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Voice of Business

Signs of the times



Above: The staff at Cranbrook's Selkirk Signs. Photo courtesy Selkirk Signs.
Right: Selkirk Signs President Hans Mehrle (right) with employees in the Channel Letters Department.

BARRY COULTER

Cranbrook's Selkirk Signs has a big economic footprint, at home and abroad. And it is this month's Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce featured business.

Hans Mehrle, President of Selkirk Signs, has been with the company since 2005. His partner Barry Nadain has been with Selkirk Signs since its founding in 1984.

The company, which creates signage large and small, of all types, has a national trading area, and does roughly \$10 million in gross revenue a year. But it's commitment to quality, customer service and community is what makes its value especially high, Mehrle says.

"The number one reason we bought this company was that it was built on quality — a high reliance on quality and customer services was what propelled me into the industry. I knew we could build on this.

"I'm proud of our quality, and to be part

of this community. We are extremely lucky to be able to do this in Cranbrook."

With more than 50 employees, Selkirk's contribution to the local economy is significant. But its market area is huge — all over Western Canada, into Ontario, and even out to the Maritimes/Territories, and their clients include some big corporate names.

"You'll see our craftsmanship on Kal-Tire, FasGas, CO-OP, 7-11..." Mehrle said. "You'll see our signage on a broader basis all over Calgary."

Selkirk Signs has a strong presence in Calgary, where it maintains a sales and installation office with a workforce of 16 employees. The product is manufactured in Cranbrook, shipped, and installed on site. Elsewhere across Canada, Selkirk operates with various sign agents who do the installation.

The company originally made its mark

with fluorescent illuminated corporate signage. In the last five years LED (light-emitting diode) has been the pace setting change for illuminated signage.

In manufacturing terms, Selkirk's 22,000 sq-ft plant on Patterson Street West in Cranbrook, off Cobham Avenue, is comprised of a welding department, metal forming department, painting department, a channel letter department working with computer controlled equipment, and a large graphics department which includes vinyl applications of all kinds and digital printing and numerous types of vinyl applications.



Products include illuminated and non-illuminated signs, fascia's (signs painted on or attached to an exterior building wall), channel letters, vinyl signs, pylons (elevated signs), vehicles wraps, infinite possibilities for custom designs, canopies for gas stations, and electronic messaging boards — the latest one which is being made for the Key City Theatre in Cranbrook.

See more information at Selkirk Signs' website: selkirksigns.com

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Dealing with Downturn – Is Infrastructure Spending the Answer?

BY HENDRIK BRAKEL

Sound the alarm! The Canadian economy is weaker than expected, shrinking by 0.5% in September and essentially flat in October, as natural resource prices are crashing right across the board.

Last week, oil prices fell to a 12-year low of US\$29.32 per barrel for West Texas Intermediate, while Western Canadian Select declined to US\$17.00 per barrel. Iron ore prices have plummeted from \$190 a ton in 2011 to just \$37 today, and copper prices have fallen from \$4.50 a pound to below \$2.00 last week. Economists keep revising down their expectations for Canadian growth.

With all this weakness, the government is under pressure to speed up its infrastructure spending to stimulate our troubled economy.

We all know the argument: during the great recession of 2009, governments invested huge sums to replace private activity with public. In 2009, the American government spent \$105 billion on infrastructure, and Canada spent \$13 billion, with a focus on “shovel ready” projects that could begin right away.

U.S. studies showed some of the projects may not have been all that useful, but the overall stimulus effects prevented a much worse downturn. Canada’s stimulus also showed positive but mixed results, providing an economic boost at a critical time.

Mark Twain once said, “The past rhymes but it doesn’t echo.” Our current economic concerns may seem the same as those of eight years ago, but they are not. Buying short term employment with infrastructure spending is the perfect medicine for dealing with a credit crisis but it’s not a strategy to help an economy adjusting to commodity prices which are low and may stay low for a long time.

Many parts of Canada, such as the big cities, would benefit from infrastructure but are less in need of stimulus. Does anyone think that Toronto’s construction industry needs a boost? Is there anyone in Montreal, Vancouver or Ottawa who can find a builder in the next six months?

If we’re using infrastructure dollars to offset the employment impact of fallen commodity prices, then the program should be concentrated in places like Fort McMurray and Calgary, which may not be optimal. But, if we’re going to be investing such important sums, we have to make sure they will benefit Canada’s trade capabilities. The program can have a much bigger impact than just temporary job alleviation.

The point is that infrastructure absolutely can improve Canada’s economic performance. An Institute for Research on Public Policy study shows a sustained 10% increase in infrastructure investment could reduce manufacturing production costs by 5% per year—that’s like boosting Canada’s productivity by 5%! The same study indicated the returns on investment in public infrastructure could be as high as 17% to 25%.

Properly done—meaning planned carefully for economic goals rather than political ones—this proposed infrastructure program could be historic for Canada, significantly changing our competitive situation for the better. But those gains can only happen if we spend on trade enabling, economically productive infrastructure—roads, ports, technology, transport corridors and borders. So let’s not rush infrastructure dollars out the door, just for the sake of spending, because the stimulus effects, much like the projects, will be disappointing.

Hendrik Brakel is the Senior Director, Economic, Financial & Tax Policy with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce

Census 2016: now hiring!

Statistics Canada conducts a census every five years. The next Census of Population will take place in May 2016.

The census collects demographic information on every man, woman and child living in Canada. Information from the census will be used by governments, businesses, associations, community organizations and many others to make important decisions for your community, your province or territory, and the entire country.

The census is looking to hire for numerous positions across Canada.

To find out more, visit the census website.

http://www.census.gc.ca/ccr16d/ccr16d_000-eng.html

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce will be held on Wednesday, March 30, 2016 at the Heritage Inn and Conference Centre, 803 Cranbrook St N, Cranbrook, BC. The meeting will be called to order at 12:01 pm. The agenda and business to be conducted can be found at www.cranbrookchamber.com

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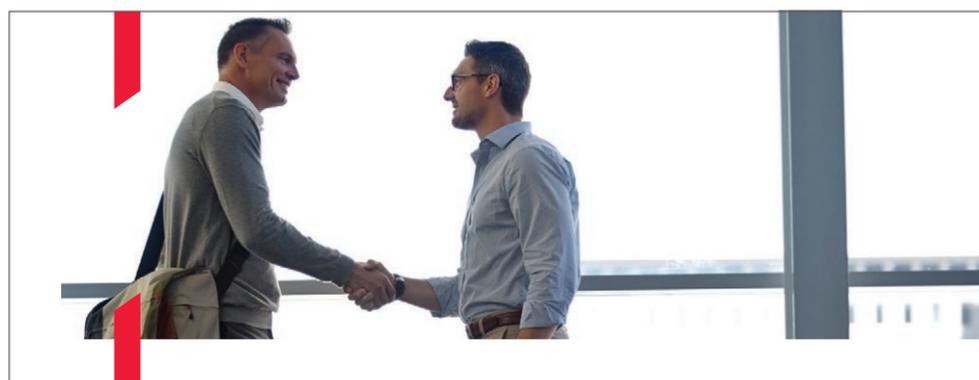
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There are 11 categories to nominate an excellent business, organization or individual. The Business Excellence Awards use a juried panel system to determine the award recipient. Multiple nominations are not necessary nor a determinant. Self-nomination is not only permitted but encouraged. If your organization is excellent please let us know. Organizations nominated in multiple categories must choose one category to participate. 2015 Business Excellence Award recipients are not eligible to participate in the same category in 2016.

The Gala Awards Banquet will be held Saturday, April 02, 2016 at the St. Eugene Golf Resort & Casino.

Nomination Deadline is February 19, 2016

Go to www.cranbrookchamber.com/business-excellence-awards-nominations open to nominate an excellent business, organization or individual.



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David D. Hull

Executive Director's Soap Box

By David D. Hull, Executive Director

Brown Paper Packages Wrapped Up With String

In the three weeks leading up to Christmas I was at our two local post offices about eight times. It was the season for long lines and each trip involved quite a number of people in the queue in front of me. Passing time and being a keen observer of my surroundings, it was clear that about eight of ten folks had a parcel pickup card in their hand.

Watching as they collected their boxes, I observed that the vast majority were not brown paper packages wrapped up with string from grandma. They were nice commercial boxes... not ones cut down from an old corn flakes box trussed up with string

and tape. These packages had machine printed labels and corporate logos clearly indicating they were the results of online shopping.

I am not really much of a shopper much less an online shopper. After observing the constant flow of online packages I spent time surfing the net to see just what could be purchased online. The conclusion was if you can imagine it you can get it online. Most of the time with free delivery in a short period of time.

Sylvester the Cat, of Looney Tunes fame, has the same challenges as local merchants. In an effort to prove to his son Junior that he was still a champion mouser they went to an abandoned house to demonstrate Sylvester's

mousing prowess.

The house has a for sale sign declaring its charm and mouse infestation. Determined to be a good mousing spot the father son duo enter. After spotting a little mouse Sylvester announces, "Now watch your father's incomparable stalking techniques."

Unbeknown to Sylvester, Hoppy, a baby kangaroo, had fallen off the circus train and was in the house. Upon spotting the kangaroo, Sylvester reports back that he has seen a mouse of gigantic proportions. "It must be a Texas mouse", he declares. Junior is in disbelief of his dear old dad, so to save face Sylvester goes to do battle with the giant mouse. In comedic style Sylvester takes a

beating. The mousing ends with Junior dejected, "Oh the shame of it all."

The challenge for local merchants, especially those not connected to large distribution centres that also have an online presence, is to do battle with the giant mouse. Or at least with the wireless one connected to the home computer.

Retail, wholesale, supplies and even a lot of services are only a click away. Every click takes a piece out of the local economy. The adage "a death by a thousand cuts" comes to mind.

If I go down to the rink to watch minor hockey teams play, or over to the soccer pitch to watch a gaggle of happy six year olds chasing the ball around and having fun, the names I see on the back of their uniforms are those of local "brick and mortar" companies.

I strongly suspect you will never see the Amazon Bantam Team competing for hockey supremacy in Cranbrook. I doubt that

the Dell U14 Girls will win the zone soccer title this upcoming season. And it's not likely that eBay vs Best Buy Colt's baseball game will be a feature local sports event this summer.

In the weeks preceding Christmas the local business community organized the Turkey Drive, Banker's Food Bank Auction and Miracle on Baker Street events and, with the help of our community, raised over \$115,000 to assist local organizations that help citizens of our community.

The responsibility to preserve our local economy cuts both ways. Local merchants must ensure they are hitting all the right marks to remain worthy of local support and the citizens of Cranbrook, who benefit from a vibrant and varied economy, need to be cognizant of the negative effects of leaking money outside our community.

To watch Sylvester in action: www.supercartoons.net/cartoon/1002/sylvester-the-slap-hoppy-mouse.html

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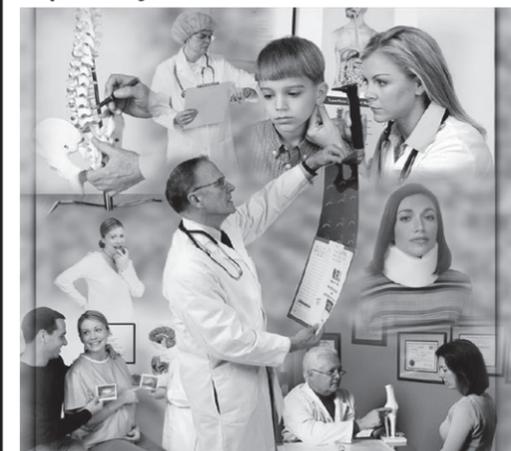
With MLA, **Bill Bennett**

1 Since 2002, spending on health has increased each year by an average of 4.5 per cent, while MSP rates have increased by an average of 2.6 per cent a year. Every Province has to collect enough from its citizens to pay the increasing costs of health care, regardless of what form of tax is used in each province.



2 BC charges a relatively small amount as a medical premium to remind us that healthcare is not «free». MSP premiums fund only a small part of the significant investment government makes in health services each year.

3 Nearly one million British Columbia residents, including thousands of seniors, receive MSP subsidies. More than 800,000 residents pay no MSP premiums at all. That's about 17 per cent of our population. Go to <http://ow.ly/WOa5d> for more information.

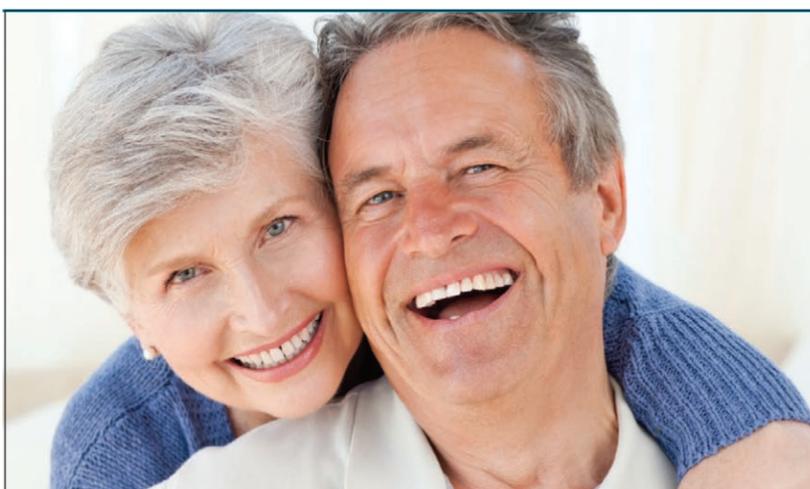


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Dave Struthers

President's Report

In last month's article I reflected on some of your Chamber's key activities and accomplishments in 2015. With the turn of the calendar to 2016 it's time to look ahead at our strategic priorities for the coming months.

Be more relevant to more businesses - As a member-funded organization it is critical for the Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce to be relevant and responsive to the needs and expectations of our members and truly demonstrate that being a member of the Chamber is a "value added" investment for every business. Key objectives include:

- Recruiting and retaining more members who represent all business sectors in the community;
- Understanding local business sector issues, challenges and opportunities; and

- Identifying and implementing activities that address the needs of members.

At our recent board meeting, directors discussed a number of member engagement strategies we can use to ensure the Chamber really understands what you need from us. Ideas ranged from one-on-one interviews to business walks and facilitated business sector round table discussions. In the weeks and months ahead there will be many opportunities to interact with your Chamber and tell us how we can serve your needs better. We sincerely hope you will participate and share your story.

Advocate strategically - Identifying the interests and concerns of our members and proactively advocating to all levels of government will

continue to be a key priority in 2016. With your input, the Chamber will continue to identify and seek removal of "institutional" barriers to business development and growth. On a broader scale, we'll collaborate with the City of Cranbrook, RDEK, the private sector and other partners to create and implement a clear and compelling local economic development plan that improves the climate for business and sustainable economic growth.

Thank you to our nearly 500 hundred members for being part of Cranbrook Chamber of Commerce. I encourage you to continue being actively involved in our luncheons, networking and learning opportunities, special events, and working groups on specific business sector issues.

We are stronger and more successful by working together.

Thank you to our nearly 500 hundred members

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