

ACCESS

ALBERTA

October - December 2004

Alberta Small Business – Foundation for the Future

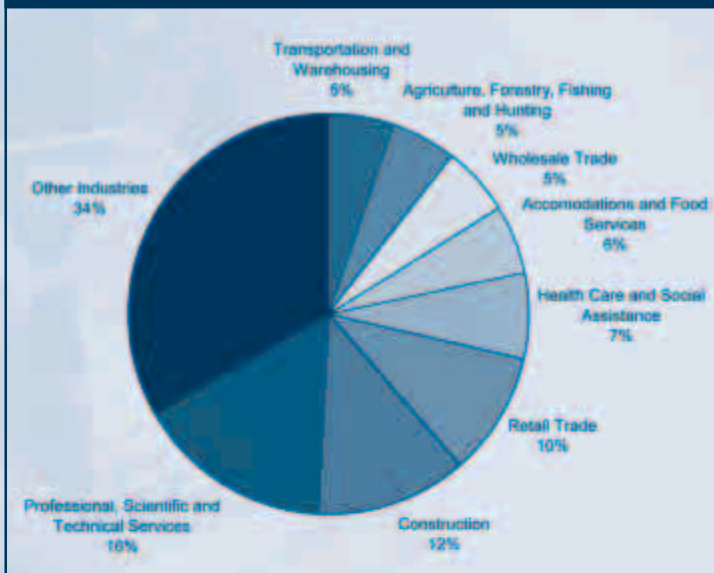
by Kent Dixon

Behind every successful business lies an innovative idea with the potential to develop into a new product or service, while creating jobs and serving a need. Canadian entrepreneurs are highly skilled at capitalizing on new ideas and turning them into viable small business concepts.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the foundation of the Canadian economy. According to Statistics Canada's December 2000 Business Register, SMEs comprise 99.7 per cent of the one million employer businesses in Canada, with 12.6 per cent of these located in Alberta.

Alberta SMEs are thriving largely due to consistent population growth. Although natural resources continue to be a

Percentage of Small Business in Alberta by NAICS Classification,
June 2003 (Source: Canadian Business Patterns, Statistics Canada 2003)



primary industry for SMEs, knowledge-based businesses increase every year as entrepreneurs see the opportunity and need to expand beyond more traditional natural resource initiatives. The knowledge-based sector will drive the economy of Alberta through the 21st Century.

The Alberta economy is based on diversity and a spirit of entrepreneurship. That spirit is celebrated

during Small Business Week, marking its 25th anniversary in 2004. Small Business Week, an initiative of the Business Development Bank of Canada, exists due to partnerships with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, local and national sponsors such as Western Economic Diversification Canada. Small Business Week enables the Department to highlight its dedication to entrepreneurship across the West. ♣

The Bonjours Welcome European Visitors to Alberta

by Sherry Brownlee

Have you ever gone on holidays, become enchanted with the place and dreamt of staying on forever? For Jean-Claude Bonjour and his wife, Liliane Vallotton Bonjour, opening **Chipmunk R.V.** in Strathcona County was just such a dream come true.

After 14 years of coming every summer from Switzerland to Alberta to holiday, they knew they wanted to make a permanent move – one that would allow them the pleasure of sharing Alberta's beauty with others. Jean-Claude explains, "It got to the point where we bought an RV here and were planning the next year's visit on the flight home."

With that kind of passion for Alberta a plan was born, and Jean-Claude and Liliane decided they wanted to immigrate to Alberta and set up a small recreational vehicle (RV) rental company to allow other French-speaking Europeans to experience the pleasures of vacationing in the province.

"We wanted other people who didn't know about Alberta to get to know it," explains Liliane. "We know how magnificent it is and we wanted to share it."

Setting up a business in another country and immigrating to run it requires significant paperwork and expertise. For guidance they



Jean-Claude Bonjour and Liliane Vallotton Bonjour opened Chipmunk R.V. to help French-speaking international visitors enjoy the Alberta tourism experience.

approached Frank Saulnier, président-directeur général of **La Chambre économique de l'Alberta**. Saulnier provided advice to them throughout the lengthy process and helped them successfully set up Chipmunk R.V.

Now, Jean-Claude and Liliane offer visitors from abroad more than just access to an RV. They ensure their clientele fully enjoy Alberta's natural treasures. To achieve this, Jean-Claude and Liliane act as personal hosts and meet all their guests at the airport, transporting them to their artisan-crafted log home where they offer Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This exceptional home features locally crafted wardrobes and side tables, and a wonderful selection of Canadian art on the walls. Before the

visitors head out exploring, Jean-Claude and Liliane take the time to familiarize them with their RV, as well as provide maps and trip planning assistance.

For these new Canadians, sharing their love for the place they now call home is no longer just a dream; it is a way of life.

You can reach Chipmunk R.V. at (780) 416-6300 or check out their Web site (French only) at: www.chipmunkrv.com. 🍁

There's More to See in Drumheller Than Just Dinosaurs!

by Drumheller Regional Chamber of Development and Tourism

Erosion uncovered the bones of the once-abundant dinosaurs in the Badlands of central Alberta, making the region world famous for its dinosaur finds. The Royal Tyrrell Museum has recreated the earth's spectacular history and diversity of life, but they haven't cornered the market on unique tourist attractions in Drumheller.

Descendants of these prehistoric creatures are alive and well at **Reptile World**, a zoo featuring over 85 species of reptiles and amphibians.

Owner Dave Bethel relocated his business to Drumheller in 1989 to increase its exposure to tourist traffic visiting the area. Reptile World has since become one of the most recognizable business success stories in the city, having hosted over half a million visitors from Canada and around the world.

Bethel says the success of the zoo is due to the heavy emphasis on education programs, a commitment to providing excellent customer service and creating a memorable experience for visitors.

Fred, a 600 lb. American alligator, and Brittany, a boa constrictor, are just two of the famous residents that make a visit memorable. Visitors can view various species, such as: Poison Arrow frogs, an Emerald Tree boa, Pythons, Gila Monsters, Bearded Dragons, various snakes and much more. They can also observe the keeper feeding Fred, have an opportunity to hold Brittany and watch snake eggs hatching at one of the displays.

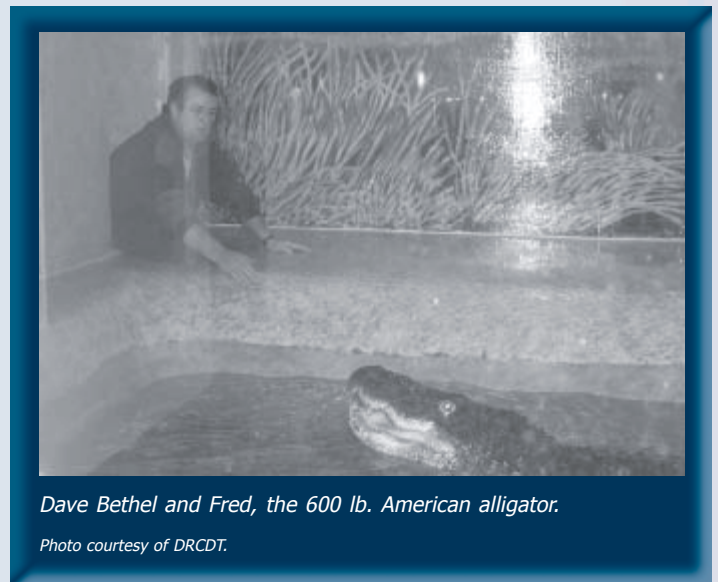
Working with reptiles such as these can be intimidating, but for Bethel it's all in a day's work. "Reptiles are actually very gentle. They will harm you only if they feel

threatened. They just want to be treated gently and with the same respect as you and I."

The business also continues to grow with several areas of expertise, not to mention the new world-class 18,000 square foot facility it moved into in June. Public education, conservation and a captive breeding program are also important roles in preserving the fast disappearing reptile kingdom.

The **Drumheller Regional Chamber of Development and Tourism (DRCDT)** — a Community Futures office — assisted Bethel with a business loan for renovations and construction of new animal displays.

For more information about Reptile World, call (403) 823-TOAD.♣



Dave Bethel and Fred, the 600 lb. American alligator.

Photo courtesy of DRCDT.

The 2005 Search Begins for Alberta Business Excellence!

Are you an Alberta business that has achieved a standard of excellence as a small business or implemented an outstanding marketing campaign? Are you a First Nations-owned business or an employer of persons with disabilities?

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce is looking for Alberta individuals and organizations that excel in 14 different categories of business excellence such as those above for the 2005 **Alberta Business Awards of Distinction**.

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has been proud to support this annual celebration of Alberta business excellence for eight years. WD places a high priority on ensuring that western Canadian companies maximize their export potential and capitalize on a world of opportunities. The Department has developed its award criteria and reviews the nominations for the **WD Export Award of Distinction** that recognizes innovative Alberta businesses that are helping to set the pace of the global economy.

The export award is presented annually to an organization that has: demonstrated outstanding achievement in exporting products, services or technology outside Canada's borders; employed an innovative and/or creative market entry strategy; and made increases in exports over the past three years or maintained their position in export markets during difficult economic times.

Award recipients reap many benefits. Increased credibility in the eyes of their international customers or partners. Enhanced reputation in the Alberta business community and their industry sector. A boost in workplace pride and staff morale that leads to gains in productivity. And, just entering a nomination for the award assists your business to focus clearly on strategies for business growth and export expansion.

"The Alberta Business Awards of Distinction pay tribute to risk takers – those who have the courage to chart their own course, those with an innate capacity to persevere in the face of adversity, and those who inspire others to achieve excellence."

*Irene Pfeiffer
Past President of the Alberta
Chambers of Commerce*

To learn more about WD's Export Award or the 13 other award categories, their criteria and how to submit a nomination, visit www.abbusinessawards.ab.ca. Deadline for nominations is November 15, 2004. ♦

Alb

Ask the Expert!

by Linda Chorney
The Business Link Business Service Centre

Ever wondered what professional expertise could do to help your small business succeed? **The Business Link Business Service Centre** works with the private sector to provide Alberta entrepreneurs with free, basic professional advice through its **Guest Advisor Program**.

Lawyers, accountants, management consultants, financial reps and e-business experts volunteer their time to discuss business concerns with clients. Each weekday afternoon in the spring and fall, a representative from a particular field is available at The Business Link to provide confidential, one-on-one consultation over the phone or in person.

You can also send an enquiry via e-mail and connect with one of our guest advisors on any given topic. The service is provided without cost or obligation, on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Guest Advisor Program introduces clients to a variety of business services available through the private sector and provides insight into how working with a professional can assist a small business operator. In the past two seasons, 425 clients were served through this program, just one of many services offered by The Business Link to entrepreneurs.

Ravind Prasad of Progressive Rehabilitation Solutions Inc. appreciated the opportunity to connect with one of our volunteer lawyers about his Edmonton-based business. "Not only was I reassured that I was on the right track as far as licensing and legalities," commented Prasad, "but it was an opportunity for me to make some great contacts as well." He added that this type of service, and many of the other services offered by The Business Link, have been very helpful and cost efficient — of particular importance to a one-person operation.

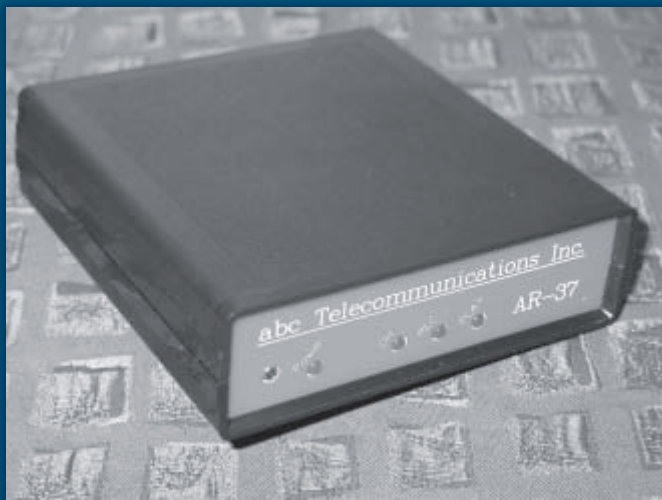
On the other side of the coin, our guest advisors also appreciate the opportunity to help Business Link clients. "The Guest Advisor Program provides a wealth of useful business information for entrepreneurs," remarked one of our legal guest advisors, Denise Prokopiuk of Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP. "I have really enjoyed helping business owners resolve many of the legal issues they face when starting or operating a business."

The Business Link is Alberta's primary Canada Business Service Centre, supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada and Alberta Economic Development to provide information and assistance to Alberta's small business community. ♦

erta

The ABC's of Success

by Kent Dixon



The AR-37 solid-state digital receiver is the only one of its kind designed and manufactured in Canada.

An estimated 70 per cent of all business callers are put on hold, 60 per cent of whom will hang up, and 30 per cent of those who hang up never call back. With statistics like these, the front line of any organization becomes vital in providing contact with clients and customers.

Edmonton-based **abc Telecommunications Inc.** delivers “on hold” information messaging services to a variety of clients including schools, community offices and other businesses, ensuring their customers are exposed to a consistent and professional image. A full-service provider for more than eight years, the company offers a complete package including scripting, voice-overs, licensed music, broadcast quality production, playback equipment with complete support, and updated music changes.

The AR-37 solid-state digital receiver, designed and developed by abc Telecommunications, is capable of receiving and playing eight-minute programs remotely uploaded from their studios. The unit can be attached to any existing phone system so all on-hold callers hear the same professional message, and its playback quality meets or exceeds industry standards.

“We are the only company in Canada that manufactures this type of equipment,” says Bryan Fustukian, president and CEO. “Our business will grow to have two aspects – one is selling the unit to existing on-hold providers, and the other is providing the units to clients and offering production as well.” Fustukian also noted the next phase of business development will include broader expansion into the North American market in the next 12 to 14 months.

Western Economic Diversification Canada’s (WD) **First Jobs in Science and Technology Program** allowed the company to hire recent graduates from Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the University of Alberta. Working with micro-engineer Stuart Olsen, the graduates were key in the development stage of the AR-37 and assisted in resolving production, manufacturing and design issues. “We have appreciated all that WD has done for us,” says Fustukian. “They have been instrumental in the development of our business.”

For more information about the products and services offered by abc Telecommunications Inc., visit their Web site at www.abctelecommunications.com or call 1-888-465-3977.

For information about WD’s business development programs, visit www.wd.gc.ca/finance. ♦

Alb

Research Set the Tone for Small Town Business Success

by Sherry Brownlee

It takes vision and confidence to become an entrepreneur. To be successful at it takes research and lots of hard work. Just ask Kim Lukacs and Colleen Ecklund who, over the past 10 years, have built not one, but two successful businesses in the Town of Vauxhall.

From working together in a salon in Taber to becoming owners of **KC's Hair & Tanning Salon** and **Tan N Tone Pace Fitness Centre**, Lukacs and Ecklund have learned lots along the way. As Lukacs explains, "You have to stay focused, confident and think about customer service."

This confidence is built on a foundation of solid market research and a well-developed business plan. When the partners were investigating markets, they visited Pete Lovering of **Chinook Community Futures Development Corporation** in Taber. Lovering encouraged them to determine their potential clientele and advised them on their business plan.

With a solid plan in place and funding secured, the partners bought a building in Vauxhall with a laundromat in it and jumped into renovating it to include their new salon and tanning bed. KC's Hair & Tanning Salon lived up to the potential forecasted in their research and by 2003 the partners were in a position to launch their second Vauxhall business, Tan N Tone Pace Fitness Centre, a circuit training gym and tanning salon. Once again, they did their research and focused on excellent customer service.

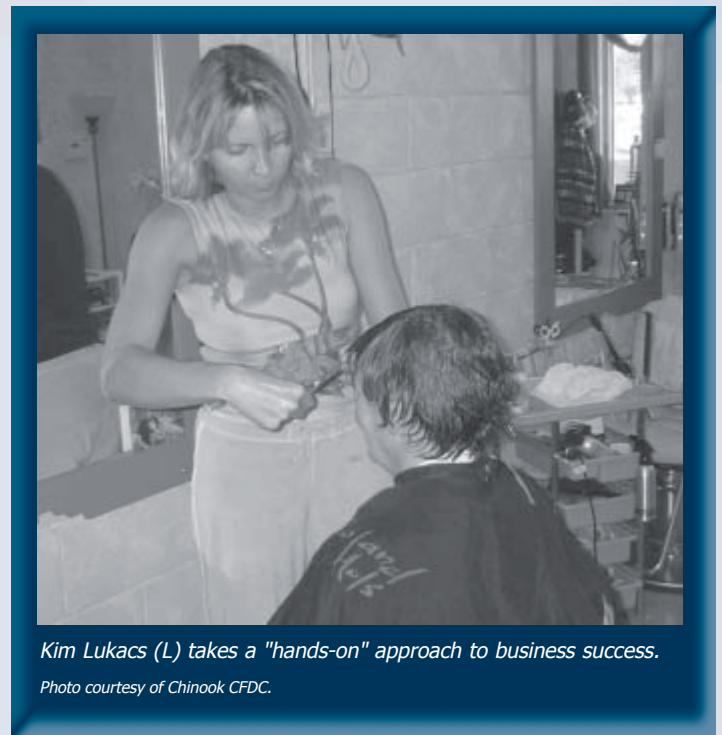
"You have to be flexible, fresh and provide excellent service, like that of our staff at the gym," said Ecklund.

These businesses not only provide a service to the community, they provide employment and participate in an apprenticeship program for local youth. Giving something back and finding

new ways to meet the needs of their clientele comes naturally to these entrepreneurs.

"We're always thinking of ways to do more," confides Lukacs. "We want to bring in more esthetician services and maybe do an exchange with a professional from another area to come and show our clientele something new. You keep your customers wants and needs in mind all the time."

You can reach KC's Hair & Tanning Salon at (403) 654-4333 or Tan N Tone Pace Fitness Centre at (403) 654-2044. ♦



Kim Lukacs (L) takes a "hands-on" approach to business success.

Photo courtesy of Chinook CFDC.

Business Assistance is Just a Phone Call Away!

Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) established the Western Canada Business Service Network to support western Canadians and help them achieve economic success. With over 100 points of service across the West, network partners provide rural and urban entrepreneurs with the expertise they need to establish a new business or make their existing business grow.

In addition to WD offices in Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta network partners include:

Alberta Women Entrepreneurs

#250, 815 – 8 Avenue SW
Calgary AB T2P 3P2
(403) 777-4250
1-800-713-3558
www.awebusiness.com

#100, 10237 – 104 Street NW
Edmonton AB T5J 1B1
(780) 422-7784

The Business Link Business Service Centre

#100, 10237 – 104 Street NW
Edmonton AB T5J 1B1
(780) 422-7722 or 1-800-272-9675
www.cbbsc.org/alberta

Calgary Business Information Centre

#250, 639 – 5 Avenue SW
Calgary AB T2P 0M9
(403) 221-7800
www.calgary-smallbusiness.com

La Chambre économique de l'Alberta

8929 – 82 Avenue NW
Edmonton AB T6C 0Z2
(780) 414-6125 or 1-888-414-6123
www.lacea.ab.ca

Community Futures Development Corporations

Business Development Centre West, Cochrane
(403) 932-5220
Chinook CFDC, Taber
(403) 223-2984
Crowsnest Pass Business Development Centre, Blairmore
(403) 562-8858
Drumheller Regional Chamber of Development and Tourism
(403) 823-8100
East Central Alberta CFDC, Viking
(780) 336-3497
East Parkland Community & Business Development Corp., Mirror
(403) 788-2212

Entre-Corp Business Development Centre, Medicine Hat
(403) 528-2824
Fort McMurray Regional Business Development Centre
(780) 791-0330
Highwood Business Development Corp., High River
(403) 652-3700
Lac La Biche Regional Community Development Corp.
(780) 623-2662
Lakeland Community Development Corp., Bonnyville
(780) 826-3858
Lamont-Two Hills Business Development Corp., Two Hills
(780) 657-3512
Lesser Slave Lake Community Development Corp., Slave Lake
(780) 849-3232
Lethbridge & District Business Development Centre Association
(403) 320-6044
Lloydminster Region CFDC
(780) 875-5458
MacKenzie Economic Development Corp., High Level
(780) 926-4233
Peace Country Development Corp., Peace River
(780) 624-1161
The Reach Corporation, Smoky Lake
(780) 656-2110
Red Deer & District Business Development Corp.
(403) 342-2055
SMEDA Business Development Corp., Beaverlodge
(780) 354-8747
Southwest Alberta Business Development Institute, Pincher Creek
(403) 627-3020
Tawatinaw CFDC, Westlock
(780) 349-2903
Treaty Seven Economic Development Corp., Calgary
(403) 251-9242
West Central CFDC, Warburg
(780) 848-2222
West Yellowhead CFDC, Hinton
(780) 865-1224
Wild Rose Economic Development Corp., Strathmore
(403) 934-6488
Yellowhead East Business Development Corp., Sangudo
(780) 785-2900

Community Futures Network Society of Alberta, Cochrane
(403) 851-9995
www.cfnsa.ca