

# LOCAL/PROVINCE

## Fort St. James hopeful for lumber deal

'We have to get people in the U.S. to realize the consequences,' mayor says

by GORDON HOEKSTRA  
Citizen staff

Fort St. James mayor Jim Togyi says he's glad to hear his community has some friends in the U.S. because they need the good news.

However, he said he fears the efforts of a U.S. consumers' group, which this week condemned the addition of the latest anti-dumping duty on Canadian lumber, comes too late.

Still, there's no reason why communities like Fort St. James can't add their voice of support, either through a letter-writing campaign directed at U.S. cities as Prince George mayor Colin Kinsley has done, or even by sending

community delegations to the U.S.

"We have to get the people in the U.S. to realize the consequences of not having free trade on lumber which they depend on," said Togyi, whose community of 2,000 has faced rolling temporary mill closures as a result of the trade battle and slumping markets.

"We must go there and we must do some publicity and marketing."

American Consumers for Affordable Homes said crushing duties of 32% will harm millions of U.S. consumers, lumber-dependent workers, housing affordability and an already-fragile economy.

The group — a coalition of home builders, lumber dealers and building suppliers like Home Depot — said trade barriers on lumber imports will just hurt the housing sector at the time when the industry is already propping up the economy.

"It is unconscionable that the Bush administration would allow these protectionist measures at a time when the president said only last week that he intended to tear down walls that create barriers to free trade," said Susan Petnunas, a spokesperson for the lumber consumer coalition.

Like other forest-dependent communities,

Fort St. James has been hit by temporary closures at its three sawmills.

Apollo Forest Products is still running, but Stuart Lake Lumber has been closed for a month.

Canfor is still operating but plans to shut down for two weeks each during November and December.

Despite the temporary closures, the residents haven't given up hope, said Togyi.

The only problem is that when you're only working 70% to 75% of the time, particularly for young families, it's difficult to make ends meet, he said.

## Police seize 2,200 pot plants in blitz

RCMP seized more than 2,200 marijuana plants during an enforcement blitz around the city over the past month and a half.

In all, 29 grow-ops were busted and charges recommended against 21 people — 18 men and three women, said Const. Mike Herchuk.

"Ultimately, many of these drugs end up in the hands of our children and are often the catalyst or contributing factor for persons committing other criminal offences," he said.

It's the second coordinated campaign police have conducted against marijuana operations

this year. In April, police revealed they had dismantled 33 pot plantations — containing more than 7,500 plants — and arrested 51 people. In the latest campaign, Herchuk said the illegal ventures ranged from operations with 35 plants to larger outfits containing 340 plants.

The grow operations were located in all areas of the city, he said. About 85% of the busts were based on Crime Stoppers tips, he noted.

Both uniform and plain clothes officers from the Prince George RCMP detachment were involved in the enforcement initiative.

Police also seized 10,000 grams of dried marijuana, 26 firearms, three prohibited weapons and hundreds of pieces of hydroponic equipment. The courts are handing out stiffer penalties for marijuana production, Herchuk noted. Some people with no previous criminal record have received jail sentences, he said.

RCMP plan to conduct more coordinated enforcement campaigns next year, he said, and in the meantime, will continue with regular enforcement of drug laws.

## DBIA hears push for downtown art

by SCOTT STANFIELD  
Citizen staff

The need for art in downtown Prince George was the topic of discussion Wednesday at a Downtown Business Improvement Association luncheon at the Ramada Hotel.

Penny Stewart, co-ordinator with the Central Interior Regional Arts Council, spoke about the link between economic development and creativity. As an example, Stewart pointed to the film industry, which she said was brought to B.C. thanks to the efforts of artists such as non-profit community theatre groups.

She also touched on the potential of cultural tourism and how the performing and visual

arts have helped bring about a "rebirth" in nearby communities like Wells and Barkerville, and in the Vancouver Island town of Chemainus, where mural-adorned buildings have drawn a steady stream of tourists to the community.

"The arts are integral to our lives and the community," Stewart said. "Arts and culture do not stand apart, but contribute to the economy and social fabric of society."

According to B.C. Arts Council statistics, 60,000 British Columbians work in the cultural sector, more than the agriculture and mining industries combined.

However, Stewart said "artistic resources are

not recognized as an economic force."

Stewart called upon local community leaders to tap into the art sector by partnering with local artists and groups such as Theatre North West, and focusing on their strengths and as well as their needs, which she said include improved infrastructure such as studio space.

"I hope today I have planted some creative seeds," Stewart said.

Stewart, along with Frank Peebles, president of the Community Arts Council of Prince George and District, is part of the DBIA task force on downtown art, formed in preparation for the upcoming revitalization of Third Avenue.

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**BEAR SCARE** — Conservation officer Ed Seitz, right, tags a black bear while RCMP Const. Jeff Findlay, keeps guard after the bruin was felled with a tranquilizer gun near Kelowna. The bear along with her two cubs was chased up a tree by a dog earlier in the day.  
 CP photo

## Welfare limit planned for single moms

VICTORIA (CP) — Single mothers should be off welfare and back at work by the time their babies are a year old, Human Resources Minister Murray Coell said Wednesday.

Stay-at-home single mothers in British Columbia now can claim income assistance until their youngest child is seven years old, but Coell said that is out of line with rules in the rest of Canada.

"I'm looking at bringing British Columbia into line with one year, but we haven't made any decision just yet,"

he said after telling an open cabinet meeting that he plans to change the province's welfare culture.

Coell said he hopes to table legislation this spring that will reduce the time mothers can stay at home collecting income assistance and will make other welfare changes.

"I think it will take a year before we see the legislation come into effect," he said. "This is a long-term plan."

Coell wants to see the welfare system divided into two streams.

The bulk of those on income assis-

tance would come under the temporary-assistance category and would be required to look for work, take job training and sign employment-plan agreements.

The remainder would be in the continuous-assistance category, in which they would not be expected to achieve independence through employment.

People claiming continuous assistance would have severe disabilities or "persistent multiple barriers" such as mental illness and drug addiction.

## Timber costs could stall Skeena Cellulose deal

VANCOUVER (CP) — A proposed deal to save Skeena Cellulose Inc. from bankruptcy requires the B.C. government to ease logging rules to help cut the companies high timber-harvesting costs.

But although the proposal is backed by the B.C. Ministry of Competition, Science and Enterprise, the province's Forests Ministry is apparently ruling out any special deal.

Skeena might benefit from the government's plans for forest-policy reforms that will apply province-wide, but the company won't get special consideration, Mike Hogan, a spokesman for B.C. Forests Minister Mike de Jong, said Wednesday.

Mercer International Inc. of Zurich, Switzerland, and a partnership of northwestern B.C. communities are spearheading a bid to buy the moribund pulp and lumber producer from the

B.C. government and TD Bank, which first rescued it from bankruptcy in 1997.

A hearing in B.C. Supreme Court on Thursday will decide whether Skeena's court-ordered protection from creditors will be extended until mid-February so the deal can be completed.

Skeena, which owns a pulp mill in Prince Rupert and sawmill and logging operations in Terrace, Smithers, Hazelton, Stewart and Kitwanga in northwest British Columbia, has been largely shut down since its operating credit was cut off in late August.

The company owes around \$500 million, much of it in the form of loan guarantees from the B.C. government.

Details of the Mercer proposal are covered by a confidentiality agreement.

## Westcoast Energy planning lockout: union

FORT ST. JOHN (CP) — Westcoast Energy has applied to municipal officials to set up a temporary work camp, a move the union says is proof the company is preparing for a lockout.

Officials with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers, are trying to get the camp blocked for safety reasons.

Yan Mendrek, president of the local, told a District of Taylor council meeting on Tuesday night that workers housed at the temporary camp wouldn't have to cross picket lines if the union goes on strike.

Union officials said they have "no desire for a strike," but are concerned about safety at the proposed camp site, a gravel pit on the southeast side of the plant on the bank of the Peace River.

"We have some concerns about a facility to house people in the facility they propose," said Grant Truscott, the union's chief shop steward.

The union has rejected Westcoast's final contract offer and is in the middle of a 21-day cooling-off period that ends Nov. 15.

Truscott said the site is too close to the plant's burn pits and flare area and does not have hydrogen sulfide detection equipment.

That would put workers and emergency personnel, including district firefighters, at risk in the event of an accident, he said.

Coun. Connie Shortt said Westcoast's application for a temporary industrial use permit for the camp requires a reason and Westcoast has not provided one.

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