

## NEY



## Olympic business

Family-run Richmond firm is excited about winning contract to supply umbrellas during the 2010 Games

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GORDON CLARK (EDITOR) • 604-605-2020 • gclark@png.canwest.com | SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2007

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## B.C. bands get down to business

**FIRST NATIONS:** Some chiefs reject 'dependency mindset'

BY ASHLEY FORD  
BUSINESS REPORTER

must head.

They may be an unrecognized factor in the B.C. economy, but make no mistake, First Nation bands and individuals are jumping on board B.C.'s economic train.

Whether it is the still painfully slow treaty process that is starting to bring long-term stability to both aboriginal and potential investors or a realization that playing their own role in the economy is vital to their future, First Nations are increasingly "buying" to be bigger players in the economy.

"Aboriginal people are willing, ready and able to compete in the economy," says Tewanee Joseph, executive director of the Four Host First Nations secretariat that is staging a major Aboriginal Business Summit in Vancouver at the end of the month to study business opportunities for natives in the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Joseph hopes to attract more than 300-plus delegates from across the country. And the fact that both Premier Gordon Campbell and federal Trade Minister David Emerson are attending underscores the quietly growing economic clout of native people.

Calvin Helin of Richmond is one of Canada's most well-known native lawyers and doesn't mince words when discussing where First Nation people

He says aboriginals are becoming more involved in the economy but have a long way to go to defeat the "dependency mindset" imposed on them. And that, he says emphatically, "is a step aboriginals must make themselves.

"There is no question we have to go from that dependency mindset and some have already overcome it," he says.

Perhaps the best example is the Osoyoos Band of the south-central Interior that has transformed itself into a very successful business conglomerate, he says.

Helin, the son of Chief Niis-Loch-a-Noos of the Tsimshian Nation and founder of the Native Investment and Trade Association, says statistics and numbers are hard to come by but the signs of progress are definitely there.

He says if natives accept his point of view of regaining their self-reliance, they could be a major force in the economy within a decade.

The reason is simple economics. Someone in the "higher halls of political thinking" finally woke up and realized that shutting out aboriginal people was akin to taking a boning knife to your knees.

First Nation have assets. They already own lock, stock and barrel more than 600,000 square kilometres of land — twice the

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Top, photo of Nk'Mip Cellars winery, in Osoyoos. Right, Native Chief Clarence Louie of the Okanagan. Bottom, Modesta Stelka looks at a photograph of herself and Lindsay George at the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre. — THE PROVINCE



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## Osoyoos shows the way

There is no perfect economic model for First Nations to follow, but the Osoyoos Indian band in the South Okanagan has demonstrated in a few short years how successful aboriginals can be in business.

They are not alone and there are other B.C. bands doing well too. But the Osoyoos band stands out for the swift economic success it has won in just over a decade.

It used to be the band received more federal transfer dollars than self-generated revenue.

That has changed dramatically under the leadership of Chief Clarence Louie of the Okanagan. He has said: "It's about time for First Nations to manage their affairs. Let us learn, let us take risks. How do people learn? They learn through trial and error."

Fast forward to today and the band is a rising and successful conglomerate.

It owns retail stores, vineyards, Nk'Mip Cellars winery, Sonora Dunes Golf Club, Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort & Spa, construction and concrete companies, is heavily involved in the tourism industry and last year opened its spectacular Nk'Mip desert Cultural Centre.

Last year it also signed a deal with the province and private sector to develop the nearby Mt. Baldy ski resort.

The motto of the Osoyoos Indian Development Corp. says it all: "Working with business to preserve our past by strengthening our future."



Top, photo of Nk'Mip Cellars winery, in Osoyoos. Right, Native Chief Clarence Louie of the Okanagan. Bottom, Modesta Stelka looks at a photograph of herself and Lindsay George at the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre. — THE PROVINCE



# No treaties means less investment, report warned

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size of New Zealand — and could eventually end up controlling one-third of Canada's land mass.

While native tourism may be the most visible symbol of aboriginal business success in B.C., they are active across the whole economy from construction to IT, agriculture to lumber and mining, joint ventures, farming to vineyards, and golf courses to shopping centres.

Investors, especially foreign ones, abhor uncertainty and the much-maligned treaty process has shown

the certainty of a successful treaty negotiation brings with it a huge potential economic payoff.

A report entitled *The Business Case for Treaties* by B.C.'s Treaty Commission said that until "there are agreements in place with First Nations across the province, investment will be curtailed."

Well over a decade ago it was estimated that the cost to B.C. of not settling treaties cost at least \$1 billion in lost investment and thousands of jobs in the mining and forestry sectors alone. That figure has likely trebled by now.

John Winter, president and CEO of the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, says there is an increasing aboriginal willingness to participate in the economy but there is also a lot of capacity-building to do with First Nation, too.

"One of the things they need to do in their population is improve business-related skills, and there are signs of improvement at the school level and aboriginal levels at the post-secondary level are also increasing," he said.

"That must go on."  
The most significant change is

that major elements of industry are now sitting down with First Nations people to discuss how they can cooperate and go forward, he said.

Industry has no choice but to sit down with them, and for their part First Nations realize they must participate with mainstream industry to make progress and become bigger players in the economy to benefit their people.

"I think First Nations people are seeing some light at the end of the tunnel and while it might take some time, they will eventually benefit and be an integral part of the econ-

omy," Winter said.

"The nations and chiefs view joining the economy as very important and even more important for their people and their future," says Joseph.

First Nations already know they can compete in the economy and have already shown that, he says.

"They also clearly understand they want to work with and enhance the economy because when they do well, there is a trickle-down effect that allows other much-needed services to be attained."

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