SPRING / SUMMER 2006

Access West

The backbone of the western economy: innovation and technology

by Tom Robbins,
WD Communications, Ottawa

Simply said, innovation is the act of introducing something new: an idea that is sparked by a simple thought. It is a result of investing in people, knowledge and opportunity—making it one of our greatest national assets. In May 2002, the Conference Board of Canada stated, "innovation is a national and corporate imperative. An essential underpinning to our competitiveness and quality of life."

The same principles of innovation that sparked the industrial revolution in the 18th century are affecting us today. New technologies are changing the way we communicate, deliver goods and services, and perform our daily activities. The technological revolution is upon us.

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) is working to ensure the West remains on the cutting edge of new technologies and is a world leader in the field of innovation. In 2004–2005 alone, WD invested $53 million to support innovation in the West, improve the West's knowledge infrastructure, enhance technology commercialization and adoption, and help communities develop innovation strategies.

Innovative initiatives supported by WD cover a range of technological fields including life sciences (biotechnology, genomics), information technologies, environmental technologies, wireless technology and nanotechnology (molecular-level science).

One of WD's most notable investments is in the Canadian Light Source synchrotron in Saskatoon—Canada's biggest national scientific project in three decades. This stadium-sized facility creates beams of light that are millions of times brighter than sunlight. They isolate the microscopic nature of matter, magnifying it to the level of an atom. The $174 million project is only the second of its kind in the world, assisting researchers in the fields of biology, chemistry, geology, physics, and medicine to increase their competitive edge internationally and create new products and technologies for domestic and global markets.

WD continues to act as a catalyst for innovation in Western Canada through partnerships and strategic investments that encourage technology development and commercialization. This issue focuses on some of these investments that are generating new economic and social benefits that improve our quality of life. ■

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MESSAGE FROM *The Honourable Carol Skelton*

Innovation is a vital element in developing regional economies, capitalizing on new opportunities and accessing global markets.

The Government of Canada supports innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit in communities throughout Western Canada—ensuring Canadian ideas are setting the pace on the international stage.

Through its investments, Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) is working to close the gap between discovering new ideas and marketing them into products and services that benefit all Canadians. We recognize that science and technology are essential components of Canada's future economic prosperity and quality of life.

By investing in projects such as Canadian Light Source synchrotron, environmental technologies, telecommunications research and fuel cell technology, WD is supporting a diversified modern economy in Western Canada.

Knowledge is one of our country's greatest assets, and we will continue to work with our stakeholders, in all fields of research and various industry sectors, to ensure the innovation that stems from this knowledge remains one of the West's leading resources.

The Honourable Carol Skelton, P.C., M.P.
Minister of National Revenue and
Minister of Western Economic Diversification

by Tom Robbins, WD Communications, Ottawa

Making concepts concrete

Ideas are the essence of innovation. But the gap between taking an idea and turning it into an actual product can sometimes seem quite daunting.

WestLink Innovation Network Ltd. is a member-based organization that bridges this innovation gap in Western Canada. It supports the movement of a new idea from its initial concept, through the research and development phase, and on to a ready-for-market product.

"WestLink is all about growing skills and connecting people," says Derek Gratz, WestLink President and CEO. "It connects skilled professionals in academia with industry, accelerating collaboration and the movement of innovation from the labs and minds of researchers to final products in the marketplace."

The concept of a western Canadian universities-based network was first discussed in 1994 to enhance the technology commercialization capabilities of participating universities and to assist them in developing their own commercialization support programs. Since WestLink was created in 1999, its network has grown from 13 universities to 26 publicly funded institutions that stretch from Victoria to Thunder Bay. Network members include industry affiliates as well as publicly funded research and educational organizations.

Gratz is emphatic about the support WestLink received from WD. "Seed funding from WD leveraged a broad number of activities, which constitute the networking catalyst community that exists today. WestLink was the first of its kind in Canada and became a model for similar networks in other regions of the country."

WestLink provides numerous gap-filling programs and services that fall into four categories: networking and communication, building technology commercialization skills and awareness, commercialization facilitation and contract services.

The network also offers the Westlink Technology Commercialization Internship Program (TCIP), which was created to build technology commercialization expertise in Western Canada. TCIP is managed by WestLink in direct collaboration with technology companies, venture capital firms and research technology transfer partners. It gives participants the opportunity to gain new skills, experiences and perspectives over two years through three mentored placements at a research institution (university, college, hospital or government), a high-tech company and a venture capital or commercial financing firm.

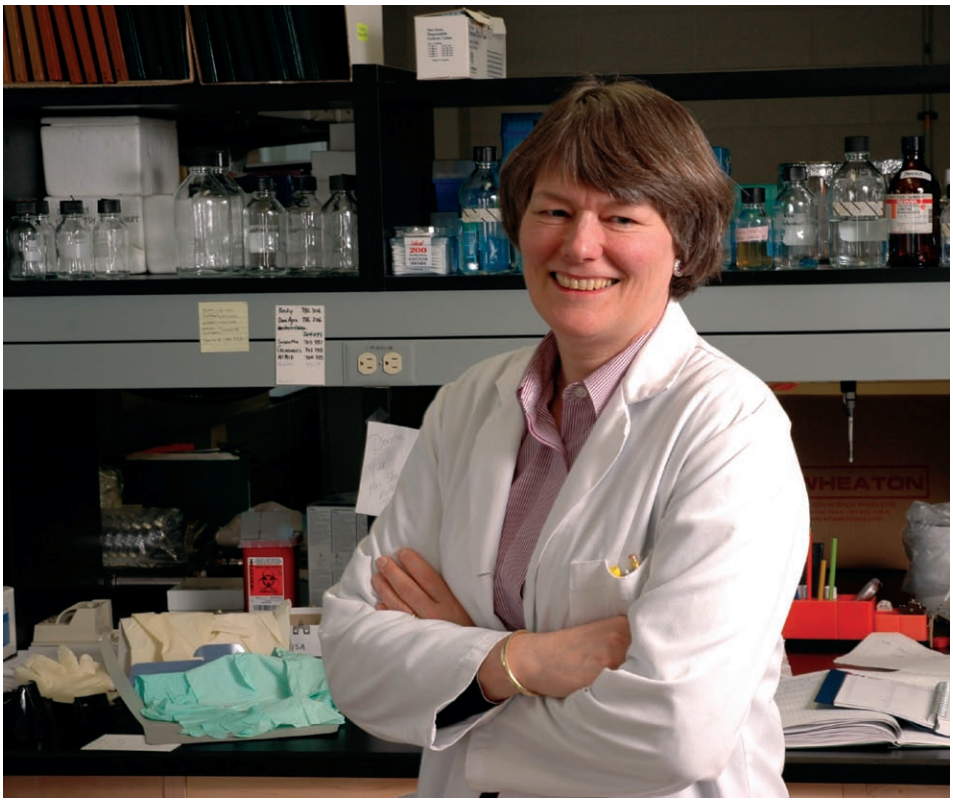
More than 75 companies have hosted WestLink interns. Successful graduates have found work in their field of choice and today make up Canada's highly trained and experienced technology management pool.

For more information about WestLink, contact Derek Gratz at (403) 974-8470, ext. 225, or visit WestLink online at www.westlink.ca. ■

The WestLink team.

by Cameron Zimmer, WD Communications, Saskatoon

VIDO finds possible hepatitis C vaccine



Dr. Sylvia van den Hurk, of the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization.

The cure for hepatitis C continues to elude scientists, but researchers at the University of Saskatchewan's Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) have developed the long sought vaccine candidate for the virus.

Dendritic cells are key parts of the immune system and necessary in controlling the hepatitis C virus (HCV). VIDO's researchers have employed a technique that uses the dendritic cells of mice to reduce the hepatitis C protein by 100,000 times in infected mice.

This is a much-needed development in the fight against hepatitis C, a blood-transmitted virus that causes liver disease and can plague victims for a lifetime.

"The vaccine reduced the amount of hepatitis C protein in a highly significant manner," says Dr. Bhagirath Singh, scientific director of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Institute of Infection and Immunity. "This offers a very promising approach to prevent liver disease caused by the virus and to ultimately eliminate it from the body."

VIDO is the first lab in Canada to show that this technique might lead to a vaccine to fight hepatitis C. Its findings were published in the January edition of the Journal of General Virology. The potential vaccine is recognized as a significant accomplishment as researchers have had trouble finding a long-term solution to the ever-changing virus.

"The hepatitis C virus is always mutating. For example, one patient can be infected with a strain that spawns sub-strains with different sequences. They are all present at the same time in the same patient," says Sylvia van den Hurk, one of the VIDO scientists who worked on the vaccine candidate.

VIDO estimates that it will take another five years before the vaccine is ready for human testing. Hepatitis C is the leading reason for liver transplants in western countries. The World Health Organization estimates that 170 million people are infected with the disease worldwide, approximately five times more than those with the HIV virus. Worse still, the death toll resulting from hepatitis C is estimated to triple in the next 10 years.

The Government of Canada's CIHR and the Canadian Network for Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics are funding VIDO's research into hepatitis C vaccines. Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has invested $5.6 million in capital funding for VIDO to expand its existing research facilities and a further $5 million to help construct the International Vaccine Centre.

For more information about VIDO and its research, phone (306) 966-7465 or visit www.vido.org. For more information about CIHR, visit www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca. ■

by Rohit Sandhu, WD Communications, Edmonton

Improved treatment gives hope to patients

When Brenda Frederick was diagnosed with cancer in the upper palate of her jaw in 2001, she knew there would be a long path to recovery. But after having undergone 12 surgeries to reconstruct the entire right side of her face, she wishes it could have been easier.

With the new Medical Modeling Research Laboratory (MMRL) at the Misericordia Community Hospital's Craniofacial Osseointegration and Maxillofacial Rehabilitation Unit (COMPRU) in Edmonton, patients such as Brenda can look forward to a faster recovery.

"The MMRL would have dramatically shortened my reconstructive treatment," says Frederick. "With the new medical modeling lab, the surgeons can look at what needs to be done and then do it."

The MMRL enables surgeons to create three-dimensional virtual and physical models of a patient's head and neck areas. Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) helped establish the MMRL by providing $999,627 in funding to the Caritas Health Group, which operates the Misericordia Community Hospital—one of three Caritas sites.

Dr. Johan Wolfaardt, a founder and director of the Caritas Health Group's COMPRU, explains the benefits of bringing this technology to the clinical environment. "Surgeons can access it directly, and to have three-dimensional virtual and physical models to look at and hold is invaluable because of the information models provide."

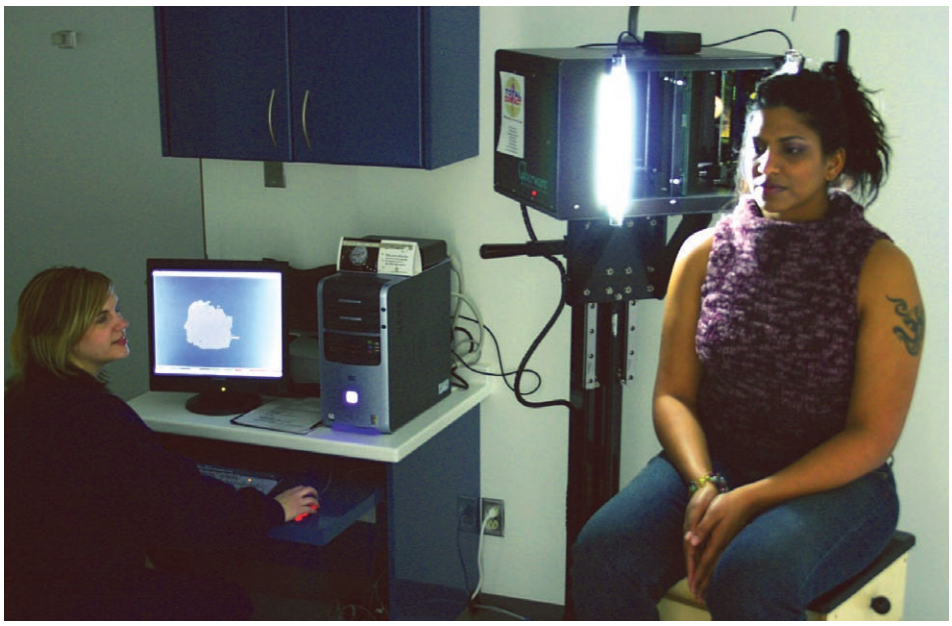
COMPRU is a highly specialized unit at the Misericordia Community Hospital that performs reconstructive surgery for patients who have suffered through cancer or injury.

The addition of the medical modeling lab at COMPRU is resulting in better treatments and improving the quality of life for patients. "We all take our quality of life for granted until it's compromised," says Frederick. "COMPRU helps you overcome the compromises you make during illness."

The medical modeling lab has been very effective in helping surgeons prepare for reconstructive surgeries and in improving treatments. "The technology is no longer seen as disruptive," says Dr. Wolfaardt. "Surgeons have become very familiar with the technology and don't want to operate without it. The medical modeling lab has also attracted specialists in disciplines ranging from computer science to the arts to explore how to maximize use of this new technology."

For patients such as Brenda Frederick, this cross-disciplinary work and technology provide a sense of hope. "So many times, patients don't have a lot of hope or positive expectations," says Frederick. "COMPRU gives them that hope."

For more information on COMPRU, visit www.caritas.ab.ca/compru. ■



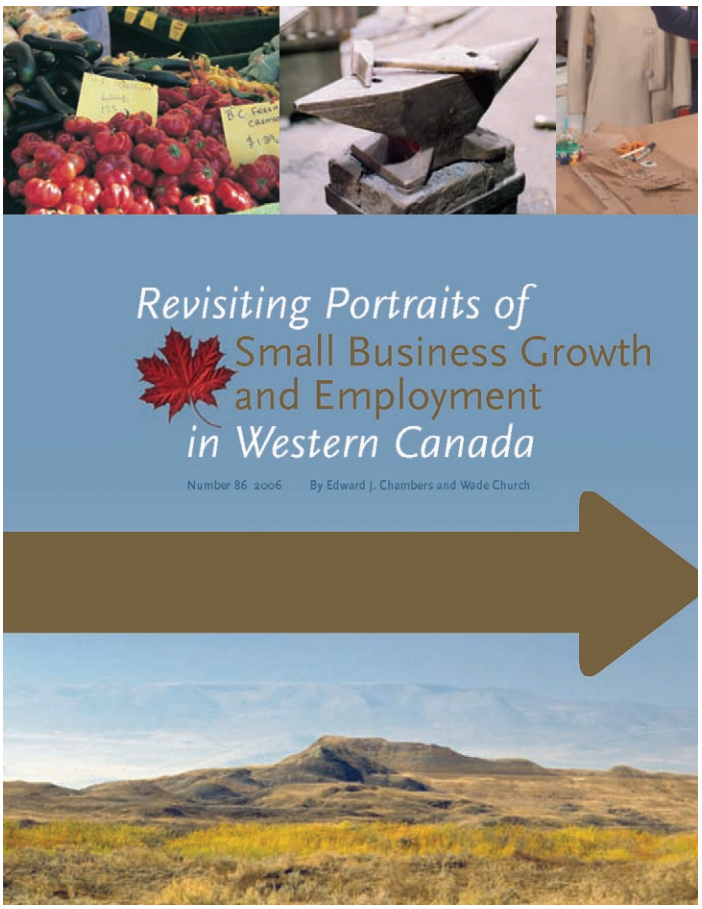
3-D Laser Scanning Station in the Medical Modeling Research Laboratory. The scanner captures non-invasive surface features in 3-D.

by Thorsten Duebel, Chief Economist, WD Headquarters, Edmonton

The role of small business in Western Canada

The economic research that is part of Western Economic Diversification Canada's (WD) mandate helps us understand Western Canada, its place in the country, the world, and its challenges and opportunities. Research findings lead to economic development policies and programs that help the West achieve its full economic potential, leading to a stronger national economy.

WD often undertakes research in partnership with external economic experts. The Western Centre for Economic Research (WCER), associated with the School of Business at the University of Alberta, is one of WD's partners. In spring 2005, WD conducted a study with WCER on the role of small business in Western Canada. This study, *Revisiting Portraits of Small Business Growth and Employment in Western Canada* (an update of a similar 2001 study), offers a sectoral and provincial breakdown of small business growth for the period 1999 to 2004.



The study places emphasis on the high technology sector and examines the roles of gender and age in the composition of the self-employed. Here are some of the highlights from the report:

- The West has a larger proportion of small businesses than the rest of Canada, reflecting the strong economic growth and entrepreneurial spirit in the region.
- Overall, rural areas in the West depend more on the small business sector than do urban areas.
- The service sector led small business growth in Western Canada, but more small businesses in the West are engaged in the production of goods than in the rest of Canada.
- The rate of growth of small businesses in Alberta outstripped that of the other western provinces, due to the growth in its energy sector.
- There was ongoing small business growth in the high-tech sector.
- Self-employment is more common in the West than in the rest of Canada. Women make up 45 per cent of the general labour force, but represent only one third of the self-employed. The proportion of self-employed over 55 years of age is twice that of the general labour force.

This study emphasizes the important role of small business in the western Canadian economy. Because of a smaller number of large firms in the region, small businesses act as a key engine of new employment, innovation and international commerce.

WD fosters entrepreneurship and business development to ensure small businesses have access to the services and risk capital they need to serve as a source of employment, growth, and research and development in an economy that is increasingly based on knowledge and technology.

The report is accessible at www.bus.ualberta.ca/wcer. Hard copies are available from Thorsten Duebel, (780) 495-8259 or thorsten.duebel@wd.gc.ca. ■

by Jitka Licenik, WD Communications, Ottawa

YouthBiz Challenge

Budding entrepreneurs from all over Canada may soon be pitted against each other in a race to sell the most ice cream and design the best advertisement.

It's called the YouthBiz Challenge, and it could be coming to an economic development organization near you.

The YouthBiz Challenge was developed by Brittany Staines, Community Economic Development Coordinator with the Sunrise Community Futures Development Corporation (SCFDC) in Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

"When I was looking at business education programs in the region, I found 14 high schools that taught accounting while only three offered training in entrepreneurship," said Staines.

This lack of entrepreneurial education led Staines to develop the YouthBiz Challenge. This business competition involves high school students working in teams to complete entrepreneurial tasks and earn the most points.

"Nobody gets fired," laughed Staines. "It's about working together, trying to be better than all the other teams."

Staines feels giving students a taste of entrepreneurship, without risk to their personal finances, is important. "I think entrepreneurs give so much to the community. They give a community local flavour. Our reason for doing this project was to help students realize their entrepreneurial potential."

The competition is also designed to help economic development organizations make important links with the local business community, the media and the public.

Students from Weyburn Comprehensive High School run an ice cream stand during the YouthBiz Challenge.

When SCFDC first offered the program to Weyburn high school students in May 2005, it was a big hit.

"The whole event ran smoothly," said SCFDC general manager Vic Plante. "Sponsors from the business community were extremely pleased with it and the school would like to repeat the event this year."

But it was more than the local community that was impressed with the program. The YouthBiz Challenge received the Minister's Award for Excellence and Innovation in November 2005.

The awards are hosted by the Community Futures Partners of Saskatchewan (CFPS), the organization that represents the province's CFDCs.

CFPS volunteer Bill Matlock said the YouthBiz Challenge won for a number of reasons. "It's a unique approach and a contemporary kind of idea. It's also the kind of thing that can get kids really involved."

Staines was excited about the award, but said the most important outcome for her was something less tangible. "What I found most rewarding was to see the business community realize how talented the students are. The average minimum wage job simply does not tap the potential that young people possess."

She now wants to share the program with economic development corporations everywhere. She plans to market the program using a comprehensive manual, which she has already developed. To order a copy, call (306) 842-8803 or visit www.sunrisecommunityfutures.com. ■

by Lee Gregg, WD Communications, Winnipeg

Conquering the digital divide

Coined in the 1990s, the term "digital divide" is used to describe the growing gap between those who have access to computers, the Internet and the skills to use information and communication technology, and those who, for socio-economic or geographical reasons, have limited or no access.

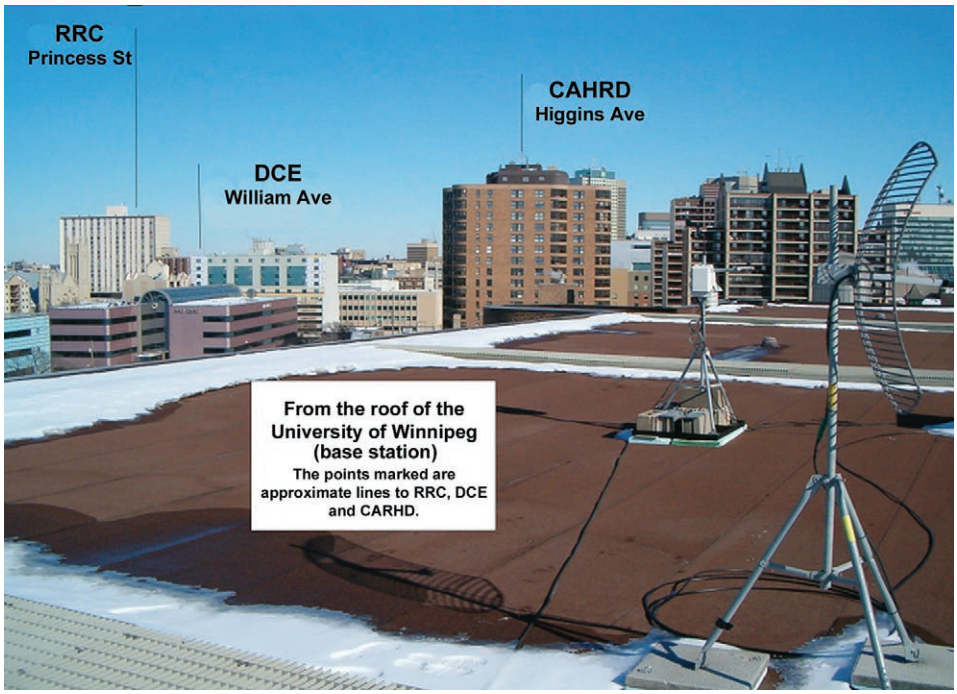
Enter the age of wireless technology. Shortly after the first municipal wireless networks began appearing, Winnipeg became the first city in Western Canada to develop its own wireless network.

With a $65,000 contribution from the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, the University of Winnipeg (UW), Red River College, and the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD) have developed a wireless corridor called Learning CITI (Learning Computer and Information Technology Infrastructure).

Mark Leggott, University Librarian at UW, was involved in planning and implementing the project and is very excited about the potential the wireless grid holds for Winnipeg. "Learning CITI will help bridge the digital divide," said Leggott.

At the heart of the new wireless corridor is a new technology called WiMAX (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access), which increases the existing wireless range from a base station from 100–300 feet to 2–10 kilometres. "We helped pioneer the WiMAX technology," noted Leggott. "It allows us to transfer data at about 12 times the rate of speed of the traditional WiFi (wireless fidelity)."

The WiMAX technology is so new that it is not yet universally available on laptops. Properly equipped systems will be available around mid-2007. For now, WiFi-enabled laptops and bridging technology will allow people's computers to communicate with the Learning CITI WiMAX system.



The University of Winnipeg, Red River College, Division of Continuing Education (UW), and the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development have developed Learning CITI, western Canada's first municipal wireless network.
Photo courtesy of the University of Winnipeg

"Individuals in the downtown area traditionally have a lower percentage of computers in the home," noted Leggott. "By focusing resources on this sector of the population, we take away the barriers of using the Internet and foster opportunities for producing community access and learning, knowledge transfer, personal development, and socio-economic development."

CAHRD, in partnership with Smart Partners of Manitoba, has set up a computer lending library. One thousand computers are available for people in Winnipeg and surrounding areas.

Broadening the wireless coverage to communities outside Winnipeg will also be explored. "The advantage of wireless is that it doesn't require the cabling associated with traditional methods," said Leggott. "This will be a very cost effective method of extending the Internet into rural areas."

What's next on the horizon? Using solar energy to power the combined WiMAX and WiFi solution—making the system truly wireless. ■

by Cameron Zimmer, WD Communications, Saskatoon

Better oil recovery

Since it was founded in 1998, the Petroleum Technology Research Centre (PTRC), located in Regina's Research Park, has developed into an international leader in finding new ways to boost oil production and enhance recovery.

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has partnered with PTRC by investing over $4 million in its construction, core research, and the purchase of research tools. These examples demonstrate how WD support is making an impact:

CO_2 storage debuts at UN Climate Change Conference

PTRC ended 2005 on a high note when it showcased its environmentally-friendly oil recovery system at the United Nations Climate Change Conference held late last year in Montreal.

Mike Monea, PTRC's executive director, demonstrated that solvent gases such as carbon dioxide (CO_2) can be injected into drying reservoirs to loosen and capture more oil. Early research shows that this procedure could extend an oil reservoir's life by up to 25 years.

This procedure is a solid step toward addressing climate change because the greenhouse gases used in the process are safely stored underground and removed from the environment. Some estimates show that PTRC's major project in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, stores roughly the same amount of CO_2 that one third of Saskatchewan cars produce in a year.

WD recently provided $450,000 through the Western Economic Partnership Agreement to enable PTRC to purchase a grid computing system that uses state-of-the-art simulators to monitor the effects of the CO_2 injection experiments.

Oil companies launch JIVE projects

The PTRC's knack for fine-tuning oil recovery methods is gaining even more support from the petroleum industry through the new Joint Implementation Vapour Extraction (Vapex) program, or JIVE.

Through JIVE, oil companies will set up three of their own field projects that test different ways to use solvent vapour to remove more oil. The process is known as vapour extraction. Waterflooding is used to extract oil in the lower portions of an oil reservoir, and vapour for the remaining oil in upper portions. The oil thins upon contact with the vapour, and flows to a lower production well, from where it can be pumped to the surface.

WD partnered with Saskatchewan Industry and Resources to provide vapour extraction (Vapex) research with $750,000 toward the purchase and installation of a 3-D scale Vapex model.

"The 3-D model will be used extensively in the JIVE program," says Brian Kristoff, a PTRC researcher who's leading the JIVE project "It will be used as a scale representation of the actual three field projects that are being evaluated."

For more information about PTRC and its research, visit www.ptrc.ca or call (306) 787-7497. ■

PTRC building located in Regina.

by Nadia Andersen, WD Communications, Edmonton

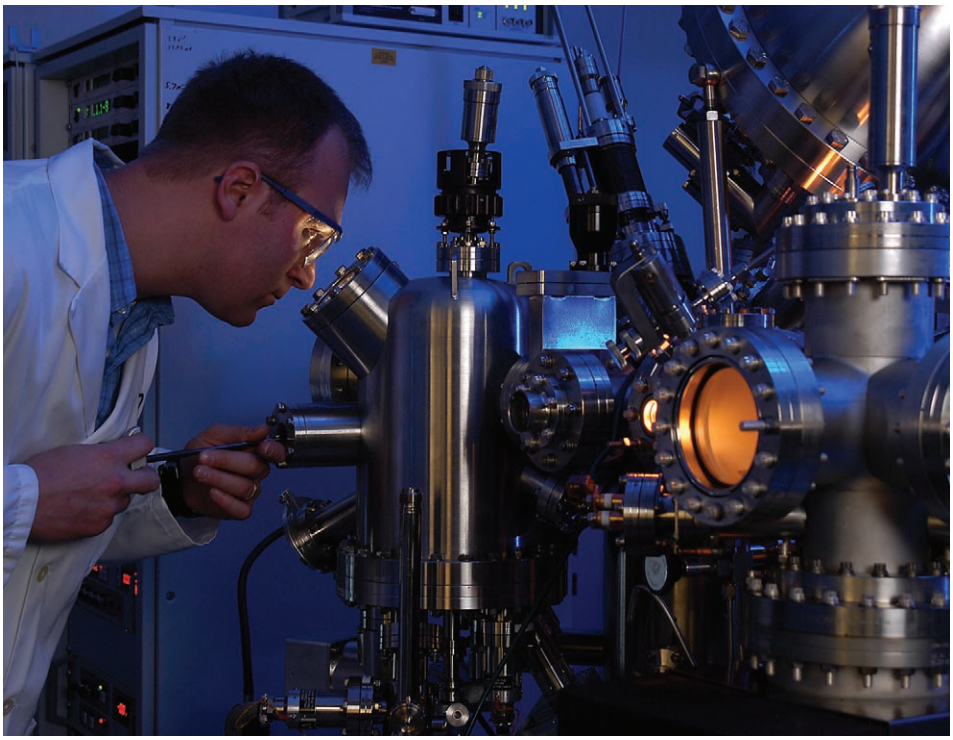
Leading a scientific revolution in all things small

Nanotechnology is on the cusp of transforming the way we live. It offers unlimited possibilities: from improving healthcare delivery to expanding our efficiency in utilizing natural resources.

In essence, nanotechnology creates tiny atomic structures, devices and systems that are able to do more because of their microscopic size. Considering one nanometer is one billionth of a metre... in nanotechnology size, or lack thereof, matters.

The National Research Council (NRC) - National Institute for Nanotechnology (NINT) is leading this cutting-edge science in Canada. Established in Edmonton in August 2001, NINT is the product of a $120 million strategic partnership between the federal government, the National Research Council, the Province of Alberta, and the University of Alberta. An integrated multi-disciplinary institution, NINT's efforts are concentrated in advanced materials, information and communications technology, energy, life sciences, and medicine.

In order to accommodate the specific needs of nano-researchers, the building was designed to be the 'quietest building in Canada,' accounting for vibration, acoustical noise, and electromagnetic interference. NINT also houses over $40 million in leading-edge research equipment.



Dr. Jason Pitters, Research Council Officer, Molecular Scale Device Group, NRC-NINT, and the Scanning Tunnelling Microscope (STM).

The combination of scientific talent and a wide array of state-of-the-art equipment make NINT a truly innovative Canadian facility. However, what makes this institute different is its commercialization facility—the NINT Innovation Centre.

Designed to be an innovation incubator, the NINT Innovation Centre integrates lab space with office space. Through the use of shared equipment and expertise, it helps companies move products from the lab, to markets, and into our homes.

Funded in part by $3.8 million from Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), the fourth floor of this six-story building is dedicated to transforming scientific discovery into marketable exports.

"Having Western Economic Diversification Canada join the other NINT partners was crucial to making the NINT Innovation Centre a reality," said Dr. Nils Petersen, Director General of the National Institute for Nanotechnology. "We all share the common goal of having a very positive impact on the local economy and the Innovation Centre will help us build a dynamic cluster of businesses that use nanotechnology."

In addition to investing in the NINT Innovation Centre, WD has contributed over $12 million to nanotechnology-related facilities at the University of Alberta's campus. ■

by Erin Macpherson, WD Communications, Vancouver

New opportunities for B.C.'s high-tech sector

The high-tech sector in Victoria, British Columbia, is booming thanks, in large part, to facilities available at the Vancouver Island Technology Park (VITP).

VITP provides the space necessary for local technology firms to grow and for new ones to locate. The Park is led by the University of Victoria and is a highly acclaimed centre for academic and biotech excellence. The 27 companies located at the Park employ over 1,200 people and directly contribute over $80 million annually to the B.C. economy.

The Park is also a working example of environmentally sensitive development in action. It was the first project in Canada and the first renovation in North America to be awarded certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™) Rating System. The award recognizes the green adaptations within the buildings, including grass and gravel parking lots, storm-water recovery systems, power purchased from methane gas conversions, public transportation agreements, bike paths, and water efficient landscaping.

"Building a 'knowledge community' requires us to provide the physical infrastructure that links regional, national, and international resources with emerging or growing hi-tech companies, which in turn will result in the economic development of our industry," said Dale Gann, Vice-President of VITP.

One of the 27 companies located in the technology park is the University of Victoria-Genome B.C. Proteomics Centre. The Centre has been in operation since 2001 and is the longest operational protein core facility in Canada, providing protein analytical services to Canadian and international academic, industrial, and government laboratories.

The 190,000 square foot facility at VITP.

"With the help of Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) and advances in instrumentation and informatics, we are making significant headway in protein research," said Patrick von Aderkas, Facility Director at University of Victoria-Genome BC Proteomics Centre. "We are able to identify key proteins in cell responses, not only during normal growth, but during stresses and diseases. These methods promise to advance research in cancer, disease and applied biology. They will also fuel the discovery of new pharmaceutical applications."

VITP is considered such a success for high-tech activity that its 190,000 square feet of space is reaching full capacity. Due to increased interest in locating tech companies at VITP and to ensure its continued success, the need to develop the Park's remaining 250,000 square foot build-out is becoming more important.

For more information about VITP and its many businesses and research facilities, visit www.vitp.ca. ■

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The Aboriginal Business Service Network helps to increase the ability of Aboriginal people to access capital, and to establish and grow their businesses. Customized business information and resources are provided through Canada Business service centres across the West.

www.cbsc.org/absn/

In Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, contact your local Canada Business service centre for referral to the nearest Aboriginal resource office, or explore the link above.

All British Columbia enquiries can be directed to the B.C. Aboriginal Business Services Network manager.
(604) 685-2330 Toll Free: 1 800 551-2276
www.firstbusiness.ca

Community Futures Development Corporations provide communities outside of major urban centres with strategic economic planning, technical and advisory services, loans to small- and medium-sized enterprises, self-employment programs aimed at youth, and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

www.communityfutures.ca

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Francophone Economic Development Organizations provide enhanced services to francophones including training, business and community economic development, access to capital, information services, marketing advice, networking and mentoring.

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