Fish plant brings Bella Bella back to life

Northern Development’s 1,000th project helps more than 60 people go back to work on the central coast

More than 60 residents in the remote coastal community of Bella Bella are back at work after the Heiltsuk First Nation re-opened its community-owned fish processing plant in June. “This project is much more than just a fish plant – it is the backbone of our efforts to revitalize the central coast fishing and marine industry, and will be the main driver for the economy of this village,” explained Ray Gerow, CEO of the Heiltsuk Economic Development Corp. The plant was built in 1989 to support a local fishing industry, but declining profits and a lack of financial resources forced the owners to close its doors in 2007. The economic blow to the community was huge. The local unemployment rate climbed to more than 80%. “Everything tanked and unemployment in the village was extremely high,” he said.

In 2010, the Heiltsuk became confident again that the plant could re-open and generate profit. The local economic development corporation undertook a feasibility study to examine the possibility of a rejuvenated plant, which revealed new markets and strategies that could be applied to make the operation a financial winner for the community.

Western Economic Diversification, Coast Opportunity Funds, Coast Sustainability Trust and the West Coast Community Adjustment Program all chipped in to help with renovations, repairs and capital equipment costs. But the Heiltsuk still didn’t have a fully fleshed out operating and marketing plan. And that’s where Northern Development Initiative Trust stepped in.

“Through its competitiveness consulting rebate program, the Trust was able to help the plant hire highly qualified consultants to develop food safety systems, human resource manuals, operating procedures and a marketing plan to ensure a successful startup. Gerow said Northern Development’s contribution was a huge benefit to the community. The fish plant was also the Trust’s 1,000th project.”

Ray Gerow, CEO, Heiltsuk Economic Development Corporation

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Fish department stores launch new community vision

One of northern BC’s best-known small-town retail brands has been rejuvenated thanks to a Delta-based entrepreneur and help from Northern Development Initiative Trust. Jason McDougall, president of newly formed FHC Holdings Ltd., announced in May that his company had snapped up 57 Fields stores in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories.

Almost overnight, McDougall has stepped in to lead one of the largest department store chains in Western Canada, which supplies many small communities with essential clothing, toys, stationery, housewares and groceries. Although Fields has been a part of the BC retail scene since 1950 when the company first opened its doors in Vancouver, the former owner of the chain, the Hudson’s Bay Co. (HBC), said earlier this year it planned to shutter 141 Fields locations this fall to focus on other areas of its business. The closures would have left some small communities in BC with no place to purchase basic household items. McDougall, who was raised in a small town in Saskatchewan, said he was keen to ensure a successful startup.

“This whole deal is about making a contribution to the community and giving back”

Jason McDougall, president, FHC Holdings Ltd.

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Ray Gerow, CEO, Heiltsuk Economic Development Corporation

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Northern Development at a glance

$110 The millions of dollars in funding the Trust committed to 1,000 projects since its inception

5,154 The number of jobs that have been created

1,778 The number of funding partners the Trust has teamed up with to attract more than $1 billion in new funding to the region

74% The percentage of investments in communities with less than 5,000 people

$199 The millions invested in new capital and training by supported companies

2,979 The number of grant writers trained to date, including 124 First Nations

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Bella Bella’s fish plant is back in action, generating dozens of jobs thanks to assistance from Northern Development

Burns Lake welcomes the first ever contractor-supplier boot camp to help northern businesses cash in on major projects

Prince George’s Excel Transportation is championing a state-of-the-art tracking system that will help it save millions of dollars and create new jobs

Northern Development CEO Janine North writes about building capacity for the northern economy during the last seven years
Invest in northwest British Columbia, Canada

There are over $30 billion in major projects and investment opportunities planned in our region!

Boot camp to help northern BC businesses bloom amid the coming wave of investment

Northern BC is expected to enjoy more than $60 billion in capital investment in the coming years, but small and medium-sized contractors and suppliers might not yet have the tools they need to cash in on the tidal wave of capital that will hit the region. Last month, Northern Development Initiative Trust delivered its first northern BC contractor-supplier boot camp. The event was held at the Heritage Centre in Burns Lake, where the Village of Burns Lake, the Burns Lake Chamber of Commerce and the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako joined forces to attract participants from across northern BC who were keen to hear how they could capitalize on major projects looming their way.

"With the amount of industry kicking off in the north, we want to play in those markets and have a better understanding of what is required from a small businessman to do business with these multi-billion dollar companies," explained Chuck Holyk, sales manager at Net-Zero Structures Ltd. in Smithers. His two-man company was established earlier this year to focus on manufacturing energy-efficient buildings for residential, commercial and industrial sectors. Holyk believes his products can save mining and exploration companies up to 80% on their heating and fuel costs in remote camps. But Holyk and his peers face challenges of finding and hiring local businesses. "If you’re a local business with the major projects procurement departments, a regional supplier database is also in the works. The database will help major industry identify and locate local contractors and suppliers. "A group of major industries came together to discuss the challenges of finding and hiring local businesses. With the boot camp and database development, two direct actions from the industry meeting, we are on the right track to keep more business in northern BC," said King.

John Gibson, president and CEO, Prince George Airport Authority

"The air carrier group that came here is a group that operates a worldwide fleet, so to get them to actually have a commercial shipment out of here and make it work sells them on the fact that we can actually do this," said Gibson. "It also helps sell them and their freight forwarders on servicing the big projects in the region, everything from transmission lines to mining equipment, forestry equipment and LNG plants. "Rather than servicing through Edmonton or even Vancouver, it’s let’s this conglomerate of companies know we can handle this freight here. That’s huge."

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Since its inception in 2005, Northern Development has teamed up with 1,778 organizations and committed $110 million in funding to leverage more than $1 billion in project investment throughout northern BC. Nearly three quarters of the projects the Trust has funded have been in communities with less than 5,000 residents, and more than 5,000 new jobs have been created since the Trust was founded. In Bella Bella, the re-imagined fish plant has already started processing shrimp and crab. Julie Edwards, the plant’s general manager, said workers are looking forward to expanding their product line to include salmon, sea cucumbers, sea urchins and manila clams. Edwards said the plant is the first piece of positive economic news the community of approximately 1,400 residents has had in years. The facility has welcomed back some of its former employees as well as others who are entering the workforce for the first time. Edwards said her organization has adopted an “inside out” approach to mentoring and training new workers for the long-term benefit of the community. The Heiltsuk plan to distribute their products to customers throughout BC as well as nationally and internationally, and the organization is already studying aquaculture opportunities to support the plant. But, for now, Gerow said Bella Bella’s residents are just happy to be back at work. “If you walked into that plant and saw the smiles on the faces of those workers you can see the effect instantaneously,” said Gerow. “People have pride in the product we are producing, they have money in their pockets and they’re spending it, the ripple effect is huge right across the village.”

Northern Development is working with communities to get their stories out to the rest of BC

Former Business in Vancouver Newspaper assignment editor Joel McKay has joined the Northern Development team to lend communications capacity to communities throughout the region. The former reporter and Western Canadian Award winning journalist who most recently covered forestry, mining, oil and gas and the Fields brand, joined the Trust’s management team as director of communications in June. With more than $60 billion in major capital projects planned or underway in northern BC in the coming years, McKay will focus on working with communities across Northern Development’s region to help get their stories out to the rest of the world amid the investment boom. In addition to unearthing exciting stories throughout the region, McKay is also available to work in partnership with communities to help them develop comprehensive communications plans, enabling northern communities to more effectively transmit their messages to key stakeholders throughout the province. McKay will also be using his storytelling skills to write, record and publish stories for Northern Development’s website and newsletters and in media outlets throughout the province. Although he is a recent transplant to the north from Vancouver, McKay’s family has a long history in BC, including some of the original European settlers in the Robson Valley. For more information about how Northern Development can help your community get its stories out or develop a communications plan, please contact Joel directly at joel@northerndevelopment.bc.ca.
Do you have an update or personal story about a project undertaken in central and northern BC that has made a positive difference for you, your family, or organization?

An Antonov landed in Prince George in 1995, but was unable to leave with cargo because the airport had a shorter runway at that time. The runway has since been extended to become the third-longest runway in North America. Northern Development Initiative Trust loaned $11 million toward the runway upgrade, which helped the airport authority secure another $22 million in provincial and federal funding. In addition to regularly scheduled flights to-and-from Prince George to other destinations throughout BC, the airport is also marketing itself as a cargo tech stop on the great circle route of cargo flights between Asia and North America.

That business has traditionally been dominated by Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport in Alaska, but the PGAA believes a longer runway, fueling stations and other technical support will increase cargo and business opportunities for northern BC.

“We’re continuing to refine the business case for these carriers,” Gibson said. “And show them that we can pamper them here and be an alternative to Anchorage.”

To learn more about this story search this keyword on our website.

www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca

Visit our website to learn more about the many projects each of these funding programs have supported since 2005.

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Apply For Funding
If you are interested in learning more about any of Northern Development’s funding programs, please don’t hesitate to call the office at 250-561-2525 to speak to a member of our team.

Business Development
Northern Industry Expansion
Competitiveness Consulting Rebate

Community Infrastructure
Community Revitalization
Economic Diversification Infrastructure
Community Halls and Recreation Facilities
Feasibility Studies

Capacity Building
Economic Development Capacity Building
Grant Writing Support
Marketing Initiatives
Industry Attraction
Community Foundation Matching Grants
Governance Essentials Scholarship

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