

**Kris Kringle/Norse**

Roger Boer was ready to celebrate the season in his Kris Kringle costume at the CDC annual Christmas lunch Friday at the Coast Inn. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

**PG now a major centre**

A report from the Chartered Accountants of B.C. says Prince George has become a major centre for British Columbia despite the depressed resource sector.

In the regional comparison section of "B.C. Check-Up: A report on B.C. as a place to live, work and invest," the association calls Prince George the northern capital for distribution, transportation, retail trade, education, and business and professional services.

Prince George's status may be increasing but resource sector problems have taken a toll in the region.

**BIA looks to Kamloops for vision**

By MICHELLE LANG

Free Press staff writer

Prince George's Downtown Business Improvement Area is hiring a Kamloops-based consultant to create a strategic plan for the city core.

Urban Systems will help the Downtown BIA through the planning process to draft a plan by mid-January. The BIA will not proceed with any major projects until its strategy is in place.

BIA organizers have been working on a five year plan since the organization was formed this spring. (The BIA has a five-year mandate.) Downtown business members pay a levy of \$1.70 per \$1000 of assessed property value to the BIA every year.

BIA chair Kirk Gable says it has been difficult for the member businesses, who

each have their own ideas for revitalization, to agree on a common vision for the downtown.

"It's difficult to do it internally without any help. We're all too close to it. That's why we're bringing a facilitator in to help us develop our strategic plan," he says.

The consultant's work will include collecting information on past revitalization efforts and the current issues facing downtown. They will meet with all downtown stakeholders in early January to guide the BIA through the planning process.

UNBC planning professor John Curry has said that past downtown revitalization efforts have failed, in part, because of outside consultants who do not understand northern B.C. But Mr. Gable believes that Urban

Systems, which has offices in Fort St. John and Grande Prairie, "has a better understanding of the north than any of the other consultants we looked at."

Despite a perception that the BIA has done little since its inception, Mr. Gable insists the organization has been busy. He notes they have set up an office on Quebec Street and hired a manager. He notes the BIA hosted an all-candidates forum during the recent municipal elections.

Mr. Gable says the BIA is taking its time with major projects because it wants a solid plan in place first.

"We've had 30 or 40 years to create the mess downtown, it's not going to get better overnight," he says. "We're moving slowly because we want to make the right decisions."

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Al's community spirit is to be commended. He's been a member of the P.G. Rotary Club for 24 years, the Canadian Legion for 49 years and involved with several other organizations. He especially enjoys building model aircrafts, likes reading and listening to music.

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The Lesson: stay in control of your valuables. Don't allow others, no matter how kindly they appear, to be in contact with anything that is important to your safety and security. Thank them and tell them you will manage by yourself. If you really need help, ask one of the official staff to help you. This is how they earn their living. Keep the key in your hand until you are out of viewing range of other people in the terminal or station. You don't want them to know where you have stashed it.

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