

2008 Year in Review

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Nanaimo has seen many positive changes over the past year. Malaspina University-College officially became Vancouver Island University. The Port of Nanaimo Centre, including the Nanaimo Museum and the Vancouver Island Conference Centre, opened in the heart of downtown. BC Ferries added two new world-class vessels to their Nanaimo routes and are continuing to make improvements to the Departure Bay Ferry Terminal. Other projects are underway or planned, including the Nanaimo Airport Expansion and the Nanaimo Port Authority cruise ship terminal.

The Economic Development Group (EDG) has also seen change with the addition of Sherree Walter as co-chair, and Maurice Donn and Tom Bennet as steering committee members. In 2008 the steering committee led initiatives such as the MATCH Forum, Leading EDG Awards, Challenge of Change, and protocol visits from international delegations from China and Indonesia. EDG also participated on various committees such as the Mid-Island Transportation Task Force to work on issues impacting the region's transportation demands.

With the unemployment rate at 5.9%, the lowest it's been in over 20 years, and workforce development a key focus in 2008, EDG partnered with the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance to undertake a pilot project called MATCH. According to the 2001 census, there were 3,000 Nanaimo residents living with a disability who were ready, willing and able to join the workforce. The MATCH forum brought together local employers and agencies representing persons living with a disability who were work ready. The forum resulted in open dialogue as well as successful job placements.

In June EDG hosted the Challenge of Change Forum, which highlighted some of Nanaimo's major sectors such as forestry, retail, education, knowledge-based, aboriginal economic development and tourism. Guest were informed of the challenges and opportunities each sector is facing in today's economy.

The 5th Annual Leading EDG Awards recognized leaders in the community who are working to make Nanaimo a great place to live, work and play. Recipients included BOSA Properties, AtlasTruss, Bill McGuire, Kristo Zorkin, Bill Robinson and WildPlay Element Parks.

With the help of the EDG membership, we are working on a 2009 workplan that will keep the Nanaimo Economic Development Group relevant in a changing economy. The 2009 steering committee will include Sherree Walter of Community Futures of Central Island, Jerry Pink of the Nanaimo Airport Commission, Lee Mason of the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce, Tom Bennett of TRB Consulting, Maurice Donn of the Nanaimo News Bulletin, Lesley White of Global Vocational Services Ltd., and myself of the Insurance Corporation of BC.

The Nanaimo Economic Development Group meets quarterly to discuss current issues facing the local economy and engage stakeholders in projects and initiatives. If you'd like to find out more about EDG, or attend a quarterly meeting, contact Katie Ferland at 250-755-4465 or katie.ferland@nanaimo.ca. Even during pressing economic times, Nanaimo remains one of the most desirable, livable small cities in North America.