



BUSINESS SERVICES FOR YOU

2008

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Small business: the power behind the western economy

Each year, Small Business Week® pays tribute to our country's entrepreneurs and their impact on the Canadian economy. And nowhere is that impact greater than here in Western Canada.

The four western provinces are home to an astonishing 800,000 small businesses, about 36 per cent of all such enterprises in Canada. These businesses employ about 2.3 million western Canadians—nearly half of all jobs in the region—and create an average of 37,100 new jobs each year.

Join Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) in celebrating the contributions of Western Canada's 800,000 small businesses and the accomplishments of their owners, whose efforts are the lifeblood of communities, large and small, across the West.

The performance of the small business sector in Western Canada dominates that in the rest of the country.

—Western Centre for Economic Research,
*Revisiting Portraits of Small Business Growth and
Employment in Western Canada, 2006*



Building the West's entrepreneurial strength

Small businesses are a major force contributing to the success of the western Canadian economy. To support this invaluable source of economic growth, WD funds a wide range of initiatives designed to improve productivity and competitiveness in the small business sector.

DID YOU KNOW...

Last year, the partners in WD's Western Canada Business Service Network:

- Responded to more than **466,000** requests for information,
- Provided more than **47,000** advisory services,
- Trained more than **28,000** clients, and
- Received more than **3.3 million** website visits and automated telephone services.
- There are **30 per cent** more small businesses per capita in Western Canada than in the rest of the country.
- The West is home to **800,000** small businesses, about **36 per cent** of all such enterprises in Canada.
- Western small businesses employ about **2.3 million** western Canadians—nearly half of all jobs in the region.
- Small businesses create an average of **37,100** new jobs in the West each year.

From market development to capital, WD works with partners—including other federal departments, the western provincial governments, industry and not-for-profit organizations—to provide access to all the resources entrepreneurs need to compete in markets at home and abroad.

The members of the Western Canada Business Service Network—Canada Business, the Women's Enterprise Initiative, Francophone Economic Development Organizations and Community Futures—are WD's primary means of providing western small businesses with information, advice and resources that will allow them to thrive.

With more than 100 points of service in western communities of all sizes, the Network partners are there to help you start and grow your small business no matter where you live.

This issue of *Business Services for You* profiles 16 western Canadian entrepreneurs and their success in local, national and international markets. From traditional retail operations to high-technology ventures, they represent the face of western small business today.

If you're interested in following in their footsteps—or if you already own a small business you'd like to take to the next level—this guide will help you find what you need to succeed. ■

Improving access to capital

One of the major challenges many entrepreneurs face is accessing the capital they need to start or grow their small businesses. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, 34 per cent of young enterprises and 40 per cent of innovative businesses cited obtaining financing as an obstacle to business growth.

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) works with a variety of partners to address improved access to financing for small businesses across Western Canada.

Several of the partners in WD's Western Canada Business Service Network provide loans for small businesses. Other partners offer path-finding services and referrals to help entrepreneurs access alternative sources of financing.

WD has also partnered with western financial institutions and non-profit organizations to

create a series of loan programs that make it easier for entrepreneurs to obtain the financing they need.

Participating financial institutions include: Vancity and Coast Capital Savings in British Columbia, Servus Credit Union in Alberta, FirstSask Credit Union in Saskatchewan and Assiniboine Credit Union in Manitoba.

The Loan and Investment Program provides patient and flexible capital on terms especially suited to the unique needs and cash flow requirements of very small businesses.

DID YOU KNOW...

Last year, the partners in WD's Western Canada Business Service Network approved **1,407** small business loans, totalling **\$65.3 million**. These loans:

- Created or maintained **8,742** jobs, and
- Created, maintained or expanded **3,447** businesses.

Most recently, WD provided \$5 million to support the efforts of iNovia Capital Inc., one of the few major seed and early stage private venture capital funds operating in Alberta.

iNovia has raised a \$107 million venture capital fund that will be invested to help promising



young high-technology companies bring their innovative ideas to market.

The new iNovia fund will invest a minimum of \$25 million in Western Canada, with a focus on helping entrepreneurs and innovators build successful companies in the information technology, life sciences and cleantech sectors.

In the years ahead, WD will continue to work with capital providers to develop additional agreements that will increase the availability of financing for small businesses in Western Canada. ■

DID YOU KNOW...

Last year, **154** loans totalling **\$15.76 million** were approved through the Loan and Investment Program.

Leveraged by **\$1.9 million** in WD contributions, the loans will create an estimated **444** jobs and generate nearly **\$57M** in increased sales

Opening up a world of opportunity

Exporting represents a particularly significant opportunity for small businesses to expand their markets and their success. To help western businesses maximize this opportunity, WD participates in several key federal initiatives that are expanding Canada's success in the global marketplace.

WD is one of 11 departments participating in the North American Platform Program (NAPP). By focusing on political and trade advocacy, market access and business development, the NAPP partnership is strengthening Canada's relationship with its largest trading partner, the United States.

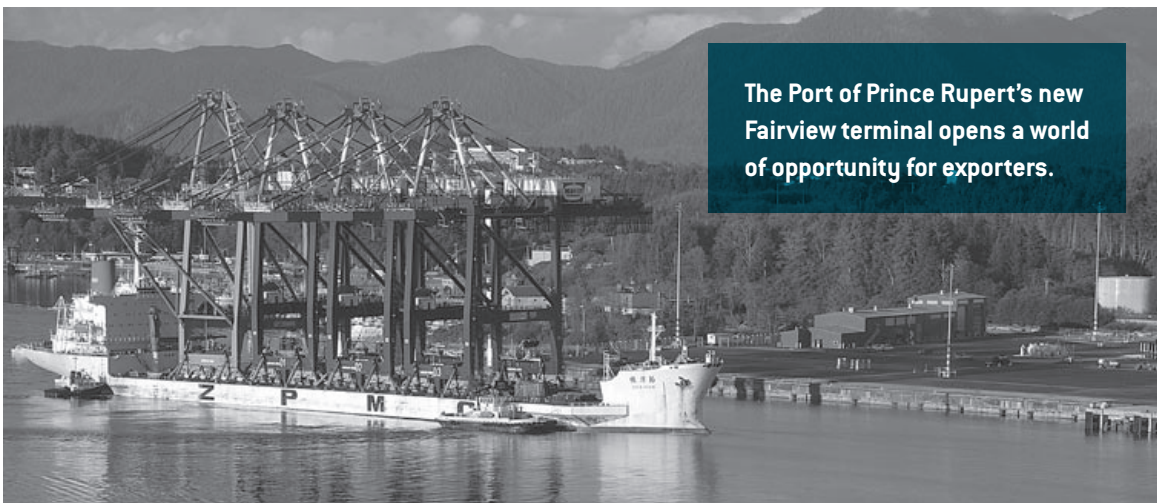
WD has also supported a number of projects under the Government of Canada's Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative. Funding provided by WD helped to create a container terminal at the Port of Prince Rupert, which is two to three days closer to major Asian markets than other North American ports.

Establishing the British Columbia coast as the preferred gateway between Asia and

North America will help small businesses and communities across Western Canada capitalize on the enormous opportunities in international trade.

WD is committed to investing in modern, world-class infrastructure to support transportation corridors and gateways that in turn contribute to increased economic activity that improves the viability, prosperity, and standard of living for individuals and communities across Western Canada.

By enhancing international competitiveness and strengthening trade and economic corridors that link the West to essential markets around the world, WD is opening up new opportunities for small businesses to grow and succeed. ■



The Port of Prince Rupert's new Fairview terminal opens a world of opportunity for exporters.

EXPORT RESOURCES

The WD website includes a wealth of resources related to exporting and international trade for small businesses. These resources include:

- **Guides:** Export primers, such as ExportSource, Canada Business's online resource for export information, including market research, trade statistics, export financing, export contacts, export regulations, and trade shows and missions.
- **Research:** Data on identifying global opportunities, such as Statistics Canada's International Trade Search, a search engine for statistics and research papers on Canadian exports, imports, trade balance and merchandise trade.
- **Programs:** Information on the Government of Canada's trade initiatives, including Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada's Canada-United States Relations website, which covers multiple aspects of Canada's relationship with the United States.
- **Networking:** A listing of Canadian-based consulates and export associations, such as the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.
- **News:** Sector and geographic updates, including Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada's Media Centre, which provides access to media advisories, news releases, official statements, and other helpful tools and links.
- **Finance:** Sources of financing for trade projects, including the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada.

Visit www.wd.gc.ca for a complete listing of the information available.

Providing a central resource for Canadian business information

Canada Business (CB) provides a comprehensive source of information on programs, services and regulatory requirements for business. They also offer a wide range of seminars, online tools and guides, and serve as the referral point for the Aboriginal Business Service Network. Located in the West's major urban centres, a network of local business organizations extends services into rural and northern communities.

Wherever you live, CB is nearby to answer your questions about starting a new business or improving an existing one.

Morning star lights the way for Winnipeg entrepreneurs

Northern Star Originals

www.northernstar.coop

In the early 1990's, a group of women began getting together in downtown Winnipeg to stitch traditional Aboriginal star blankets. Originally intended as a community-building exercise, the program has since evolved

into Northern Star Originals, a thriving business that has sold its unique creations to customers from England, Australia and across North America.

The Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre and the Aboriginal Business Service Network have helped Northern Star make the transition, providing contacts and marketing information that have expanded awareness of the little-known Aboriginal artifacts.

Star blankets have tremendous significance in traditional Aboriginal culture. The blankets' design represents the morning star,

DID YOU KNOW...

Since 1999, Canada Business has handled more than **1.7 million inquiries** from entrepreneurs in-person or by telephone. Each year, their website receives more than **2 million visits**.

symbolizing both the dawn and new beginnings, so they are frequently given as gifts to celebrate life-changing events such as births and marriages. And, because the blankets often tell a story through each diamond of the eight-pointed star, most are custom-designed to capture the purchaser's vision.

As a cooperative, Northern Star Originals is owned and operated by its five members. Their creations are available at select stores and galleries in Winnipeg, as well as through their website. ▶



Hand-crafted and custom-designed, Northern Star blankets symbolize the dawning of a new day and new beginnings for the Canadian Great Plains Aboriginal Peoples.

Saskatoon business helps alleviate western labour shortage

International Immigration and Business Consulting

<http://iibc.ca>
www.saskjobcafe.com

After completing a B.A. in Business Operations Management in 2002, Dirk Propp decided to take some time off to see the world. After visiting 18 countries, he understood how truly fortunate Canadians are and how much we have to offer.

Propp's desire to help people immigrate to Canada, coupled with the current labour shortage in the West, sounded like a great idea for a business. But, his irregular income meant the banks were unwilling to loan him the money he needed to get started. A visit to the Canada-Saskatchewan Business Service Centre soon rectified the problem and, in August 2007, International Immigration and Business Consulting (IIBC) opened its doors in Saskatoon.

IIBC specializes in growth, hiring, immigration, relocation and retention strategies for businesses. The company also operates saskjobcafe.com, an online job-matching site where companies post job openings and potential employees post their resumes. In little more than a year, IIBC has helped bring foreign workers to Canada from around the world.

In addition to their head office, IIBC has branches in Calgary and Mexico, and is planning to expand to Poland in the near future.

Family tradition pays off for Alberta entrepreneur

Nefiss Lezizz

<http://nefisslezizz.com>

Called "liquid gold" by the ancient Greeks, olive oil has been highly prized for millennia. Today, olive oil is valued both for its health benefits and for its unique taste, which varies according to the type of olives, how they are processed and where they are grown.

Mustafa Cetin of Edmonton believes the best olive oil comes from the remote state of Gemlik in Turkey, where olive trees are believed to have originated. The 27-year-old has lived in Canada since he was five, but his family has owned a farm in Gemlik for generations. In the traditional—but increasingly rare—method, the olives are picked by hand and cold-pressed the same day to preserve flavour and quality.

In January 2008, Cetin imported his first shipment of oil to launch his new company, Nefiss Lezizz, which means "delicious tasting" in Turkish. Cetin used the services of The Business Link to help him navigate the many regulatory requirements, including business licensing, Canada food regulations and label guidelines. The attention to detail has paid

off. In less than two months, the company racked up an impressive \$15,000 in sales.

The dining room at the Fairmont Chateau Whistler is one of a number of exclusive restaurants that are already using Nefiss Lezizz, and Cetin is currently negotiating to extend usage across the Fairmont chain. The oil is also available at a number of specialty stores, and a recent agreement with a major distributor means Nefiss Lezizz will soon be available at grocery stores from coast-to-coast.

Ni Ma'ma

M A T E R N I T Y

Vancouver entrepreneur makes motherhood fashionable

NiMa'ma Maternity Inc.

www.nimama.ca

It can sometimes seem as if being pregnant and being stylish are mutually exclusive. But, thanks to Teena Legris, mothers-to-be across North America will soon have options to keep them looking great throughout their pregnancies and well beyond.

Legris opened her retail maternity-wear store, NiMa'ma, in Vancouver early in 2008. Although she intended to add an online store toward the end of her second year, demand for the boutique's unique local and international designs is accelerating that schedule considerably.

NiMa'ma's entrepreneurial success is well deserved. Legris brought a number of strengths to the challenge, including a long-standing interest in fashion, a background in advertising and retail sales, and a commitment to learning everything she could about small business ownership. An online search for small business resources led her to Small Business BC, which provided information and resources that have helped the young entrepreneur succeed.

NiMa'ma, which means "my mother" in the Woodland Cree dialect, reflects not only Legris's Aboriginal heritage, but also the store's dedication to family, community and the environment. That dedication is reflected in NiMa'ma's merchandise, which includes clothing, accessories, jewelry, and organic cosmetics and skincare. ■

Referred to as "liquid gold" by the ancient Greeks, olive oil is known for its health benefits and unique taste.



Contributing to women's entrepreneurial success

The Women's Enterprise Initiative (WEI), with offices in each of the four western provinces, provides specialized services for women entrepreneurs. From business loans and advisory services to networking and mentoring opportunities, the WEI provides the tools women need to start or expand their small businesses.

Across the West, the WEI is helping women seize new, niche opportunities and capitalize on markets across Canada and around the world.

Miniature golf glows—and grows—in Winnipeg

U-Puttz Black Light Miniature Golf

www.u-puttz.ca

With two children of their own, Michelle and Ryan Davis know that parents are always looking for something new and different to do with the kids. Internet research led them to the idea of black light miniature golf, a twist on the age-old classic they were confident would make a successful business. Others were less certain though, so after several unsuccessful attempts to obtain financing through traditional

sources, Michelle visited the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba for help.

With their loan in hand, the Davises created U-Puttz Black Light Miniature Golf, Manitoba's first black light miniature golf course. Each of the 18 holes is uniquely themed, with realistic props and murals that take golfers deep into the sea and back in time.

The couple's optimism has proven to be well-founded. Since U-Puttz opened in June 2007, the wheelchair-accessible course has become such a popular destination for family outings, birthday parties and corporate events that the Davises have hired 13 employees to help handle the demand.



U-Puttz Black Light Miniature Golf in Winnipeg, Manitoba sheds a new light on an old-time favourite family outing.

DID YOU KNOW...

Since 1994, WEI has provided more than **1,490 loans** totalling more than **\$46 million** to western businesses led by women, creating or maintaining more than **4,150 jobs** in western communities.



Rachel Mielke's exclusive jewellery collection has been making a splash in the fashion world and can be seen on film and television stars on both sides of the border.

Saskatchewan designer shines at the Oscars

Hillberg & Berk

www.hillbergandberk.com

When Rachel Mielke of Regina revived an old high school hobby and started making her own jewelry early in 2005, the response was immediate. Friends encouraged her to display some of her designs at a local show, and the orders started flowing in. Hillberg & Berk was born.

Fortunately, she was well prepared. Mielke had always known she wanted to own her own company, so she had earned a Bachelor of Business Administration and was working for Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc., helping other women achieve their entrepreneurial dreams.

By January 2008 she was ready to give up the steady paycheque and devote her attention to the growing business. The timing turned out to be perfect. Mielke soon received an invitation to participate in the 2008 Academy Awards. Hillberg & Berk jewelry was offered ▶



to Hollywood luminaries at the pre-Oscar's luxury gift lounge, earning a red carpet appearance and nation-wide recognition.

Since the trip to Los Angeles, Hillberg & Berk has been featured in *Fashion* and *Western Living* magazines, seen on *Canada AM* and written about in newspapers across Canada.

The exposure has propelled the company into a new growth phase. Mielke now designs two annual collections, each with about 100 pieces, and has three employees to help with marketing, administration and production.

The Hillberg & Berk line is now carried by more than 25 western Canadian boutiques and galleries, a number that is sure to grow with the recent hiring of two sales representatives who will promote the brand across Canada. Plans are already underway to enter the U.S. market next year.

B.C. baby food line feeds growing appetite for organic foods

BOBOBABY Inc.

www.bobobaby.com

When Kalpna Solanki's daughter was born six years ago, she and her husband wanted her to eat the same high-quality, organic foods they ate themselves. With no good commercial products available, Solanki not only decided to make her own baby food, but also to start a company that would fill the gap for other parents.

After receiving a loan from the Women's Enterprise Centre of B.C., the Burnaby-based entrepreneur launched BOBOBABY—short for Bohemian Bourgeois Baby—in 2005. The company's 12 products are certified organic,

kosher and free of the top nine allergens. Each contains no added salt, sugar, colour or preservatives, and comes packaged in convenient frozen portions.

Solanki's timing turned out to be excellent. The North American organic baby food market, estimated to be \$180 million (U.S.), is growing about 20 per cent a year.



Already available in select grocery and natural foods stores across Canada and the U.S., BOBOBABY recently signed its biggest contract to date when a grocery store chain in Texas introduced the line in 155 of its stores.

All signs suggest the company will continue to thrive. In April 2008, Solanki introduced her latest venture, BOBOKIDS, at ExpoWest in Anaheim, California. With probiotics, superfoods and antioxidants, the new line features snacks and frozen meals for healthy kids of all ages.

Testing the limits of biotechnology in Alberta

Keystone Labs

www.keystonelabs.ca

When Jodi McDonald of Edmonton started Keystone Labs in 2005, she wasn't concerned about the scientific side of running her own testing laboratory. Twelve years of experience in the biotechnology industry had given her a thorough understanding of the strict requirements and standards that must be adhered to in microbiology testing.

The business side of the equation was another story though, so establishing a relationship with Alberta Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) was a priority. McDonald sought help with her business plan, and says AWE's advice and assistance has been a big help in getting her company where it is today.

Demand for her services has been strong from the start. Western Canada is home to a growing number of biotech companies, but few of them are large enough to require a full-time quality control testing lab, or to justify the enormous expense that entails. However, until Keystone opened its doors, there were no contract testing services available in the West, meaning firms had to use labs in Eastern Canada or the U.S.

Filling that gap in the marketplace got things off to a strong start, but it has been the company's precision and attention to detail that have kept the momentum going. After just three years, Keystone's reputation for quality has earned them a client list that includes companies and universities from across Canada. From cancer drugs to wound care and drug delivery systems to functional foods, McDonald and her five employees are helping to put Western Canada's biotechnology industry on the map. ■



Improving opportunities for Francophone entrepreneurs

Francophone Economic Development Organizations (FEDOs) in each of the four western provinces provide a range of services customized for francophone entrepreneurs, including training, business and community economic development, access to capital, information services, marketing advice, networking opportunities and mentoring.

FEDOs are enhancing the vitality of official languages minority communities in Western Canada and strengthening economic opportunities for francophone businesses, at home and abroad.

DID YOU KNOW...

Since their inception in 2001, FEDOs have responded to more than **51,500 requests** for information, delivered **9,500** technical and advisory services, and provided more than **6,500** training and skills development services.

European ceilings stretch for success in Manitoba

European Ceiling Solutions
www.europeanceiling.com

Replacing a stained or cracked ceiling the traditional way is a long and messy process. Now, thanks to Dany Ensminger, there is another option.

The technique, which has been employed in Europe for some time, involves stretching a fire-, water- and stain-resistant material over a PVC frame to create a false ceiling that can be installed in only a few hours.

Not only does the process avoid the mess of removing the old ceiling, it also offers design benefits. The material is available in hundreds of different colours, finishes and patterns, and architectural details like arches or vaulted ceilings can easily be created.

Ensminger founded his company, European Ceiling Solutions, when he moved to St. Anne, Manitoba from France in 2005. Since then, he has worked with the Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba to market the company and its innovative products.

The entrepreneur says the stretched-ceiling technique is ideally suited to the climate in Canada, where wide temperature variations cause houses to shift and crack over time. With European Ceiling Solution, cracks will never recur.

As awareness of the new ceiling solution has grown, so has the company. Ensminger currently has two to three employees, depending on the workload, and is planning to hire a sales representative in the near future.



European Ceiling Solutions provides a simple, hassle-free, yet elegant solution to the traditional ceiling replacement process.

Saskatchewan business has the key to success

CherLock & Safe Inc.
www.cherlocknsafe.com

When Cheryl Gareau started working as a bookkeeper for a locksmith, she was like many people who think locksmiths just cut keys. Once she learned how much more there is to it, she was hooked.

Gareau's curiosity led her to Alberta to complete her four-year locksmithing certificate and then back to Saskatchewan to visit the Conseil de la Coopération de la Saskatchewan for help with the business plan she needed to

secure a bank loan. The young entrepreneur—believed to be the province's only female journeyman locksmith—opened her business, Cherlock & Safe, in Prince Albert in April 2008.

It hasn't all been smooth sailing. On the very first day of classes, Gareau gave her classmates some hands-on experience when she locked her keys in her car. Knowing it can happen to anyone has made Gareau patient with the more routine aspects of her job, but she most looks forward to helping in more serious situations, such as when a child accidentally gets locked in a car in frigid winter weather or a family needs to re-key their locks after a break-in. ▶

Vancouver entrepreneur helps businesses win on the web

Que Sacco

www.quesacco.com

If you're looking for an online cooking class, Google can provide you with nearly two million options. But you'll find 911cheferic.com right at the top of the list. Why? Because the company is one of many that has benefitted from Frédérique Niel's expertise in web marketing.

Niel's Vancouver-based company, Que Sacco, offers fully bilingual services in web design, marketing and strategic consulting to help clients maximize their visibility and increase their success on the Internet.

In southern France, "que sacco" is slang for "what's new." The expression reflects both Niel's French heritage and Que Sacco's commitment to providing clients with innovative, cutting-edge solutions in new media.

Like many first-time entrepreneurs, Niel had her doubts when she started her business. But in 2002, she became an inaugural member of the Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique's (SDECB) Femmes group, which provides a forum for women entrepreneurs to share ideas and discuss the challenges of small business ownership.

The group gave Niel the confidence to forge ahead, and she now consults for the SDECB, helping other small business owners create effective websites and increase their profile on the Internet.



Ladybug Organic's delicious treats bring new meaning to "have your cake and eat it too."

Organic bakery brings European tradition to Alberta

A Ladybug Organic Foods & Belgium Bakery

When Marie Ghesquiére opened her bakery at the Calgary Farmers' Market in 2004, she was continuing an old tradition. The Ghesquiére family has been in the business as far back as 1792.

A Ladybug Organic Foods & Belgium Bakery began by offering Belgian waffles and authentic French pastries in the traditional Parisian



Cheryl Gareau, Saskatchewan's only female journeyman locksmith, launched Cherlock & Safe in Prince Albert in May 2008.



style. Produced from organic ingredients and free of trans fats, genetically modified organisms, vegetable and animal fats, the delicacies soon earned a loyal following. Since then, Ladybug Organic has expanded its product line to include organic breads and frozen products.

Le Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta not only helped the entrepreneur prepare her business plan for the bakery, they have also provided consulting services for her most recent venture—a restaurant that Ghesquiére and her son will open this Fall.

The restaurant, which will feature baked goods, breakfast barista lattes and hamburgers, will source many of its ingredients from local farmers. ■

Helping rural businesses compete

Community Futures (CFs) help foster rural entrepreneurship by providing business development loans, technical and advisory services, and self-employment assistance programs. To provide local access to e-training seminars and workshops, a video-conferencing network links communities across each of the western provinces. In addition, CFs offer customized services for youth and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Business by business, town by town, Western Canada's 90 CFs are creating new opportunities and new prosperity.

DID YOU KNOW...

Since 1995, CFs have provided **21,000 loans** totalling **\$620 million** to rural western businesses, creating or maintaining more than **63,500 jobs** in western communities.

Angling for success in Manitoba

Northern Angler

www.northernangler.mb.ca

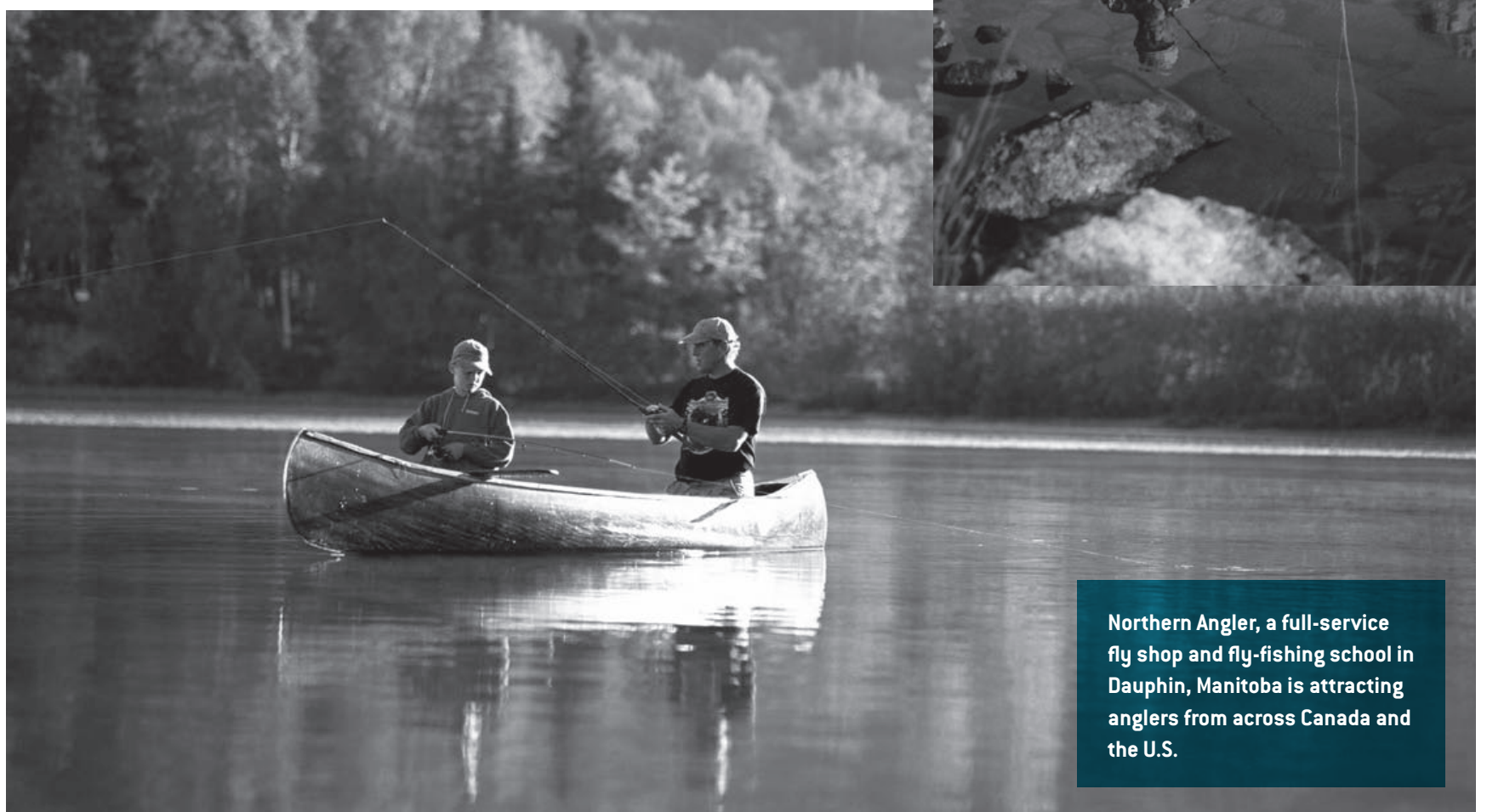
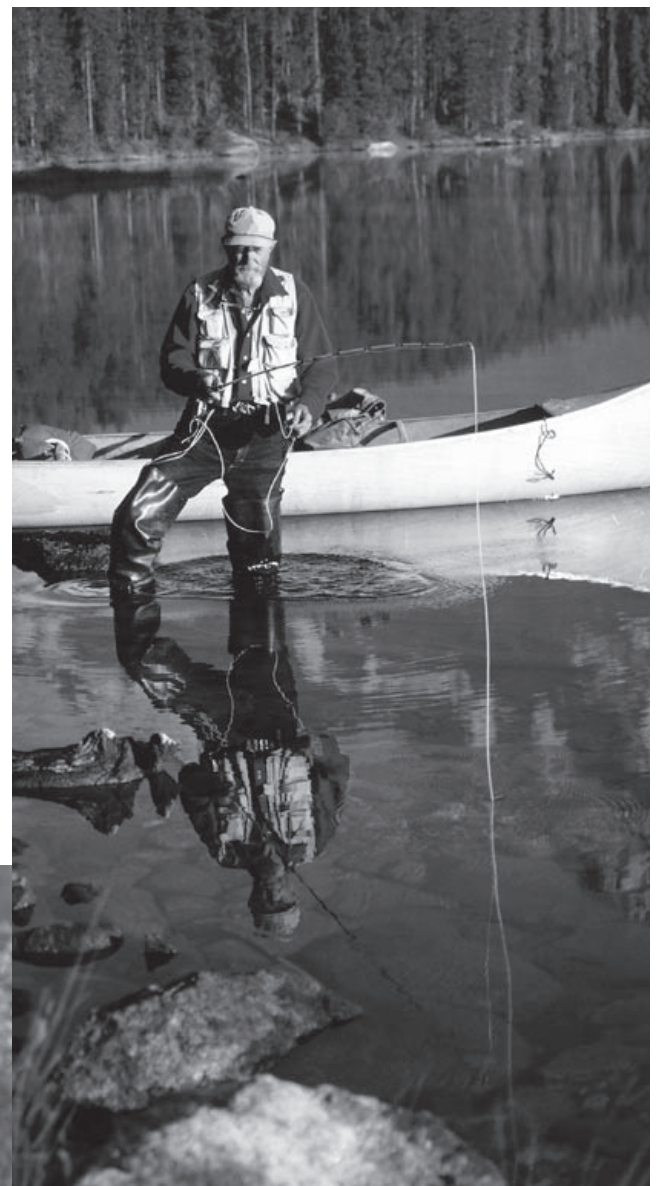
Manitoba's Parkland region is a fly-fisher's paradise. Known for its deep, clear lakes and fast-running streams, Parkland holds the provincial records for brook trout, brown trout and rainbow trout, and is home to some of the best walleye fishing in the world.

John and Tracy Yury are extremely familiar with the area and with the allure of flyfishing. Since 1995, they have operated Northern Angler, a full-service fly shop in Dauphin that also sells products through its website. The sport's increasing popularity has brought in Internet orders from countries as distant as England, China and Germany.

Flyfishing is, however, notoriously challenging to master, so the Yurys saw an opportunity to increase their success by offering lessons and guided tours.

With assistance from Community Futures Parkland, the couple opened a certified flyfishing school and licensed guiding operation, which now brings avid anglers of all skill levels from across Canada and the U.S.

The influx of tourists has not only brought new business to Northern Angler, but also to numerous other businesses throughout the Parkland region. ▶



Northern Angler, a full-service fly shop and fly-fishing school in Dauphin, Manitoba is attracting anglers from across Canada and the U.S.

Maggie and Doug Deconinck-Smith's children proudly display their medieval castle



Saskatchewan couple thinks outside the box

EverBuild Imagination Accessories Inc.

www.everbuildcrafts.ca

Anyone who has ever given a child a gift, only to see the contents ignored in favour of its package, knows the allure that cardboard boxes hold for children. That experience gave Maggie and Doug Deconinck-Smith of D'Arcy, Saskatchewan the seed of an idea for their own business—craft kits that could be used to transform empty boxes into themed playhouses, providing hours of imaginative play.

The couple hired Saskatoon artist Huw Evans, whose work has been featured in MAD magazine, to create the designs, which are then printed on heavy, glossy paper. Children can cut out pieces representing windows, doorframes and other elements, and then position them to create a medieval castle, a fairy tale cottage or a puppet theatre.

The Deconinck-Smiths also visited the Meridian Community Futures Development Corporation, which provided advice and a loan, helped with the business plan and lent the couple a display booth, which they used to debut EverBuild Imagination Accessories Inc. at a Toy and Hobby Fair in Toronto early in 2007.

The toy industry is a notoriously difficult business to break into, but the budding entrepreneurs have already placed their craft kits in a number of toy and appliance stores in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The products are also available through their website.

Alberta couple competes in international computer games market

HermitWorks Entertainment Corporation

www.hermitworksentertainment.com

When Cameron and Marcia Tofer met during their junior high school days in Grande Prairie, they had no idea how closely their futures would be bound. The pair not only ended up marrying, they also founded HermitWorks Entertainment Corporation together in 2004.

HermitWorks specializes in creating computer games that serious and casual gamers can play together. After receiving advice and funding from Community Futures Grande Prairie, the company released its first game title, *Space Trader*, in August 2007.

Space Trader is a new style of competitive-cooperative game where players compete in a fictitious future universe. The goal is to make as much money as possible by leasing cargo ships, traveling to planets and trading with merchants that sell different commodities. Finding successful trade routes between these merchants is one of the key strategic elements of the game. Available through the company's website, the game is highly-rated by avid gamers from around the world.

HermitWorks, which now has 15 employees, will release a new version of *Space Trader* in October. The title will be available in stores across North America and in the U.K.

BC educator performs for international audiences

Crazy for Life Co.

www.victoriamaxwell.com

According to Statistics Canada, people with disabilities start businesses at almost twice the rate of the general population. Health educator Victoria Maxwell has chosen that route herself, but she also hopes her business will make the traditional workplace more accepting and responsive to people with mental disabilities.

Maxwell understands the challenges better than most. Her foray into entrepreneurship followed a long struggle with bipolar disorder that ended a successful acting career. Re-channeling her creativity, Maxwell wrote *Crazy for Life*, a one-woman show about living with mental illness that she performs for corporations, health associations, colleges and universities.

The show is combined with customized seminars to educate organizations about the stigma and prejudices associated with mental illness, and help them respond to issues such as depression in the workplace.

The creative aspects of her new job came easily, but to help master the business end of entrepreneurship, Maxwell completed the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program through Community Futures Sunshine Coast in 2005. Since then, she has performed *Crazy for Life* and her second show, *Funny... You Don't Look Crazy?!*, before audiences around the world. ■



Victoria Maxwell is educating audiences around the world on mental illness and recovery through her one-woman stage show *Crazy for Life*.

Helping the West's small businesses succeed

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), a department of the Government of Canada, supports small businesses across Western Canada by providing access to the information and resources they need to succeed.

A click away

WD's website offers a wide range of online guides and tools, from start-up information and interactive business planning to information on regulations and advice on reaching out to larger markets through the Internet.

The website also provides access to economic research and market studies, funded by WD to improve the understanding of Western Canada's economy, and the challenges and opportunities facing the region. Small business owners will find valuable information on topics such as start-up and growth trends, comparative business costs and export opportunities.

In your community

WD's Western Canada Business Service Network is a unique partnership of organizations that provide entrepreneurs with the

products and services they need to establish a business or make it grow.

Together, the Network partners—Canada Business, the Women's Enterprise Initiative, Francophone Economic Development Organizations and Community Futures—provide more than 100 points of service across the West, where small business owners can access invaluable resources to help them succeed.

From creating business and marketing plans, to accessing financing or expanding into export and e-business markets, Network staff can help make it happen.

To ensure small business ownership is an option for all western Canadians, WD also supports the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program. The program provides western

Canadians with disabilities access to a wide range of customized resources, including business information, training and development, mentoring, one-on-one counselling services and business financing.

Available through Community Futures in rural areas and independent not-for-profit organizations in the West's urban centres, the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program is helping people with disabilities start and build their own small businesses. ■

Across the West, WD is there, working with and for western Canadians to increase the number, size and success of the western small businesses.

To find out more about how Western Economic Diversification Canada and its partners can help your small business, visit our website at wd.gc.ca. ■

Western Canada Business Service Network Directory

Discover how our Business Service offices can assist you with starting or growing a business.

1-888-338-WEST (9378)

Canada Business

www.canadabusiness.ca

Small Business BC

(604) 775-5525 Toll Free: 1-800-667-2272

Small Business Victoria

(250) 384-1516

The Business Link (Alberta)

(780) 422-7722 or (403) 221-7800

Toll Free: 1-800-272-9675

Canada-Saskatchewan Business

Service Centre

(306) 956-2323 Toll Free: 1-800-667-4374

Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre

(204) 984-2272 Toll Free: 1-800-665-2019

www.canadabusiness.ca/absn

Toll-free: 1-888-576-4444

Or, contact Canada Business for a referral to the nearest Aboriginal resource office.

Women's Enterprise Initiative

Women's Enterprise Centre

(250) 868-3454 Toll Free: 1-800-643-7014

www.womensenterprise.ca

Alberta Women Entrepreneurs

(780) 422-7784 or (403) 777-4250

Toll Free: 1-800-713-3558

www.awebusiness.com

Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc.

(306) 477-7173 or (306) 359-9732

Toll Free: 1-800-879-6331

www.womenentrepreneurs.sk.ca

Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba

(204) 988-1860 Toll Free: 1-800-203-2343

www.wecm.ca

Francophone Economic Development Organizations

Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique

(604) 732-3534 Toll Free: 1-877-732-3534

www.sdecb.com

Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta

(780) 414-6125 Toll Free: 1-888-414-6123

www.lecdea.ca

Conseil de la Coopération de la Saskatchewan

(306) 566-6000 Toll Free: 1-800-670-0879

www.ccs-sk.ca

Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba

(204) 925-2320 Toll Free: 1-800-990-2332

www.cdem.com

Community Futures

www.communityfutures.ca

Community Futures British Columbia

(604) 685-2332

Community Futures Alberta

(403) 851-9995

Community Futures Saskatchewan

(306) 260-2390

Community Futures of Manitoba

(204) 943-2905

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