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Helping Small Businesses Meet Their Needs

by Michelle Glen

Small businesses — enterprises with less than 50 employees — are an integral part of Canada's economy. In 2001, 98 per cent of all businesses in B.C. fell into this category, with the fastest growing sector being high-technology, where 93 per cent of all new jobs were created.

Given these impressive figures, there is exciting potential, as well as a need for talented and skilled employees to support this growth. This is an area where small businesses may experience difficulty in matching job requirements with employees' skills. Bridging this gap is the goal of the innovative business development programs provided by Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD).

WD offers two programs that were created specifically for western Canadian small businesses — the **First Jobs in Science and Technology Program** and the



WD's Michelle Neilly (C), Director General of Operations, and Kandice Johnson (R) present J.M. (Jack) Gin, director/president of Extreme CCTV, with the WD 2003 Growth Award. The award recognized Extreme CCTV for its significant achievement in revenue, income and overall financial growth. It was presented at a reception during Small Business Week in October 2003 for companies and recent graduates who have benefited from WD's First Jobs and ITPP programs.

International Trade Personnel Program (ITPP). Entrepreneurship and International Business Manager Kandice Johnson states that the programs have provided 2,600 graduates with jobs, 40 per cent of which were in

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K'uaweekeela's Treasures: Realizing

by Michelle Glen



James Speck stands surrounded by art displays featured in K'uaweekeela's Treasures.

At the age of seven, James Speck carved a pair of totem pole earrings. Who would have ever guessed it would be the beginning of a career for this Namgis First Nations artist.

Growing up, Speck often thought about opening an art gallery in his own community to showcase his work and stay close to his family. With the encouragement of friends and family, he decided to make this goal a reality.

Speck contacted the **Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) of Mount Waddington**, which provided information and the financial assistance he needed to start the gallery. "Working with Community Futures made my goal look closer with every visit," said Speck, explaining how the CFDC helped him with the process of starting up a business.

In 2000, Speck opened his gallery, **K'uaweekeela's Treasures**, in his hometown of Alert Bay. When speaking of his experience, Speck says "I've dreamed of opening a gallery since I started carving, and I've enjoyed the whole process of realizing my dream." In May 2003, he celebrated his third successful year in business.

The gallery features his artwork, as well as other First Nations artists from Alert Bay and surrounding areas who can now enjoy selling their artwork locally. "All my carving knives, paints and sandpaper are purchased from local toolmakers and craft stores. In effect, Community Futures has not only helped me, but helped my community," says Speck, pointing out that the loan from the CFDC of Mount Waddington has also helped him create work for others in his community.

Speck has great plans for the future of his gallery, including producing K'uaweekeela's Treasures merchandise such as

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A Dream



An example of one of the many different styles of native artwork featured in the gallery.

t-shirts and mugs. Every year the gallery inventory doubles, so he will be looking for a bigger space and hopes to hire more employees. Speck says he will go to the CFDC for help with this expansion because of his previous success with them.

Community Futures Development Corporations can lend up to \$125,000 to new or existing businesses, while also providing technical support with business plans, financial planning and export readiness. The Self Employment Program provides



James' daughter Linda helps out at the gallery.

clients with training in: self-employment skills, marketing, bookkeeping and computer literacy. They also provide financial support during the initial development of a business.

If you would like to contact James Speck of K'uaweekeela's Treasures, call (250) 974-2100 or e-mail jaspeck@island.net.

For more information about the programs and services offered by the Community Futures Development Corporation of Mount Waddington, call 1-888-685-2332 or visit the Community Futures Development Association of British Columbia website at www.communityfutures.ca. 🍁

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Helping Small Business Meets Their Needs

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B.C. She added, “It’s a real boost to the economy and these graduates get to work in international marketing or in innovation developing new technologies.”

Through these programs, WD provides up to 50 per cent of a recent graduate’s salary to a maximum of \$20,000 for one year. This provides small businesses the opportunities to hire the expertise they need that they otherwise would be unable afford, while providing graduates with valuable experience and a chance to utilize the skills they have acquired throughout school.

The First Jobs in Science and Technology Program helps small businesses hire recent graduates with the up-to-date skills and knowledge required to commercialize a new technology or develop a scientific technique to increase production capabilities, keeping the business competitive and profitable in today’s knowledge-based business world.

Robert Either, president of **Herbon Naturals Inc.**, has hired students through this program and says that, “WD’s program has helped us a lot. It permits a small business like ours with opportunities we otherwise wouldn’t have had by giving us the flexibility, money and time to be able to hire skilled people.”

PICS Smartcard President Steven Simonyi-Gindele is another employer who has hired graduates through WD’s program and explains how it “allows us to hire from the cream of the crop and offer the best salaries in order to be very competitive with companies much larger than we are.” For his company, the First Jobs program has been extremely helpful.

The First Jobs program has been equally beneficial to students. **Azimuth Consulting Group Inc.** recruit Cheryl Mackintosh explained, “The First Jobs in Science and Technology Program has allowed me the opportunity to get the training and experience with Azimuth that I would not otherwise have had access to.”

The International Trade Personnel Program is designed to help small businesses hire the talent they need to develop a marketing plan, find ways to expand their customer base and provide sales service when they are seeking to expand from local markets and begin to export globally.

For more information on how to apply to one of these programs, call 1-888-338-WEST (9378) or visit www.wd.gc.ca. 🍁