

ACCESS Alberta

Rural Albertans to Benefit from Extra Funding

by Jon Close

Executive Director, Community Futures Network Society of Alberta

After 20 years of service to rural Albertans, the main purpose of the Community Futures (CF) program remains unchanged: to help people help themselves. What started out as a grassroots community economic development (CED) initiative is still a grassroots community economic development initiative. All that has changed is that *more* rural Albertans can be helped, in *more* types of businesses, and with *more* efficiency and expertise. With \$18.2 million in additional pan-western CF funding announced last summer, and a \$5 million joint federal-provincial rural Alberta CED project announced last spring, many *more* rural individuals and businesses will benefit.

The Community Futures program is a pan-western federal initiative that, in Alberta, is managed by 27 regional Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) serving more than one million rural Albertans. In 1995, Western Economic Diversification

Canada (WD) became responsible for the ongoing federal partnership with the CFDCs.

With a rich history of successful local leadership, regional CFDC managers and their staff have assisted rural Albertans by providing them with business development loans, technical support, training, business advice, and easy access to experts.

"We seek out every opportunity to exchange ideas between CFDCs and our partners to ensure we can offer rural Albertans the most help possible," said Jon Close, executive director of the provincial network of CFDCs, called the Community Futures Network Society of Alberta (CFNSA).

Speaking at the gala banquet for this year's CFDC conference in Red Deer, Oryssia Lennie, Deputy Minister of WD, expressed WD's pride in the last 10 years of effective partnership with the CFDCs and CFNSA. She said WD was looking forward to the continued success of CF leadership in rural communities for the benefit of all rural Albertans.

For more information on the Community Futures program, regional Community Futures Development Corporations, or the Community Futures Network Society of Alberta, visit www.cfnsa.ca or call (403) 851-9995. ■



At the gala banquet on June 18, 2005, Oryssia Lennie, Deputy Minister, Western Economic Diversification Canada, presents a gift to Glen Freadrich, past chairperson, Community Futures Network Society Association, in recognition of his long service to the community futures program in Alberta.

by Linda Chorney, *The Business Link*

Celebrating 10 Years of Entrepreneurial Spirit

Albertans truly have entrepreneurial spirit. After 10 years of helping businesses start or expand, requests for services are not slowing down! The Business Link is Alberta's primary Canada Business Service Centre (CBSC). The CBSC is a partner in a business service network managed and partially funded by the federal government through Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD).

Since The Business Link opened its doors in February 1996, we're proud of the fact that we've helped so many Albertans. With one phone call or one visit, people from across the province can get answers to their many questions. Although the business climate may have changed over the years, today's entrepreneur still faces the same challenges. *Where do I start? Where do I find financing? How do I write a business plan? What regulations affect my operations? How do I export outside of Canada? How do I drive traffic to my online store?* The Business Link provides timely and up-to-date information and contacts to help them on their way.

For those that learn best in a classroom setting, The Business Link offers seminars and workshops for quick-to-learn, quick-to-use business basics. Through the wonders of video conferencing technology and working with the members of the business service network, our reach now extends right across the province.

Although we celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit in Alberta every day, each October we join the nation in celebrat-



General manager Rodger Cole (back row, third from left) and a number of his staff stand in front of the entrance to The Business Link, Alberta's primary Canada Business Service

ing *Small Business Week*. The Business Link works with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce and our various network partners to showcase the learning and networking opportunities planned especially for this celebration. From mid-September to the end of October, www.sbwalberta.ca is the central source for *Small Business Week in Alberta* event information. This year will have particular significance as the province celebrates its 100th birthday.

Over 30,000 clients a year access The Business Link's services by phoning toll-free, walking in to our downtown Edmonton location, or via e-mail. Add over 943,000 web visits last year alone and you have a lot of people accessing business information — not too surprising in entrepreneurial Alberta.

For more information on The Business Link Business Service Centre, call 1 800 272-9675 or visit www.cbcs.org/alberta. ■

by Marie Cusack, WD Communications, Edmonton

Alberta Women Entrepreneurs: 10 Years of Success and Growing

On November 16, 2005, Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) celebrates ten years of partnering with Alberta Women Entrepreneurs (AWE), and AWE celebrates ten years of providing Women-To-Women service, or W2W as they like to call it. Over the last decade, this non-profit organization has responded to increasing demand by offering more services, opening new branch locations and relocating to larger offices. What will the next ten years bring? Alison Gray, executive director of AWE says, "We are excited about helping more Alberta women entrepreneurs reach their business goals!"

AWE Financial Programs

1. Fast-Track Micro-Loan Program

Quick access to seed capital of up to \$10,000 to kick-start exciting, viable, but not traditionally bankable business ideas.

2. Conventional Loan Program

Financing up to \$100,000 with an average loan size of \$25,000.

3. Loan After-Care Program

Ongoing business advice and support to help women successfully operate their businesses after they've received an AWE loan.

Demand for business support to women entrepreneurs from the women-oriented business incubator, AWE, is on the rise. According to Gray, "More and more women entrepreneurs are approaching AWE for their financing needs. We have nearly tripled our loan figure from last year's \$522,000 to this year's \$1.5 million. This demonstrates that women entrepreneurs have an increasing impact on Alberta's growing economy and that there is still a need to provide access to capital that is not available through traditional financing."

Gray describes AWE's clients as "having great ideas but they often need help with financial analysis and business planning." An impact study performed in 2001 further revealed that AWE's clients are young, well educated, without direct business experience, and are not afraid to seek out advice and training, especially from other women.

Whether or not they need a loan, women entrepreneurs regularly ask staff at AWE for one-on-one business coaching, or sign up for extra training through regular workshops and circle groups. "The caliber of business owners who come to us are especially drawn towards our circle groups where five or six women join together and engage in action learning," says Gray. "Not only is this a powerful experience, but it is also an incredibly insightful one for participants." Clients also take full advantage of AWE's many networking opportunities, including

AWE Quick Facts

1995 to 2005

Funds loaned:

over \$8 million

Loans approved:

345

Information inquiries:

over 108,000

Service requests:

over 25,000

Personal advice appointments:

18,450

Women trained via workshops:

18,000

Jobs created via AWE clients:

829

quarterly socials, weekend retreats, showcases, and conferences.

AWE has a staff of nine employees who work out of headquarters in Calgary and branch offices in Edmonton and Lethbridge. AWE is the Alberta delivery agent of the Women's Enterprise Initiative, which is part of a business service network funded by Western Economic Diversification Canada. For more information on AWE, call toll-free 1 800 713-3558 or visit www.awebusiness.com. ■

By Frank Saulnier, Chairman and CEO, La Chambre économique de l'Alberta

La Chambre économique de l'Alberta

La Chambre économique de l'Alberta (CÉA) has been a member of Western Economic Diversification Canada's (WD) Business Service Network since 1998 and is also a member of the RDÉE Canada network (Réseau national de développement économique francophone).

In Western Canada, the CÉA is a member of the Francophone Economic Development Organizations group. Our mandate is to provide services to francophone small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as to those providing bilingual services in French and English or some other language.

We serve our francophone and bilingual clients through four branches in Alberta (Calgary, Edmonton, St. Paul and Peace River), and help businesses and community groups project themselves more in French so they can benefit from the added value of working in both of the country's official languages.

While the CÉA does not manage its own investment funds, it still plays an economic development role by working with financial institutions that serve the SMEs and the funding agencies. Over the last five years, we have succeeded in generating leverage funding of over \$7 million in terms of money paid directly to businesses or groups but not counting the revenue generated by these leverage funds.

Over the last four years, we have carried out major tourist-industry advertising campaigns in Quebec, France and other

parts of francophone Europe. These campaigns have helped produce a major increase in visitors to Alberta from Quebec and France.

We have handled over 5,000 inquiries from members of the public and around 20,000 follow-ups. On an annual basis, we work with over 800 existing and new businesses and deliver around 450 training sessions. We make approximately 150 presentations per year to a total audience of 120-150,000 people.

All this work is performed by a team of 10 employees and a few volunteers. We are proud of the fact that we can count on enthusiastic, competent staff.

We are also proud to be a major WD partner and being able to help this department fulfill their official languages mandate, while benefiting from its highly valuable collaboration in fostering the economic development of Alberta's francophone community. ■



Members of the Chambre économique de l'Alberta gather at the society's annual general meeting on June 17, 2005. From right to left, Randy Boissonnault, elected chairman, Léo Piquette, outgoing chairman and Frank Saulnier, chief executive officer.