Living Footprints project.

The success stories of individuals breaking out of the vicious cycle of street life and rediscovering their sense of purpose represent the true value of this outreach program. The project's artistic director, Jane Cameron, commented, "This program acts as a transition for street-involved people, connecting them with the necessary services and giving them the basic skills required to seek out further employment."

Living Footprints works to foster the most basic levels of economic development by increasing community control and providing street people with an opportunity to contribute to their neighbourhood, while bringing order to their individual lives.

For more information about Living Footprints, contact John Hansen at (604) 666-1136. ♣

Columbia

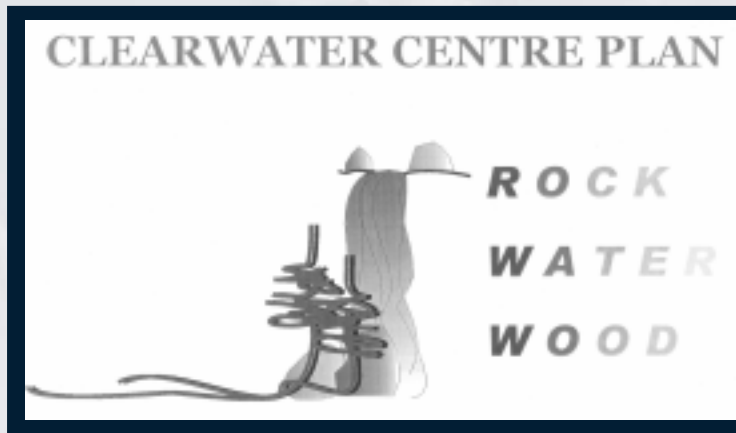
## Clearwater Revival

by David G. Morgan

The **Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) of Thompson Country** and the Town of Clearwater have embarked upon an ambitious development plan to spruce up the community. Inspired by the need to attract tourists and encourage business growth, the plan is designed to enhance economic, environmental and social sustainability throughout this small, unincorporated community of 5,000.

The plan will develop a long-term theme for the community to build on over the next 20 years that includes: zoning recommendations, improvements to building facades, an urban forestry plan, preservation of flora and fauna, and enhancement of cultural and heritage features.

Located in the rugged North Thompson Valley about 126 kms north of Kamloops, Clearwater is the recognized gateway to the geological wonderland of B.C.'s fourth largest provincial park, Wells Gray. The park is remarkable for its primordial-like features and is renowned for the Helmcken Falls, the region's major tourist icon. Its 1.3 million acres of virtual wilderness contains a mix of alpine meadows, extinct volcanic cones, lava flows, twisted canyons, lakes, waterfalls and white-water rivers that draw tourists from North America and beyond.



Despite the tourism, Clearwater remains “the most forestry-dependent community in British Columbia,” according to Thompson Country CFDC General Manager Phil Lindsay. Recent events in the forestry industry have had a hard impact upon the community, he added. The town is primarily a service centre that supports logging

operations in the surrounding forests and other communities nestled along the Yellowhead Highway.

The town has experienced modest population growth in recent years, but the Clearwater Chamber of Commerce recognized it would be prudent to diversify the town's economy. They needed to build on the community's strengths. They also recognized they probably couldn't do it alone.

The CFDC of Thompson Country, Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) and Venture Kamloops partnered with the Clearwater Chamber of Commerce to develop and finance the **Clearwater Community Centre Plan**. Other partners included: Urban Systems Ltd., the urban planning specialists who produced the final report; the North Thompson Skills Centre; and the Thompson Nicola Regional District.

# Plan for the Future

WD had both a direct and indirect role in providing funding. While WD provides general core funding to the CFDC of Thompson Country, in this case, it also provided direct funding of \$20,000 to Clearwater through the Community Economic Development Opportunity fund to kick-start the plan.

Although the product of many partners, “this plan wouldn’t have happened without WD and CFDC funding,” stated Lindsay. “It looks to the future potential of the community.”

In April 2001, local MP Betty Hinton publicly launched the plan under the banner: *Rock, Water, Wood*. One of the core concepts includes a scheme to unite four community clusters, (Raft River, the ‘Flats’, ‘Uptown’ and the highway commercial area), all with divergent features, into a single Clearwater identity.

The plan also seeks critical buy-in from local residents and businesses by facilitating community involvement. In fact, community pride is one of the outstanding characteristics of Clearwater, according to Lindsay. He described how the high school art class, on their own initiative, acquired the wood for signposts and trail markers, and have developed some of the signage that will be going up around town.

The signs, with a common logo representing a stylized Helmcken Falls and the three theme elements of rock,

water and wood, will brand the Clearwater image and direct tourists to amenities.

The CFDC of Thompson Country played a key role in the Clearwater project and is typical of the 33 CFDCs operating throughout British Columbia. These volunteer-led, non-profit organizations take a grassroots approach to local economic development. Their primary focus is job creation in rural areas.

According to the 2001 census, two-thirds of B.C.’s almost four million people now live in the Lower Mainland and on southern Vancouver Island. If this trend towards southern urbanization continues, the work the CFDCs do in the rest of the province will become more significant to the viability of rural communities.

CFDCs may enter into unique projects to meet the specific demands of individual communities, but their common goal is to build strong, vibrant communities through localized economic development and diversification. Like the Clearwater project, they all focus on integrating the social and economic needs of their communities and developing a vision for the future.

For more information about the Community Futures office serving your rural area, visit: [www.communityfutures.ca/provincial/bc/](http://www.communityfutures.ca/provincial/bc/). ❁

The common goal of CFDCs is to build strong, vibrant communities through localized economic development and diversification.

## Partnership Brings New Life to Vancouver Neighbourhood

by Norine Pike

The Vancouver Agreement brings together all three levels of government with the community in a coordinated effort to create a safer, healthier, more sustainable community in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). It has already made considerable progress toward its goals. Highlights of the accomplishments, which resulted from strong partnerships between Western Economic Diversification Canada and other organizations during the first two years of the Agreement, include:

The **Future Search Conference**, held in March 2001, brought together all the Vancouver Agreement partners, as well as a diverse range of community stakeholders. The three-day event laid the groundwork for change in the community and identified common ground for future initiatives.

The **Graffiti Removal** project helped cover the cost of removing graffiti in the neighbourhood, making area businesses more attractive to residents and visitors alike.

The **Chinatown Lighting Improvement** project saw the construction and installation of 90 historical lampposts in Chinatown. The new lighting was turned on in March and makes the streets brighter, safer and more welcoming.



Typical Downtown Eastside alley.

The **BEACON** (Building Education and Culture in Our Neighbourhood) project was a storefront learning resource centre in the DTES. Building on the success of several similar initiatives in Vancouver, the centre promoted barrier-free access to post-secondary learning opportunities for area residents.

Located at 20 Water Street, the **First Nations Creations Artists Co-op** operates a workshop and gallery space in Gastown for First Nations artists. It also offers mentoring and training opportunities for First Nations youth.

**Interurban Gallery**, currently under construction in a heritage building at 9 East Hastings, is slated to contain exhibition space, artist studios, commercial offices and shops.

A traditional Chinese gate – the **Millennium Gate** – is being constructed at the entrance to Chinatown to attract shoppers and tourists to the area. Part of a broader initiative to strengthen the ties between the DTES and downtown, the Gate will help promote community pride and build on its unique strengths.

For more information about these, and other projects being undertaken through the Vancouver Agreement, contact John Hansen at (604) 666-1136. ♣