

# YELLOWKNIFE CHAMBER INSIDER



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE YELLOWKNIFE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE • 2018

## GIANT MINE

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# YELLOWKNIFE CHAMBER INSIDER



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ON THE COVER: Tourists take Aurora photos at Prosperous Lake.  
billbraden/courtesy My Backyard Tours

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After nearly six decades of dirty mining, the Giant Mine cleanup will take years and hundreds of millions of dollars - for Yellowknife, a Giant gift that keeps on giving. P8

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# President & Executive Director's Report 2018

The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce is your business network! With 370 local businesses as members, we're dedicated to strengthening the Yellowknife business community. Our mission is to be a leader in the improvement and development of a strong Yellowknife business community with a diversified economy and sustainable growth. We work to achieve this mission by focusing on five key areas: advocacy, promotion, education, connections and savings.

## Advocacy

Our major advocacy priorities are encouraging transportation and infrastructure investment in the North, supporting economic diversification, and attracting and retaining Yellowknife businesses. Throughout 2017, we lobbied the municipal, territorial and federal governments on 23 different issues. This year is off to a strong start with a diverse advocacy portfolio that includes opposing a land transfer tax, continuing support for an accommodation levy, lobbying for the privatization of cannabis, lobbying for open government and transparency, and co-sponsoring our first ever resolution with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

Inspired by our lobbying efforts on open government and transparency, we've created an 'Advocacy' page on our website ([www.ykchamber.com](http://www.ykchamber.com)) to display our lobbying letters, the responses we receive, relevant media coverage, and links to relevant government discussions.

## Promotion

Studies show that membership with a local chamber of commerce increases consumer awareness by 73 percent. When consumers know that a business is a Chamber member, they are 49 percent more likely to think favorably of it and 80 percent more likely to purchase goods and services from the company in the future (A.C.C.E., 2012). Through promotion in our online and print business directories, we're spreading the news about members of the YK Chamber!

We also run a number of initiatives designed to create opportunities for Yellowknife businesses to promote the products and services they offer. For example, our beloved #ShopYK passport program, in partnership with the City of Yellowknife, had 56 participating businesses in 2017 and saw \$931,800 spent locally through the campaign.

## Education

We provide educational and professional development opportunities for our membership with programs such as Lunch & Learn, Small Business Small Talk, and Business Club Luncheons. We also pursue government funding to subsidize the cost of training for local businesses through our "Building Business Capacity in the North Program".

From our annual membership survey, we've gained a greater understanding of the educational needs of our members and intend to leverage our Small Business Week Conference to provide a combination of thought provoking content and practical business knowledge.

## Connections

Partnering with us to host a Business Club Luncheon or Business After Hours event is a great way to showcase your business. These events provide attendees with an opportunity to connect with potential suppliers, customers, and fellow businesspeople. So far in 2018, we've hosted events with Northwestel, Blachford Lake Lodge and Air Tindi and Angela Gzowski Photography.

We also facilitate networking during our annual Business Award Gala, where we will

present 10 awards to outstanding Yellowknife businesses. The awards include: Small Business of the Year, Corporate Business of the Year, Aboriginal Entrepreneurship Award, Customer Service Award of Excellence, Community Impact Award, Breakout New Business Award, Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, the Workplace Health & Safety Award, and the Trailblazers Women in Business Award. The only award recipient selected by the Board of Directors is the Chamber Member of the Year Award, which was proudly presented to Samantha Stuart Photography. In 2017, we had 262 people in attendance at the Business Award Gala dinner!

Our Discover travel program has been very popular. In April 2017, 94 people joined us for a trip to China and in April 2018, 44 people joined us for a trip to Peru. Our 2019 destination is Bali, where members can join us for nine days for \$2300 + GST and non-members can participate for \$2500 + GST.

## Savings — Membership Has Its Benefits!

Our membership with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce allows us to share their value-added programs with our membership. We're proud to offer you discounts on merchant services with First Data, fuel savings with Esso and shipping discounts with UPS.

For 2018, 22 businesses registered for our Member2Member discount program, which allows Chamber members to offer discounts to other Chamber members. Discounts include: 20 percent off advertising, 10 percent off graphic design, 10 percent off Boardroom rentals, discounts on photography, and much more!

It takes a team to pull together the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce's diverse programs and advocacy efforts. Thank you to our dedicated Board of Directors and our hardworking staff: Angela Heal, executive assistant, and Jessica Wang, programs coordinator.

We'd like to recognize our Platinum Sponsor - First Air and our Corporate Gold Sponsors: CIBC, Northwestel, Northland Utilities, Crowe MacKay LLP, Lawson Lundell and Finning.

*Cheers to the year ahead!*



Mike Lalonde  
President



Deneen Everett  
Executive Director

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# THE LONG-TERM LEGACY OF GIANT MINE

The Giant Mine's eight million-ounce legacy will keep on giving. The cleanup will transform 55 years of dirty mining and add a boost to Yellowknife's economy for decades to come.

By Bill Braden

Think ahead, not too far out, to around the year 2023.

By then, the old Giant Mine site's 950 hectares will be reshaped as a peak workforce of over 300 toils at cleaning up more than a half-century of really dirty gold mining and refining.

It will take at least five years, to about 2028, to get most of the cleanup work done, and years more to finalize the job. And then, for decades to come, a much smaller workforce will monitor and maintain a complex range of control systems.

In the coming decade, the federal government will spend more than \$600 million on the cleanup - that's on top of more than \$365 million already spent - a staggering amount of cash that may not be nearly enough to satisfy a very long list of project criteria, demands and expectations. High on that list are hopes from Yellowknife's Indigenous and business communities that they will be at the front of the line for jobs and service opportunities worth hundreds of millions.

The "C" shaft head frame skeleton, prior to its demolition in 2016.  
billbradenphoto

As one long-time Yellowknifer wryly observed, Giant's eight million-ounce gold legacy, spanning from 1948 to 2004, will just keep on giving. And it's true. Apart from the hundreds of jobs and millions in trade that flow yearly into Yellowknife pockets from the NWT's three diamond mines, it is the biggest certain economic project on the city's near-to-midterm horizon.

But just how and when those impacts will roll out is not certain – yet. Despite almost 20 years of planning, research and studying, the project's complexity makes it difficult to say when the process will roll out.

"It's early in the process as it stands right now," says Paul Gruner, President and CEO of the Yellowknives Dene First

Nation's Det'on Cho Corporation. "But I'm encouraged by what I've seen so far from INAC (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) and from Parsons. I would say I'm more optimistic now than I was a few months ago."

He's referring to Parsons Inc., the American engineering giant which late last year was awarded the contract to manage the Giant Mine Remediation Project (GMRP). Parsons plans to run the project from its Canadian headquarters in Calgary and a satellite office at the mine site just north of Yellowknife.

Det'on Cho has been a contractor on the Giant site for about 15 years, through joint ventures with Nuna Logistics and Nahanni Construction, for site management, security and construction. Gruner says at least half of the 60 or so Det'on Cho workers are Northerners.

"There's definitely a willing desire to engage at a local level ... and to make this a positive socio-economic engagement for the territory," he says. "They've been soliciting our feedback in how to best engage, how to hire locally. We don't know the outcome yet of the most recent RFP... but everything I've seen so far has been very positive."

Kenny Ruptash, vice-president of projects for Yellowknife-based Nahanni Construction, praises the relationship he's had with Parsons as one of its Giant subcontractors over the past six years. He also introduced Parsons to other local suppliers and says they have kept up those channels.

"They've been great to deal with, very respectful of the local community," says Ruptash. "I think Parsons has done a good job about rolling this out and contacting companies to give a heads up about what's coming up."

Both Gruner and Ruptash are bullish on what the Giant cleanup project can do for Yellowknife's economy, and for the future of mining in the North.

"You're going to have a bunch of displaced workers from Diavik (anticipated closure 2025) with transferable skills,"

says Gruner, estimating there are at least 200 northern workers at that mine. "What a great opportunity, that we reduce the downside of Diavik shutting down and we can port that skilled labour into the remediation plan's 10-years plus program."

Ruptash takes that notion a step further. "If you look at remediation, the cleanup of Giant will transition quite nicely into the cleanup of other diamond mines," he says. "Highly trained individuals can walk into those other situations."

Gruner urges collaboration, and managing the peaks and valleys of where and when the labour force will be needed. "That's where everybody in the Territories, including the Det'on Chos of the world, need to be prepared," he says. "We need to make sure we've got a developed workforce, that we've got businesses in place that can go and execute that work."

When Giant's last owner, Royal Oak Mines Ltd. declared bankruptcy in 1999, it was legally able to walk away from the mess that it and previous owners left behind. Their mining leases reverted to the federal government, under INAC control.

INAC assumed full control of the site in 2004 and assembled a team that now includes eight people in Yellowknife and others in Ottawa and Edmonton, to manage the site and design the massive cleanup. The team has many project layers to coordinate: adhere to the federal Metal Mining Effluent Regulations, the Fisheries Act, and NWT mining and safety laws, to run the Giant site as a functioning mine, maintaining and keeping safe the underground and surface workings. It has an almost overwhelming consultation mandate; it regularly connects with no fewer than five local working groups, including some 14 different agencies.

Between 2006 and 2016, INAC spent about \$356 million on these and others tasks. It threaded its way through a seven-year environmental assessment. It has razed and meticulously disposed of dozens of arsenic and asbestos-contaminated structures. It footed the bill for millions in

engineering and environmental studies to draft an overall surface rehabilitation and underground arsenic containment plan, and financed the \$17.5 million mine site bypass, re-routing the Ingraham Trail around the mine workings and open pits.

INAC is now preparing for its biggest regulatory challenge: filing its application early in 2019 for the all-encompassing

Closure and Reclamation Plan and the related and necessary water license. This process, expected to take 17 months, will be open to public interveners and will set the detailed criteria for the remediation plan and for Parsons to carry out the work.

When Parsons formally assumes the project, it will also take over all subcontracting.

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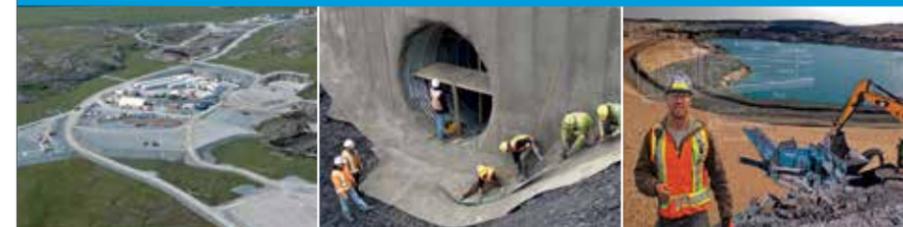
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It has already had boots on the ground at the Giant mine project. From 2013 to 2016, it managed the \$35.7 million demolition of the Giant roaster complex. Parsons has an almost identical role in Yukon, where it won a \$14 million, four-year contract to manage the abandoned Faro lead-zinc mine.

As the Giant project's main construction manager (MCM), Parsons has been awarded two contracts: a \$32 million deal to manage and maintain the site from July of this year to sometime in 2020. That's when the new closure and reclamation plan and water license are expected to be in hand, both of which will guide Parsons' management of the much larger and long-term clean-up. The federal government has booked this effort at \$600 million, plus a 50 percent contingency.

Two major subcontractors have already been selected: AECOM for environmental support services and general design, and Golder Associates for mining support services and civil design.

"One of the primary roles Parsons has is tendering the contracts on behalf of the federal government," says Rob Turek, manager of the Giant procurement team for Public Works and Procurement Canada (PWPC). "As of July 1 this year, they will assume responsibility for the site and they will tender the work packages related to refreshing care and maintenance and site stabilization work (up to 2020) and the larger remediation stage (beyond 2020)."

Under federal procurement policy, the remediation plan falls under the umbrella of international free trade conventions such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. Canada cannot compel these contracts to go to Canadian firms or even demand conditions on local content. These rules caused no small amount of angst among Northerners, who were expecting hard guarantees for a share

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UP OTHER  
DIAMOND MINES.

**Kenny Ruptash, Vice-president,  
Projects, Nahanni Construction**

of the remediation plan's action. After all, hiring local contractors and labour has been a condition of getting approval for any new development here in the NWT. And, claimed by just about every local politician, this is in our backyard – we deserve it! The Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) especially, felt it had a right to demand conditions; its people bore the terrible consequences of unchecked arsenic pollution early in the mine's life.

On contracts estimated at over \$100,000, local and northern firms will be up against big competition.

Turek says Parsons is required to tender these internationally, under the trade agreements rules for federal projects. All contracts will be posted on the MERX on-line tendering system listing federal and provincial government projects.

"We include provisions in all contracts to maximize local, regional and indigenous participation, for encouraging indigenous employment, subcontracting and training," says Natalie Plato, deputy director of the Giant project for INAC.

Turek says Parsons will assess capacity within northern and indigenous suppliers, and under federal support policy for northern firms, can award tenders only to those firms. "We want to make this do-able for northern and Indigenous firms so they can compete, and right-size them for the local and regional capacity," says Turek.

Despite the international trade barriers, INAC was keen to find a way to give voice to frustrated locals. In its 2015 Giant project environmental agreement, INAC established the Giant Mine Oversight Board (GMOB) as an independent society to monitor the project. It is governed by a mix of citizen and professional members, appointed by the City, YKDFN, North Slave Métis and the advocacy group Alternatives North, with GNWT and INAC as co-proponents. From its storefront office in downtown Yellowknife, it has the mandate and a budget of \$680,000 to report to the public, and to question and make recommendations to INAC's project team.



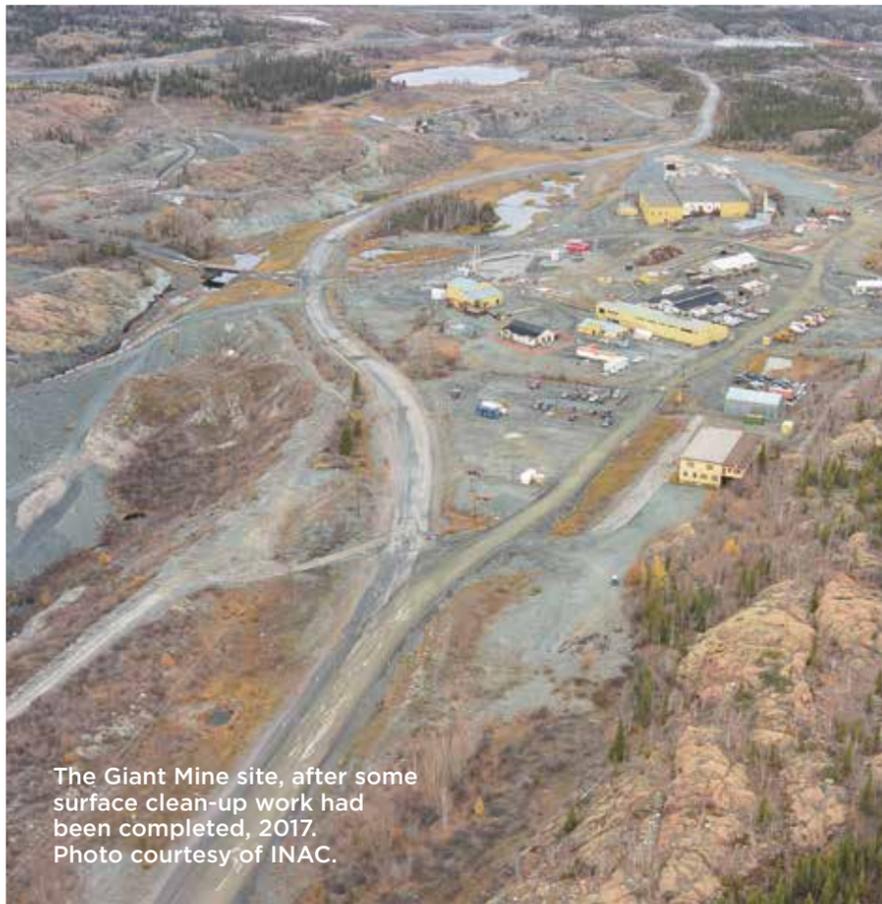
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The Giant Mine site, after some surface clean-up work had been completed, 2017. Photo courtesy of INAC.

It also has a daunting research task, and an annual budget of \$180,000, to seek a permanent solution to underground arsenic trioxide that will be frozen in place. Freezing is regarded as only a stopgap measure to contain the 237,000 tonnes of the highly toxic byproduct. In fact, the current design suggests freezing in place can be a manageable 'fix' for only 100 years.

Plato says Parsons will have a small core team – perhaps fewer than 10 – on site to manage the mine and the contracting. Two local residents have already been hired: Louie Azzolini, formerly the director for the Arctic Energy Alliance, is the community economic development manager, and Lisa Colas of Ndilo is community liaison.

“Their main role is to update our local labour study, and work with the communities and local businesses to make sure we package the upcoming work appropriately,” says Plato.



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## THERE'S DEFINITELY A WILLING DESIRE TO ENGAGE AT A LOCAL LEVEL... AND TO MAKE THIS A POSITIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT FOR THE TERRITORY.

Paul Gruner,  
President and CEO,  
Det'on Cho Corporation

"As the MCM (main construction manager), Parsons is reaching out to Indigenous and northern Yellowknife area businesses through direct engagement and via the Parsons MCM website," responded Azzolini in an email. "Once future remediation plans are firmed up and associated contracting opportunities are more firmly defined, a concerted effort will be made to communicate that information to the business community."

The closure of Giant, followed closely by the closure of Con mine, in the early 2000s hit the City's coffers hard. Both mines were within City limits, so Yellowknife lost hundreds of thousands

of dollars in industrial taxes. Grants and payments in lieu of taxes from territorial and federal sources have stopped. A deal to provide minimal emergency services to Giant, valued at \$70,000 a year, expired in 2014. It's an arrangement the City wants to renew.

In a briefing to the City's municipal services committee in February, Kerry Penney, Director of Policy, Communications and Economic Development, advised that the withdrawal of both Giant and Con sites also cut deeply into the City's land quantum. Remediation of some areas to industrial and residential standards could open new

parcels of land for growth, and Penney said a next step would be to add this long-range potential to the City's community and engagement planning processes.

"We are working with the GNWT and the project team to ensure that maximum benefits are achieved locally," she wrote in an email, adding that, "the City wants to ensure maximum benefit to northern/Yellowknife businesses and one mechanism to achieve this may be a socio-economic agreement."

The Giant project team, in a 2018 brochure, stresses that it "strives to

ensure the cleanup leaves a positive legacy from one of Canada's largest contaminated sites." It says it will direct contractors to deliver socio-economic benefits that meet local capacity and needs.

In all, the Giant mine project does indeed have the mandate, the money and all the good intentions to turn one of the country's worst industrial messes into a cleaner, maybe even reusable place. Most agree, though, that's too early to gauge whether, and how, the final chapter of Giant's legacy will meet the expectations of the communities it helped, yet hurt, so much. **YKCI**

## Giant leaves a forever legacy

Johnny Baker found gold at the site that became the Giant mine in 1935, but commercial ore was not proven until 1944. His exclamation that a rich surface vein was "two hands wide and goes on forever!" became the name of the Yellowknife musical *Two Hands and Forever*, staged in the 1980s. Indeed, the mine fostered a thriving company camp that was a cornerstone of Yellowknife culture into the 1980s.

The mine poured its first gold in 1948 under Falconbridge, was later sold to Pamour (1986-90) then to Royal Oak Mines (1990-99). In 1993, during a bitterly-fought strike, an underground bomb set by a striking miner killed nine replacement workers, shattering the community. By 1999 Royal Oak was bankrupt, mining stopped and the lease briefly reverted to the federal government.

Miramar Mining Corp., which was closing down the neighbouring Con Mine, made a deal with INAC and re-started mining at Giant. Miramar recovered Giant's remaining ore, and from 1999 to 2004, trucked it from Giant to the Con mine for processing, ending 55 years and 8 million ounces of gold production at Giant. The lease, and with it, the second worst industrial mess in Canada's history, once again reverted to the federal government.

Giant left behind an ugly swath: eight open pits, four tailings ponds, 325,000 cubic meters of contaminated soil and an estimated 85 buildings laced with arsenic and asbestos. By far the greatest hazard is 237,000 tonnes of arsenic trioxide, a byproduct from processing the gold, which was pumped back into 11 underground stopes. To stop it from seeping through the rock into Great Slave Lake, it will be frozen in place.



The underground freeze system at Giant Mine. Photo courtesy of INAC.

# GIANT MINE REMEDIATION PROJECT LABOUR STUDY

The Giant Mine Remediation Project Labour Resource Study 2017, released in March 2018, by Stratos Inc., gives Yellowknifers the best scenario to date of just how big the Giant Mine cleanup will be, and how long it could take, to remedy a half-century of very dirty gold mining and refining.

The 141-page study says there are another three years of detailed planning and design ahead, by the federal planning

team and its principal contractor, Parsons Inc., before rehabilitation begins in earnest. A major permitting threshold also lies ahead - getting a renewed water license from the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board. This intensely detailed process could take up to 18 months and, because an equally detailed reclamation and closure plan must be submitted as part of regulatory process, will reveal a lot more about how the work will roll out.

If the water license is approved and issued, the remediation process will gear up by 2021. The workforce will increase from about 30 to over 300 by 2023, and is expected to spool back to less than 200 by 2026, and by 2030, to fewer than 50. During this intensive nine-year period, the bulk of the demolition, materials disposal, water management and freeze-block systems will be completed. About 30 workers will then be needed for many years to maintain the sprawling site to the standards set in the approved plan. Stratos qualifies that any forecasts for labour or project timelines are subject to INAC and Parsons finalizing the overall plan, subject to the terms of the water license.

It's a stark comparison: the Giant Mine operated for 51 years. The charts and tables in this report show that it will take at least 35 years to plan and carry out its rehabilitation.

Over the project's peak five years, from 2012-25, the labour requirements alone are roughly equivalent to adding the entire payroll of the City of Yellowknife's 270 staff to the Yellowknife economy. As Yellowknife prospector and mine history advocate Walt Humphries said, in a 2014 article in *The Economist*, "That mine is still making money... and it will make money for years to come."

Stratos speculates that the gradual slowing of NWT's mining sector over the next few years may benefit the project, as affected workers seek their next paycheck. In a sense, it could mirror the bust-to-boom cycle the city lived through 20 years ago. When both two gold mines closed, a pall of gloom was replaced with the euphoria of the diamond economy.

Adding to that optimism, the report says that, especially among indigenous communities, there is a potential labour source emerging which, given training opportunities, could satisfy needs on all sides. "The findings demonstrate that there is Northern and Northern Aboriginal capacity for GMRP entry-level and semiskilled occupational needs, as well as some skilled and professional occupational needs," says the study.

## MAJOR PROJECTS IN THE NWT AND PROJECTED LABOUR DEMAND

PROJECTED LABOUR DEMAND	Ekati (+ Jay pipe)	Diavik + A21 <sup>1</sup>	Snap Lake <sup>2</sup>	Gahcho Kue	Cantung <sup>3</sup>	Inuvik-Tuk Hwy <sup>4</sup>	Whati Hwy <sup>5</sup>	GMRP	TOTAL (Excluding GMRP)
2017	1889	1134	55	380	254	49		30	3761
2018	1889	1134	35	380		49	150	30	3637
2019	1889	1134		380			150	30	3553
2020	1889	1134		380			150	30	3553
2021	1889	1134		380			150	204	3553
2022	1889	1134		380			10	312	3413
2023	1038	1134		380			10	254	2562
2024	1038			380			10	251	1428
2025	1038			380			10	202	1428
2026	1038			380			10	162	1428
2027	1038			380			10	162	1428
2028	1038			380			10	162	1428
2029	1038						10	162	1048
2030	1038						10	36	1048
2031	1038						10	30	1048
2032	1038						10	30	1048
2033	1038						10	30	1048
2034	282						10	30	292

<sup>1</sup> A21 will allow Diavik to maintain current production rates

<sup>2</sup> It is unclear whether care and maintenance will continue beyond 2018

<sup>3</sup> This mine site is located near the Yukon border, a long distance from the GMRP Site and Yellowknife community

<sup>4</sup> This project indicates an additional 40 long-term jobs are expected following the completion of the project, but it is unclear whether this will be direct or indirect employment

<sup>5</sup> The labour numbers are preliminary, taken from a public announcement by the NWT DM of Transportation

Still, there are the unknowns.

The Stratos team makes it clear they were hampered in some of their work by stale, inconsistent, or incomplete data. For instance, the GNWT's 2014 NWT-wide labour survey won't be updated until 2019. They also flagged that Canadian and world market conditions could easily skew their assumptions over time. For example, Dominion Diamond's recent suspension of its massive Jay Pipe expansion at Ekati, announced just weeks after the report's release, signals another shift in the NWT's labour dynamics.

The study shows there is only one other significant project on the horizon: the Tliche all-season road which will connect the community of Whati with Highway 3, the main road to Yellowknife, will likely mostly completed

by the time GMRP begins to ramp up. There are other proposed projects, such as the NICO, Prairie Creek and Pine Point mines that could be rivals for available labour. None are advanced enough to consider at this time.

Like all big projects North of 60, this one can't be entirely staffed by northerners, says Stratos. Much of the talent needed, such as entry-level labourers, semi- and skilled trades like heavy equipment operators, drillers, blasters, welders or electricians, is available in the NWT. But there will be range of skilled technical and professional roles that will have to come from elsewhere.

"Overall, local labour supply can partially fulfill GMRP labour needs, although the local labour market may not have the interest or skills needed.... and may

require additional training or education. Stratos adds that the local Aboriginal workforce may be larger than presumed, as more indigenous people join the workforce and achieve higher education."

The study includes charts and tables for about 60 specific skillsets and breaks them down into 15 "work centres" such as underground, landfill and open pits. Each chart includes a timeline of what years a specific job skill will be needed: for instance, a total 59 drillers and 62 driller helpers jobs will be needed on surface from 2021 to 2030. More will be needed underground.

The Stratos report was commissioned by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. For more information about the Giant Mine Remediation Project, go to the website at [www.giant.gc.ca](http://www.giant.gc.ca). **YKCI**



An RTL truck works at the Giant mine site. Photo Courtesy of INAC



Tourists at Prosperous Lake take photos of the Aurora Borealis.  
billbradenphoto / courtesy My Backyard Tours.

# A GOOD PROBLEM TO HAVE

BY PETER BURROWS

Yellowknife has a fast growing tourism market – a good problem to have for any city. But can available tourist facilities meet the growing demand?

Yellowknife has one of those good-to-have problems. The number of leisure travel visitors coming to town — whether on business or for pleasure — is way up over the last few years. More than 73,000 tourists came to the city in 2016-17, more than half of them to see the Aurora Borealis, and spent about \$116.6 million. The numbers from Canada and the United States have climbed steadily, and the numbers from China and Korea have, on a percentage basis, skyrocketed. That means money in the pockets of hotel owners and tour operators and, via various taxes and fees, more revenue for the territorial government.

But it also means strain on some of the links in the tourism chain, from the number of available airline seats to not enough available hotel accommodations to reservations for dog sled tours. And then there are a couple of significant new factors at play for the local travel industry.

The first is the proposed introduction of a new levy on hotel rooms that would go to fund what is known as a destination marketing organization (DMO), which would market the city as a whole to prospective visitors. The levy has the support of industry organizations and most hotels, and looks set to be in place by next year.

**“AT A TIME WHEN WE’RE  
LOOKING FOR ECONOMIC  
DIVERSIFICATION, TOURISM  
SEEMS TO BE A CLEAR  
OPTION...”**

*Michael Lalonde, President,  
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce*

The second big new factor is not unique to Yellowknife or the NWT. It’s one that has sprouted up all over the world in the last few years and one that will have a growing impact in coming years — the short-term, unlicensed, rental business. Whether on Airbnb or Tripping.com or Hometogo, the number of people renting out a room in their house — or their entire house, or even a series of houses they have purchased for the specific purpose of putting them out for short-term rental — has exploded in Yellowknife, as it has in cities and towns around the planet.

Many short-term rentals are great. The owners are considerate and honest and offer a good experience to guests. Others are nightmares, with stories of bunk beds in the basement and mould on the walls. And, as many established tourism entrepreneurs have pointed out, even the good short-term rentals are avoiding taxes and fees and other obligations that fall on



Joey Cruz, General Manager, Days Inn and Suites Hotel, and President, Yellowknife Hotel Association. billbradenphoto

traditional, licensed establishments. In addition, they generally have not had inspections from the fire department or health personnel.

The City of Yellowknife and the territorial government are facing these two issues right now. They’re considering legislation to allow communities to charge a levy and other laws to address short-term rentals and try to create a level playing field for established, traditional accommodations. The first issue has broad support and looks certain to pass. The second is a tough balancing act with no obvious solution.

Joey Cruz has a front-row seat from which to watch Yellowknife’s changing landscape. He’s the general manager of the Days Inn & Suites

Hotel and president of the Yellowknife Hotel Association. He’s seen the booms and busts, the annual cycles and the growth of short-term rentals. He says that, overall, things are pretty good for hotel operators in Yellowknife right now. “The good news piece is that there is a lot of demand from tourists,” he says. “Tourism is up mainly due to the influx of Chinese guests.”

The statistics bear that out. The Government of the Northwest Territories reports that 591 Chinese tourists came through the Yellowknife airport in 2012-2013, and 6,206 arrived in 2016-2017, a 950 percent increase. That number is dwarfed by the 88,000 visitors from Canada, but it’s still an important factor in recent tourist market growth.

**NWT TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS**

NWT Visitation Statistics	2015-16	2016-17	% Change
<b>NUMBER OF LEISURE VISITORS</b> <small>(Aurora Viewing, Fishing, Hunting, Gen. Touring, Outdoor Adventure, Visit Friends &amp; Family)</small>	<b>63,010</b>	<b>73,580</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>NUMBER OF BUSINESS TRAVELLERS</b> <small>(Mining, Government, etc.)</small>	<b>30,900</b>	<b>34,900</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>TOTAL VISITORS</b>	<b>93,910</b>	<b>108,480</b>	<b>16%</b>
NWT Visitors Spending (in millions)	2015-16	2016-17	% Change
<b>LEISURE TRAVEL</b>	<b>91.90</b>	<b>116.60</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>BUSINESS TRAVEL</b>	<b>75.20</b>	<b>84.90</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>TOTAL SPENDING</b>	<b>167.10</b>	<b>201.40</b>	<b>21%</b>
Yellowknife Hotel Occupancy 2016	2016	2017	2018 (Jan- May)
<b>OCCUPANCY RATE</b>	<b>72.2%</b>	<b>69.1%</b>	<b>72.7%</b>

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"It's incredible," says Deneen Everett, executive director of the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce. "Those numbers are creating a lot of economic opportunity for our small business community and enhancing the well-being of Yellowknife residents. As we've seen more tourists over the last couple of years, we've seen more businesses opening up and that benefits residents as well."

Cruz says travellers to Yellowknife can be divided into three sectors: government travel, business travel, which is heavily dependent on the mining industry, and tourists. Ideally, the volume from those three sectors would come at different times of the year, but that can be a tough balance to reach. In particular, the number of tourists visiting Yellowknife is heavily cyclical, with the peak season being January to March, when visitors are most likely to see the Aurora Borealis. In recent years, the August through October period has also been busy. Outside of those times, hotels can be dealing with low occupancy rates. In 2017, occupancy rates in Yellowknife varied from 91.2 percent in September to 52.4 percent in May.

Those numbers will soon be affected by the number of new rooms coming on stream. Cruz says Yellowknife currently has about 750 hotel rooms. Nova Hotels will soon add another 80, the Explorer Hotel is adding about 80, and there are another 30 being built by other operators. "It's great to have these new hotel rooms come on," he says, "but during the downtime it will add to significant challenges."

One way the territory is addressing the seasonal fluctuations is through the NWT Conference Bureau, whose job it is to promote the territory as a destination for meetings, conventions and incentive travel. A single convention can bring a lot of business to a community during a downtime; even a smaller meeting in a small community will fill the hotels. The Conference Bureau receives funding from the territorial government to chase bids, host site visits and generally get potential clients to conclude that the NWT is the place they should meet. The Bureau has been increasing its activities since it started bidding on contracts three years ago, with a 304 percent increase in the value of bids it submitted in 2017-2018 over the previous year. "We submitted \$7 million worth of bids, and won quite a few of them," says Cathie Bolstad, the chief executive officer of NWT Tourism, which not only represents 200 tourism operators but also runs the Convention Bureau. "That brings the business traveller to Yellowknife and they often tack on a package to stay for an extra day or two."

Another mechanism that could help level the seasonal variations in Yellowknife tourism would be the establishment of a destination marketing organization (DMO), which would be tasked with marketing Yellowknife as a whole. The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce

has been lobbying the Government of the Northwest Territories for an amendment to the Cities, Towns and Villages Act, which would allow the City of Yellowknife to impose an accommodation levy. Almost all large cities, and many smaller cities in Canada, charge an accommodation levy of between one and five percent, and most Canadian and international travelers are used to seeing this charge on their hotel bills. "We have some strong partners working alongside us to lobby for these changes, and we're hopeful that legislation will pass this fall", says Everett. "The collection of the levy and the ability to use that for additional marketing is a good thing in a very competitive marketing world," says Bolstad.

Legislation to let municipalities collect a tourism levy is winding its way through the NWT legislature, with a third reading expected in October. At the very least, the legislation is expected to allow the larger regional centres and Yellowknife to pass bylaws to create a tourism levy. Yellowknife's city council is already working on its bylaws in this regard, but nothing is expected to be decided before the municipal elections in October. Bolstad expects final bylaws to be produced by the new mayor and council and, if things go smoothly, for a levy to be in place by the beginning of next year. Michael Lalonde, President of the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, says the tourism levy will help to market Yellowknife as its own unique entity. "We benefit from NWT Tourism's campaigns to get people to the NWT, but a specific Yellowknife destination marketing organization will allow us to have that singular focus on Yellowknife and everything there is here," he says.

Then there is the issue of short-term rentals. As of June 10, there were 132 listings on Airbnb for accommodations in and around Yellowknife. That's up from 97 the previous July, a 36 percent increase in less than a year. There were 65 on Tripping.com, more than doubling from the previous year, and 90 on Hometogo.com, a 50 percent increase.

Cruz recognizes the short-term rental market as an important new part of the tourism industry, but points out that online rental platforms do not collect or remit GST or HST, pay no corporate taxes and make it easy for those renting rooms on their platforms to do the same. He would like to see a level playing field. "You can enter the business, just get inspected and get the necessary permits," he says.

NWT Tourism, which is the territory's destination marketing organization, is working on its position regarding vacation rentals, but notes a few issues that are being considered. "NWT Tourism does not list unlicensed accommodations on its Spectacular NWT website or in its Explorer's Guide, and it advocates that there be a level playing field and enforcement of existing bylaws that require an

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accommodation to be licensed,” Bolstad says. “NWT Tourism spends a lot of money marketing the ‘spectacular’ destination, and the tools of government – like the requirement that an accommodation have a safety plan and that it be inspected before it is licenced – ensure that the destination is spectacular and are very important to uphold the brand and the experience for the visitor.”

That idea of a brand – of an image that comes to mind when a name is mentioned, of an experience that is passed on from former visitors to prospective ones – comes up again and again when talking about the impact of short-term rentals.

Jo-Ann Martin, the owner and operator of Yellowknife’s Bullocks Bistro, which derives a good part of its annual income from tourists, says it’s important to protect the city’s brand as a friendly, beautiful place to visit. The City has recently launched a new brand —“Extraordinary Yellowknife”— specifically designed to target the tourism market. (See story following this feature). “Tourism is an entire-community effort,” Martin says. “If you’re walking down the street in Yellowknife and you see a tourist trying to figure out where to go, you need to stop and ask if they need a hand. We are a tourist destination and need to make people feel like they are at a home away from home.”

Short-term accommodations can also create problems with local residential markets. If too many units are taken out of circulation and then dedicated to short-term rentals, the cost of rental accommodations for Yellowknifers will go up – including for the people who work in the tourism industry. Short-term rentals have also been known to drive down housing prices in neighbourhoods or buildings that have a high percentage of units for rent.

For the past few years, municipalities across Canada have been considering and implementing

options for regulating short-term rentals. Some have banned all unlicensed units and rentals that are not occupied by the owners, with violators subject to fines as high as \$500 for a first offence. Others have insisted that entire houses can only be rented if they are registered and pay a higher fee than room renters. In some places, the short-term rental sites have agreed to collect sales and accommodation taxes for the municipality. All of these options are available to city council, which has recognized the need for greater fairness



Cathie Bolstad, the chief executive officer of NWT Tourism. billbradenphoto








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The Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife is adding 75 rooms and upgraded convention facilities. billbradenphoto

in providing for licencing of short-term accommodations and the collection of taxes and levies on the services they provide. Again, policy changes resulting in bylaws are not expected until after the municipal election in October.

Lalonde, the Chamber's president, says tourism is a huge opportunity for Yellowknife, and policy-makers will need

to consider the options carefully. "At a time when we're looking for economic diversification, tourism seems to be a clear option and now is the time to capitalize on it. It provides a path to help alleviate some of the difficulties we face with the coming decline of the diamond mines that we've relied on for so long."

NWT Tourism's Bolstad says the challenges can and will be met, and that the future for tourism is bright. "Our board is so impressed with the way Yellowknife is embracing tourism and wants to pursue it as a bigger part of their economic strategy ... we want to invite Yellowknife to present at our annual conference so the rest of the NWT can see what tourism can be like when you mobilize a community to take care of tourists." **YKCI**



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# COME *for the* LIGHTS STAY *for the* CHILL CITY

*By Beverly Cramp*

The City's new tourism strategy called for rebranding and a new slogan — "Extraordinary Yellowknife" — and it's already working to attract visitors



Kerry Penney, the City of Yellowknife's Director of Policy, Communications and Economic Development, and two of her staff members, Richard McIntosh and Meyha Oake, show off the City's new brand. [billbradenphoto](#)



## REBRANDING TO CATCH THE TOURISM WAVE

A lot of thought and research goes into brand development, starting with the fundamentals, below.

### BRAND OBJECTIVES

#### Business Objective

To expand and diversify the economy of Yellowknife by increasing the number and expenditures of visitors, while expanding services and facilities to align with the brand promise.

#### Marketing Objective

To increase awareness of Yellowknife as an extraordinary year-round destination.

#### Branding Objective

To ensure the Yellowknife tourism brand delivers on its promise.

### BRAND MISSION

Make tourism the second largest sector in the Yellowknife economy

### BRAND VISION

The City of Yellowknife is a world leader in Aurora tourism, a significant player in water-based tourism (fishing, boating and float plane tours) and a destination where you will see and participate in dozens of activities and experiences within or just outside city boundaries.

### KEY BRAND MESSAGING

- Yellowknife will light up your life
- More in Yellowknife than you ever imagined
- Hard to believe until you experience it
- You have the best of Canada in our own backyard

On March 13 of this year, the City of Yellowknife launched its new brand and related slogan - "Extraordinary Yellowknife." It replaces Yellowknife's old one - "Diamond Capital of North America" - that was established more than two decades ago when Yellowknife hosted a huge diamond staking rush that resulted in the development of five diamond mines. That brand was retired a few years ago.

In developing a new destination marketing strategy, City officials decided to shift the focus from industry to tourism in order to diversify the city's economy. As Kerry Penney, the City's Director of Policy, Communications and Economic Development explains, the tourism market is showing signs of being very lucrative for Yellowknife. In 2016, tourist spending was about \$90 million; in 2017, that amount grew to more than \$100 million. With the right branding and marketing efforts, that will continue to go up. "Tourism is one of the fastest growing areas now," says Penney. "It has huge potential."

The "Extraordinary Yellowknife" slogan is the foundation of the new tourism brand identity. It was developed to support the City's plan, as part of the marketing strategy, to establish an accommodation levy that will fund a destination marketing organization.

Penney says the new slogan is meant to convey the incredible personality of the Northwest Territories' capital city and hints at the awe and beauty of the Aurora Borealis' slow dance across the night sky, a natural wonder that attracts ever-increasing numbers of tourists from Japan, China and Korea during the fall and winter. And, she says, it is also meant to evoke the city's relaxed 'no big city stress' lifestyle and a connection to Yellowknife's natural environment, attractive to Canadians who come in summer for water-based activities such as fishing, canoe or float plane trips.

"Extraordinary Yellowknife" is not just part of an economic diversification plan, it's also part of a game of catch-up for Yellowknife as many other Canadian cities have already created new tourism brands. "We're not inventing the wheel here," says Penney. "We are trying to catch up."

With a grant from Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor) and additional funding from the City, a local agency was contracted to research and then create what became the "Extraordinary Yellowknife" brand. "In developing the brand, the agency consulted a number of local tourism operators



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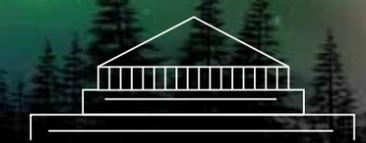
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and members of the target audience," says Penney. With this feedback, a draft was developed and then tested with focus groups by an independent research firm that also gathered the groups' perceptions of Yellowknife.

Three focus groups in Toronto and two in Yellowknife zeroed in on their preferred brand. Surprisingly, both the Torontonians and Yellowknifers had the same ideas about Yellowknife and its outdoor and adventure possibilities. "That was important," says Penney. "If the locals don't believe Yellowknife is extraordinary, it would be hard to get visitors to believe it."

A new, user-friendly website was also a part of the brand development – [www.extraordinaryyk.com](http://www.extraordinaryyk.com) – and provides comprehensive information about tourist activities, accommodations, entertainment and restaurants. For example, the information about accommodations includes prices and booking information. Activities are listed by the month of the year in which they are available and there's even a city street map on the website. It also contains information about available conference facilities and who to contact for help in planning a conference in Yellowknife. Conferences are a growing segment of the Yellowknife tourism market.

To support the new destination marketing organization, which will use the new branding, all Yellowknife tourism accommodation businesses will be required to add a levy to their invoices, capped at four percent. To make the levy legal, the Northwest Territories government must write and pass into law enabling legislation, which is already in the works. The City will then pass its own bylaw to put the levy and destination marketing organization into place. Penney hopes it will be finalized this fall so they can begin to get set up. "We're rolling along behind the scene," she says, adding that for now, her department staff are managing the development. "We're hoping the process will pick up and be way faster when that by-law is passed and we can set up the new organization."

The new branding is also available for use by Yellowknife tourism companies, and to encourage them, Penney's department has created a style guideline for how to use it to its best advantage. The brand is flexible and allows for different colours to be used, such as Aurora Borealis green and cranberry red. But there are limits to how much it can be changed to fit into the marketing materials that local tourism businesses now use. Those wishing to use it can contact the City



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to receive a link to download the brand style guidebook. That way, says Penney, the City can assess if the brand is suitable for the way the person or group wishes to use it. "We'd love it if people used it," says Penney. "We need to let them know it's available for them to use. But certain parameters have to be followed. We don't want to dilute or change the brand."

Penney has already seen how well the new branding works. Since it was launched in March, she and her department staff have attended some major tourism conferences along with NWT Tourism. "We partnered with them on a bigger booth," she says. "With our new brochures displaying the new "Extraordinary Yellowknife" brand, and the new website, we saw a huge increase in convention bookings here."

It can be tricky to replace an existing slogan. Good or bad, the slogan can leave a lasting impression. Think of the very famous "I Love New York" campaign with the heart icon to replace the word "Love" between "I" and the abbreviation "NY." It was so popular millions of people wore it on T-shirts, purses, and other personal items. Churchill, Manitoba's "Polar Bear Capital of the World" is practical yet suitable and continues to attract visitors to the small town on the west shore of Hudson Bay to see the iconic top predator of the Arctic.

But a bad slogan can be boring, confusing or even worse, cringe-inducing. Ottawa recently abandoned "Technically Beautiful," which presumably referred to the region's significant hi-tech sector but which also took an unintended swipe at the local scenery. "There are a number of things to do in Okotoks" is indeed a slogan, but a rather underwhelming one. And then there's the grim tagline that Tisdale, Saskatchewan kept for decades, "Land of Rape and Honey" to acknowledge the region's two main agricultural products. Tisdale eventually replaced it with the less alarming "Opportunity Grows Here."

It's easy to criticize but very difficult to develop new slogans. They must be simple, short and memorable – a catchy phrase combined with an integrated design. Summarizing the attributes of a city or town with just a few words, some colour and some graphics is a brain twister that takes talent to solve.

One thing is certain: if people remember the slogan, they will remember the city, and if they remember the city, they may come for a visit. As Penney says, "A strong slogan will help us achieve a strong tourism brand. It will help us stand out." **YKCI**

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# MARIJUANA ECONOMICS

IN OCTOBER, CANADA WILL OFFICIALLY LEGALIZE THE SALE AND USE OF RECREATIONAL CANNABIS. HOW WILL THAT WORK IN THE NWT?

By Samuel Wood

On October 17, 2018, recreational use of cannabis became legal under the new Cannabis Act, which was passed by Parliament in June, bringing to an end 95 years of prohibition.

One of the aims of the Cannabis Act is to disrupt the illegal market in Canada, and by doing so, ensure quality of supply, and capture some of the revenue for federal government coffers. In 2017, the last full year of prohibition, Statistics Canada estimates that about four million Canadians broke the law to purchase cannabis, spending more than \$5 billion. The federal Finance department expects to collect about 25 percent of this in the first month after legalization, and is very optimistic about the opportunities for future growth. By 2019, the government expects to harness about 40 percent of market demand, and estimates that by 2022 it will have as much as 75 percent of the Canadian cannabis market.

In addition to legalizing personal use, the legislation allows for home cultivation of up to four plants, as long as the plants are not accessible by children in the home. It also allows for private businesses to set up stores to sell cannabis or operations to produce it, both of which could create thousands of new businesses across Canada. The Act allows provinces to opt in or out of some of the provisions of the new act, such as two above.

The legislation does not, however, legalize the production and use of cannabis edibles such as candies, cookies and extracts, such as those used in beverages and vaping, which are estimated to be consumed by about 60 percent of current users now. These products are already illicitly available online or at dispensaries in cities across Canada. This rapidly growing part of the market is where the real money is, estimated to eventually be worth as much as \$12 billion to \$22 billion annually. In Colorado, the edibles market boomed after cannabis was legalized there. Health Canada, which has developed regulations for the growth, production and sale of cannabis, plans to introduce regulations for edibles and other forms of cannabis consumption in 2019.

However, the market for edibles seems to be moving faster than the development of the legislation and related regulations. The Guardian recently reported that a small laboratory in Toronto is developing an alcohol-free beer made from cannabis, and has plans to produce it commercially in

## WHAT THE NWT CANNABIS LEGISLATION SAYS

The Cannabis Legalization and Regulation Implementation Act, 2018 was passed by the Legislature on June 1, 2018 and legalizes the sale and use of recreational cannabis in the NWT.

The following is a summary of the Act, and is not meant to be read as legal authority.

- Anyone 19 years of age or older may buy or possess cannabis, and may have up to 30 grams of dried cannabis or equal amounts of other cannabis products on their person in public;
- Adults are allowed to smoke cannabis on their own private property;
- Up to four plants maximum can be grown in a private home, no matter how many adults live there;
- It is against the law to drive a vehicle while under the influence of cannabis;
- A package of cannabis in a vehicle must be unopened or stored in a place that is out of reach of the driver or passengers;
- Cannabis can be smoked in public such as on trails or in parks, but not when they are in use for public events;
- Smoking is banned in areas used by children or in crowded places, including playgrounds, sports fields and parks during public events;
- Smoking cannabis where it is banned will result in a fine;
- Environmental health officers from the Department of Health and Social Services will enforce the law governing public cannabis smoking;
- The Liquor Commission will be responsible for the distribution and sale of cannabis in the NWT;
- Cannabis will be sold in "cannabis stores" that will be in existing liquor stores;
- Stores must post signs warning of the health risks from using cannabis;
- NWT residents who live in communities that do not have liquor stores can mail order cannabis from a liquor store;
- Municipal governments in tax-based communities can hold a plebiscite to vote on whether to allow cannabis in the community, similar to existing liquor laws;
- Community governments can make their own bylaws, in addition to the GNWT law, to govern smoking cannabis in public. Community governments can request bylaw officers or inspectors to do enforcement;
- Under the federal Cannabis Act, only dried or fresh cannabis, cannabis oil and seeds will be sold. Cannabis edibles may be available when the Government of Canada updates the Cannabis Act, within a year of coming into force.

**NOTE: "Cannabis only" stores, privately-owned outside of liquor stores, are not yet legal. The GNWT Health Minister, Glen Abernethy, has promised to review this by the end of 2018.**

anticipation of Health Canada's regulations. Further, a company called Canopy Growth is developing mixed drinks infused with cannabis. These products could have a huge impact on the edibles market and on the consumers who drink them.

The GNWT's legalization bill, The Cannabis Legalization and Regulation Implementation Act, was passed on June 1, 2018 in the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories. The Act stipulates that the NWT will opt-out of private business sales, and instead decrees that cannabis is to be sold only through existing liquor stores in the NWT, or through mail order from a liquor store for communities without a liquor store. There are seven liquor stores operating in communities throughout the NWT, including two in Yellowknife. The owners sell beer, wine and spirits on commission for the territorial government. Any revenue that flows from the sale of cannabis in these stores will be split between storeowners and the GNWT. The government expects to earn about \$400,000 during the first year from this arrangement, and has no plans to share any of this revenue with NWT communities. Statistics Canada says that Northwest Territories residents consumed an average of 15.3 grams of cannabis annually, and paid an average price of \$11.11 per gram on the illegal market.

Before the legislation was passed, it ran headlong into some heated opposition from Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), community leaders and the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, who all voiced concerns about the plan to sell cannabis only through existing liquor stores. By not allowing any other residents, except those owning liquor stores, to apply for licenses to run "cannabis-only" retail stores, the legislation effectively sets up a government-only monopoly similar to the liquor stores.

Deneen Everett, the YK Chamber's executive director, argued against government monopolization of cannabis sales. In her November 27th 2017 letter to the GNWT, Everett said, "entrepreneurs are interested in the business opportunities related to cannabis, but using the Liquor Commission as the sole distributor and limiting the retail opportunities to already established liquor stores unfairly restricts who can pursue these opportunities."

The GNWT's Minister of Justice, Louis Sebert, defended the GNWT's retail model in a letter, saying, "this approach allows the GNWT to draw upon the experience of the Liquor Commission and the existing retail infrastructure for liquor to accommodate the sale of cannabis in a regulated environment within the extremely short time frame before cannabis is legalized."



The YK Chamber president Mike Lalonde rejected this reasoning. The proposed retail model ran counter to basic principles of fair competition and economic diversification, he said. "We're asking for an open and

transparent process that provides entrepreneurs with an opportunity to demonstrate that they can operate at whatever standards are set by the territorial government," said Lalonde.

MLAs joined the argument during the spring session of the Assembly in May. Several MLAs, many representing Yellowknife constituencies, criticized the GNWT's refusal to allow privately-owned stores, and proposed an amendment to the legislation that would establish a process for also licensing private "cannabis-only" retail stores.

"We are creating regional monopolies through liquor stores that will be run by the Liquor Commission and relying on mail order in communities where people don't have Visas, where the shipping (cost) is high, and the cost isn't going to go down," said Kieron Testart, MLA for Kam Lake. "There will be no incentive to switch from bootleggers and drug dealers."

The committee's proposed amendment required that the government add regulations that set out clear criteria for owning and operating "cannabis only" stores by private business. "Anybody who meets (these) prescribed conditions would get a licence to sell," said Frame Lake MLA Kevin O'Reilly.

Much to the MLAs' frustration, the amendment failed to pass by a vote of 9-7, meaning the finance minister will retain the power to approve or deny cannabis retail licenses as he sees fit, discretionary power that MLA Julie Green said the minister did not need. Testart criticized the GNWT for its "paternalistic attitude" and suggested that the government monopoly was intended to squeeze as much profit from the sale of cannabis as possible.

Health Minister Glen Abernethy, who voted against the amendment along with the rest of Cabinet, offered an olive branch of sorts. He made a firm commitment to re-visit the issue of private ownership, promising, "... the GNWT will be opening up cannabis sales to the private market within six months. That is our intention."

The YK Chamber's Everett says the Chamber will be holding the GNWT to this promise. "We want to see an open, transparent application process that allows Yellowknife entrepreneurs to participate in this new market," she says. "Over the next six months, we hope that is what the GNWT will be working towards."

The legislation allows tax-based communities to hold a plebiscite for residents to vote on whether to allow cannabis in the community, similar to the way liquor is controlled in communities now. In Yellowknife, city councillors made the decision to allow cannabis in the city, so a plebiscite was not held. Two councillors, Neils Konge and Shauna Morgan, called on the GNWT to allow private sector cannabis retail businesses as soon as possible.

Jurisdictions across Canada have different approaches to private ownership. In Nunavut, a prospective owner can apply for a license to run a cannabis store but it cannot open until after a three-month consultation period. In the Yukon, a single publicly run store will serve as the territory's only cannabis storefront.

Canada's western provinces have each established an open process through which residents can apply for cannabis retail

licenses. Alberta began accepting license applications in March. Applicants must complete a 70-page application form, pay a \$400 application fee, a \$700 annual license fee, and a \$3,000 deposit that is held for up to four months while mandatory background checks are done. By the end of April, the Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission had received over 450 applications for cannabis retail licenses. The Commission estimates that about 250 stores will open across the

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province in the first year of legalization, though there is no set maximum that may be approved.

British Columbia plans to launch publicly-run stores throughout the province, but they will compete with stores run by entrepreneurs, many of whom have already established stores despite the fact the cannabis is still not legal. As of May, the province had yet to open its online application portal but had released a guide to the application process in February.

Saskatchewan is allowing businesses to apply for retail licenses and will accept up to 51 qualified applications. The province has received over 1,500 applications so far and plans to hold a lottery to determine who will ultimately be awarded a license.

Manitoba issued a Request for Proposals to run cannabis retail stores in the province, and in February announced four proposals had been conditionally accepted from four different groups, each made up of several Manitoba First Nations and existing medical cannabis companies.

Further east, only Newfoundland will allow privately-owned cannabis stores to operate. The province issued an initial Request for Proposals in February and received more than 80 applications – two dozen of which were approved in May.

In Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, cannabis will only be sold from government-owned cannabis stores operating as subsidiaries of provincial liquor corporations. Ontario had also planned to use government-run stores, operated in similar fashion to the province's liquor or beer stores. However, the recently elected Conservative provincial government announced changes that will allow for licensed privately-owned and operated stores.

Cannabis producers must follow Health Canada's regulations that require production licenses to cover indoor and outdoor cannabis cultivation and cannabis processing. Micro-cultivation and micro-processing licenses would allow for "craft cannabis" businesses that grow less than 200 square feet of cannabis plants, or process less than 600 kilograms of dried cannabis each year. These small businesses would be exempt from requirements that larger operations must follow such as the installation of visual monitoring and intrusion detection systems. They must also record the identity of every person entering or exiting an area where cannabis is stored.

All cannabis producers, big and small, would be required to erect physical barriers

around the perimeter of their production sites, and around any indoor areas on-site where cannabis is present, accessible only by employees with valid security clearance in order to perform their job duties. Producers must maintain records and report on production levels, inventory, sales, and other information "that demonstrates compliance with good production practices." The cannabis they produce must be tested for levels of its active ingredients, tetrahydrocannabinol ("THC") and cannabidiol ("CBD"), as well as for microbial contamination, heavy metals, and pesticides. Cannabis that passes quality control can be sold to retailers, which fall under territorial/provincial jurisdiction.

Yellowknife business owners have several concerns about the potential impact of legal cannabis use on their workplaces, says Sandra MacKenzie, a partner at Lawson Lundell, who has seen an uptick in inquiries from local businesses. She thinks some businesses will need to adjust their attitudes towards legal employee cannabis use. "There is a common misconception that if somebody is smoking marijuana, that they should automatically be disciplined," she says. "Employers have to be asking themselves – is this person coming to work impaired? Is the smoking of marijuana impairing their ability to do their job? It's only in that situation where they should be disciplined."

Employees will also have to make practical considerations around cannabis use. "The legalization of marijuana is not a license for bad behaviour," says MacKenzie. "Say you're smoking a joint on the weekend – that's going to be fine, but you're not going to be able to smoke a joint on a Monday morning before you go to work."

The Workers' Safety & Compensation Commission has issued workplace impairment regulations and MacKenzie recommends that employers update their own policies in accordance with these regulations. "Make sure that you have an alcohol and drug policy that deals with things like being fit to work, what happens if you think somebody is impaired, what are the steps that the employer is going to take, and what happens if you think someone has an addiction" she says. "The more that you have that is written down and the more that the employees understand it and the employers know what to do in advance, the less likely that an employer is going to run into legal trouble." **YKCI**



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Carlos Gonzales, owner, Yellowknife Outdoor Adventures. billbradenphoto

# Yellowknife Outdoor Adventures

A passion for the outdoors is Carlos Gonzales' greatest adventure

By Beverly Cramp

Carlos Gonzales arrived in Yellowknife from Montreal 36 years ago and fell in love with the North's outdoors. But he worked indoors for the first several years he was here, first as a waiter at the Explorer Hotel's restaurant, and within a few months, then as the manager of a rival restaurant. Knowing what a diligent worker Gonzales was, the Explorer eventually hired him back to manage their fine dining restaurant.

"They had a fantastic menu," says Gonzales. "We prepared many dishes at the table: caesar salad, steak Diane, cherries jubilee and crêpes Suzette. It was very fancy and nice to work there."

Soon, Gonzales was in charge of the dining room and also the lounge and café. He handled the new staff training too, as there were no other training options then in the NWT. The hours were long and arduous. "I got tired of working 16 to 18-hour days, seven days a week," he says. "When there was a change in ownership, I decided I needed a break."

While on his break, he approached Arctic College (now Aurora College) about setting up a program to train hospitality and tourism workers. "They gave me a desk and a computer. For two months, I worked there for free, developing the curriculum and writing a proposal to get funding for the new program."

His proposal was approved, and for the next ten years he worked as the senior instructor and coordinator of the certificate programs in tourism and hospitality. The job took him to many places across the north, before division into Northwest Territories and Nunavut. "I was very privileged to travel to 52 of the 63 communities in the North," Gonzales says. "It was a beautiful thing to be involved in developing the tourism potential here. It's like a big diamond in the rough."

As an instructor, Gonzales had up to 45 days off in the summer. In 1993, he began doing small summer fishing and

bird watching tours. "The outdoors has always been my passion. I had a boat, trailer and truck and decided to start showing people all these wonderful aspects of the North." This was the beginning of Yellowknife Outdoor Adventures. Gonzales started small, mostly working with locals and their visiting family members and friends.

He was still in the restaurant business as a co-owner of a dining room and lounge called Our Place, which he changed to a fine dining establishment and outdoor catering business. But as his outdoor tour business grew, he realized that there was a big niche to be filled providing outdoor experiences for business travellers. Many companies came asking about corporate trips for their employees and clients. "I captured 80 percent of Yellowknife's business travel," says Gonzales.

He sold Our Place in 2007 to work full-time at Yellowknife Outdoor Adventures. He now offers winter adventures such as ice fishing and snowmobile trips that are frequently backlit by fabulous views of the northern lights, and in summer, pike fishing on Great Slave Lake, a variety of bird and wildlife viewings, and scenic float plane fly-ins to places such as Virginia Falls in Nahanni National Park.

"I feel extremely fortunate to be able to work in an environment where I am very happy," Gonzales says. "It's easy for me to please my customers. They see and feel what we have here." **YKCI**



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Gabe Powless, Owner, Raven Web Services. billbradenphoto

# Raven Web Services

**Gabe Powless loves his work, indoors, where it's warm and cozy**

By Beverly Cramp

The founder of Raven Web Services may be one of the most highly qualified digital marketers in Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories.

Gabe Powless, owner of Raven Web Services, keeps a growing tally of his digital marketing skills and accomplishments that includes a half a dozen Google certifications. To do that, Powless is constantly learning and networking to maintain his qualifications and build his expertise. "You have to stay on top of the changes at Google and also at Facebook," says Powless. "There are very few people here who have similar qualifications, so others may have had to rely on third parties down south for this expertise in the past."

Powless is also affiliated with high-tech giants such as e-commerce retailer Shopify. "I'm trained with them, as a third-party representative I can give technical assistance," he says. "If someone gets 'shopified' with me, they can consult directly with me in person for assistance or with Shopify online."

It may sound mystifying to those less savvy about technology and business, but as Powless knows, a lot of business today is conducted online. "I help my clients with their digital campaigns," he says, and offers such services as web development, Internet marketing and online monitoring. "I help them make more money and be more efficient; that keeps them coming back for more services. On the whole, I can help clients increase sales leads by as much as 30 percent, sometimes even more."

Clearly, Powless is passionate about his work. "I feel like I'm playing every day," he says. Yet, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation member didn't start out as a computer nerd. "I grew up more interested in sports than computers. After high school, I worked in construction with my father. During my first winter working outdoors in minus sixty weather, I had this epiphany that I should find work indoors. I just needed to get some qualifications."

In pursuit of that indoor job, Powless took computer courses at the Academy of Learning in Yellowknife. "I had high grades and went from being a student there to being an instructor. Afterwards, I worked in various administrative roles with the diamond mines and the government for a bit. Eventually, I felt the urge to pursue new skills."

Starting in 2012, Powless studied video game and 'app' development, but after getting advice from a business consultant he shifted his focus to web development and online marketing. "It became a full-time passion and ongoing adventure for me," he says. He set up Raven Web Services in 2016 and has not looked back to outdoor construction since.

Powless trains his clients' staff so they can do most of their own work. "I empower my clients with training and consulting. If they get stuck, I help them get unstuck. Many clients become very self-sufficient and that's rewarding because those clients take less effort to maintain and best of all, when done right, my services pay for themselves."

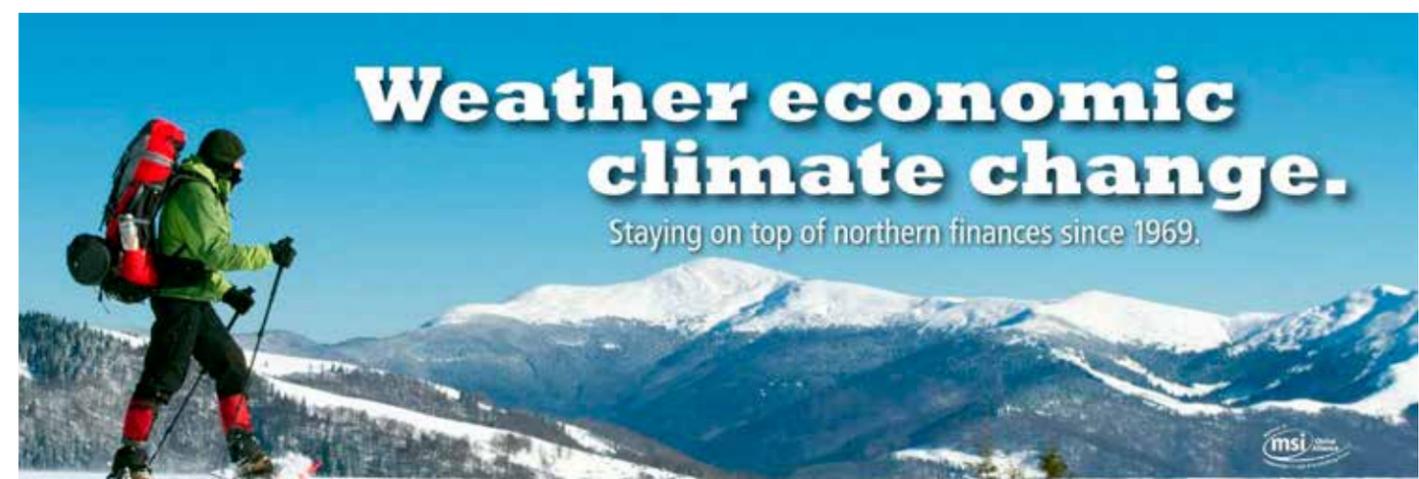
Powless has been successful with Raven Web Services, gaining clients, affiliates and partners from across Canada and beyond. And he's happy about it. He works inside, in the warmth and comfort of his own office, doing something he is passionate about. **YKCI**



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Gord Olson, Owner, Polar Tech Recreation

# Polar Tech Recreation

## Gord Olson's well-prepared mind finds success in opportunity

By Beverly Cramp

Gordon Olson is a good example of the well-prepared mind meeting an opportunity. Throw in diligence, hard work and dedication and the result is a thriving business.

Olson, a mechanic, founded Polar Tech Recreation, one of the most successful "small engine" retailers in the North. The company sells boats, snow mobiles, ATVs, Harley motorcycles, power saws, and other equipment. The company also operates a parts and repair servicing centre, and a rental business for industrial and commercial equipment. Eighteen staff work out of a 16,000 sq. ft facility, which includes 4800 sq. ft. of retail space that's open seven days a week.

It's a long way from the small rental business Olson started in 1994 in Yellowknife's Kam Lake area. "I had this dream of owning and operating the best small engine shop in Yellowknife," he says. Working out of a small garage, Olson started by renting

pumps, generators and cement mixers. "It just kept growing," he adds. "I bought more equipment, rented it out; earned more money and was able to buy even more equipment to rent, and so on."

In 1998 Ski-Doo approached Olson about running a dealership. That began a whole new era. Soon, Olson was selling so many snowmobiles that he was able to move into a bigger location on Old Airport Road. With success, came recognition and in 2001, Olson won awards for Ski-Doo sales.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Olson began working with an architect in 2004 to design and build a new facility on Utsingi Drive, Polar Tech's current home in the Kam Lake industrial area.

He gives a great deal of credit for his ongoing success to his staff. "I don't take their hard work for granted. I take their input seriously," he says. "When there are problems, I stop and consult with everyone

for solutions and I make changes immediately. It's important to be engaged with my staff. I may be the owner but I don't work in every department."

Olson also ensures his staff have the latest training. "I keep them state-of-the-art. I send some guys for training three weeks or a month every year."

Good customer service is another of Olson's keys to success. "We work with our customers, listen to them and try to bring in what they want."

In recent years, Olson has brought his sons Sam and Bradley into the business. "My daughter Courtenay lives in Spruce Grove, Alberta or she would be here, too."

Olson comes from a long line of mechanics. "My Grandpa was a mechanic and I had an uncle who was a mechanic. I'm a fairly good mechanic, too," he says. Shortly after high school graduation, Olson entered a new, three-year apprentice program in Fort Smith that licensed small engine mechanics and he became one of the first graduates of the program.

Olson now sits on Aurora College's advisory board for apprenticeship programs and takes an active role in developing new apprenticeship programs. "I'm looking at teaching small engine mechanic courses. We want to get out into the communities and get people trained for opening their own shops." **YKCI**

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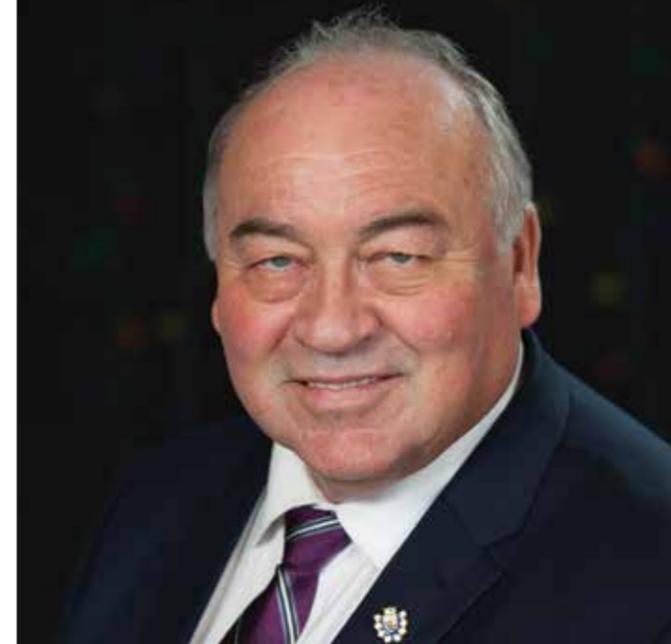
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Dr. Mike Hughes and his wife, Jeanie, owners, Yellowknife Veterinary Clinic. billbradenphoto

## Yellowknife Veterinary Clinic & Pet Boutique

**Mike and Jeanie Hughes created success from ideas and innovation**

By Beverly Cramp

A day to remember for veterinarian Dr. Michael (Mike) Hughes is June 21, 2012. He'd been working at a Yellowknife vet clinic for a year and was making plans to move back to Nova Scotia, where he grew up. But as word spread that he was leaving Yellowknife, he began to get pleas from his pet-owning clients. "They said to me, 'please come back.' And it was National Aboriginal Day, which is pretty cool because I'm Métis," says Hughes.

Hughes found a place to rent in the Kam Lake industrial area, added examination rooms, a small lab, and operating area, kennels and pet food and opened his own clinic a few months later. In 2015, needing more space, he renovated a building on Woolgar Avenue for a new clinic and bigger pet supply store.

"Yellowknife has treated us extremely well," Hughes says about his busy practice, which he runs, along with his wife, Jeanie, and employs as many as eight staff, including a receptionist, an office manager, vet technologists and vet assistants. "Mainly, we see canine and feline pets. But we also get pocket pets such as rats and gerbils, birds from finches to parrots, and turtles, snakes and reptiles."

Given that his clinic sees mainly cats and dogs, with a few other exotic animals brought in once in a while, you would be forgiven for thinking that Hughes' days are routine. Not so, he says. "Pretty much every day I think I have an idea how it will go and then something new always happens."

It's motivating when Hughes sees clients with pets that recognize the clinic. "There's a lady who brings her little dog in for regular check-ups. The dog is always pulling and straining at his leash to get into the clinic. That's great to see."

Hughes has invested in technology at his clinic, including for his lab where he does most of his own tests. Very few tests are sent out to other labs for analysis, meaning clients can get needed results much faster. "Recently, I upgraded all our lab equipment," he says. "I also bought a laser scalpel for surgeries about a year ago. I can do spays and neuters much faster and there is less recovery time for the animal."

A typical day for Hughes is long, starting with a 6 a.m. workout in the gym at the clinic that he added for his staff. He begins work at the clinic between 7 and 7:30 a.m., although he will see patients earlier if there's an emergency. The clinic closes at 8 p.m. but Hughes often stays on until 9:30 p.m. "On Friday," he says, "we try to close at 6 p.m. We put in another full day on Saturday and then do our best to take Sunday off."

He may work more hours per week than most people, but Hughes says he loves it. "I could retire anytime I want but I feel like I've got the best job in town," he says. "It's not really working if you're doing what you really want to do." **YKCI**

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Rob Warburton, partner, CloudWorks. billbradenphoto

# CloudWorks

## Rob Warburton puts people and property into projects that work

by Beverly Cramp

How do you start a real estate development company? With a lot of good ideas and a line of credit.

That's what Rob Warburton did when he linked up with Sam Gamble in 2012 to do just that. "Sam and I were both doing our own property investment," says Warburton. "I had recently sold a condo and a house in Yellowknife; Sam had done a couple of one-off property deals. Between us, we had sold a lot of real estate and we wanted to do it professionally, full-time."

They had complementary skill sets. "I'm good at finding projects – places that are under-utilized or are not putting the space to best use. I can put the pieces together – tenants, buildings, contractors – and manage them as we go along. Sam is finance-based and great at pulling together the financing and business plans."

Initially with a third partner, the new company called CloudWorks was born. The

third partner relocated and sold his shares to Warburton and Gamble. "We started hunting for things to do," says Warburton.

Their first project was a modular home infill development in an older part of Yellowknife. Borrowing from friends and family, in addition to Warburton's line of credit, they completed the \$330,000 project in 2013. "Our investors did well and we learned valuable lessons," says Warburton.

From those small beginnings, CloudWorks has completed \$11 million in real estate projects. In the process, Warburton and Gamble have developed a unique business model. "We're a hybrid social enterprise and real estate investment company. We utilize existing buildings and existing spaces, and find new creative uses for them," says Warburton, adding that they often engage in advocacy work to allow for more urbanization and densification in Yellowknife.

An example of CloudWorks' innovative development is the company's venture into a soon-to-be launched car sharing operation. "I'm not a car co-operative guy but I want to be able to offer a car share opportunity to my tenants. So, we designed the coop and set up a board to run it."

CloudWork's biggest project is a \$3 million mixed use condominium conversion with commercial space, completed in 2014. "When we bought it, there was one commercial tenant and they left shortly after. Now we were in a market with tons of vacant commercial space. It took us a while to figure it out," says Warburton. What was missing was small, flexible office space for small businesses and non-profits who can't afford big, long-term leases. CloudWorks carved out several miniature office areas from the one large commercial space and offered flexible rental agreements. They also provided services such as WIFI, coffee, and mail and parcel management. After hiring a community manager, tenants started mingling.

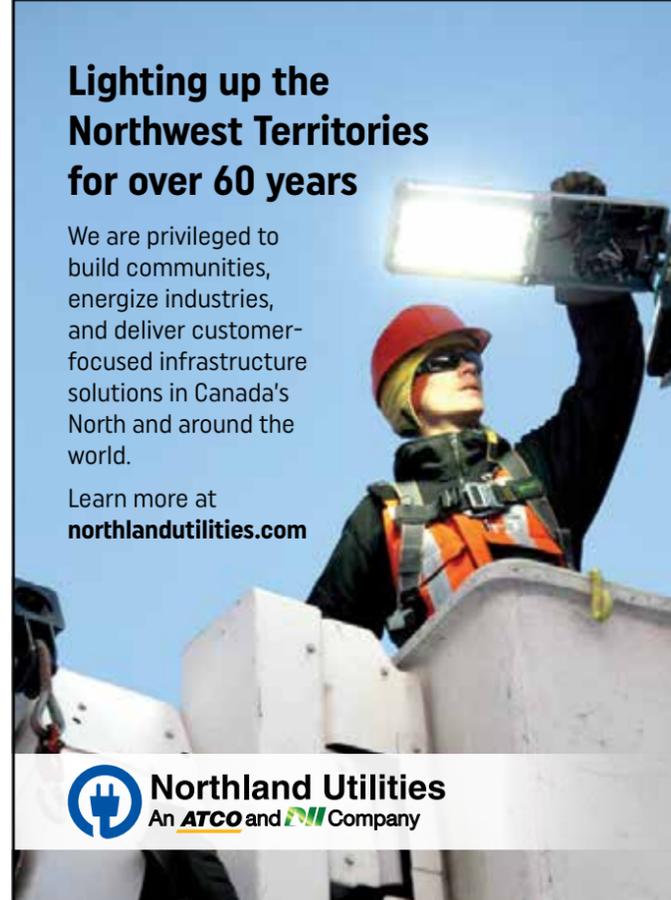
"We've created a real community there," says Warburton. "Now, we are expanding it to other locations."

Warburton says he and Gamble plan to keep growing, using their unique approach. "I'm happy to keep doing what I'm doing." **YKCI**

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## THE CITY'S EXCELLENT PARTNERSHIP WITH THE YELLOWKNIFE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

In my final column as Mayor of Yellowknife, I wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on the strengthened relationship we've forged between the City of Yellowknife and the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce over the past several years. I've had the pleasure of working with four excellent Presidents during my time as Mayor – Larry Jacquard, Jason McEvoy, Renée Comeau, and most recently, Mike Lalonde, and have valued their feedback, input and partnership on many City-Chamber initiatives. The Chamber is also extremely fortunate to have a fantastic group of staff, led by the always enthusiastic and energetic Deneen Everett.

In preparing this column, it was quite remarkable to make note of all of the projects the City and Chamber have partnered on over the past six years. Following the 2012 election, one of the first initiatives undertaken by City Council was the creation of an Economic Development Strategy for Yellowknife, in which the Chamber played a critical role. Flowing from this strategy, we placed considerable emphasis on encouraging Yellowknife residents to spend their dollars locally,

culminating in the annual #ShopYk campaign.

The shop local theme was broadened in subsequent years, including initiatives such as the "Be a Tourist in Your Own Town" promotion. I can recall participating in that one, booking a "floating dinner theatre" evening with Narwhal Adventures, and being pleasantly surprised at the fantastic quality of our Yellowknife tourism offerings.

For the past two years, we've worked closely with the Chamber of Commerce on the "Win Your Space Yk" campaign, which resulted in numerous contestants putting forward their business ideas – à la The Dragon's Den – and which resulted in the establishment of Ja-Pain, Yellowknife's first Japanese bakery (be sure to try the curry beef pan!).

I'm very proud to report that after many years of lobbying by the Chamber, the City has created and Council has adopted a local procurement policy to guide buying decisions by our local government. This ensures that we're spending our tax dollars locally to the greatest extent possible. We were grateful for the guidance



Mark Heyck | Mayor of Yellowknife

and advice of Chamber officials in the creation of this policy.

In recent years, the City and Chamber teamed up to lobby the Government of the Northwest Territories on legislative changes that will benefit our community and our local economy. These efforts have led to amendments to the Cities, Towns and Villages Act, which passed in the November sitting of the Legislative Assembly and allows the City to create a hotel levy, the proceeds of which will be entirely re-invested in promoting Yellowknife as a tourist destination. The support of the Chamber in this effort was invaluable.

I believe our local economy is stronger because of the close working relationship between the City of Yellowknife and the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce. By working in partnership, we can tap into each other's expertise and develop projects, programs and services that benefit all of our residents and businesses. Thank you to the many Chamber Board members and staff who have made this relationship so rewarding during my time in office. **YKCI**

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Our aim is to create the right conditions for NWT residents to become prosperous, healthy and self-reliant; to develop the relationships and economic environment in which programs and supports can be delivered; and to help convert our territory's many opportunities into real and tangible economic development.

As the strong, experienced voice of the Yellowknife business community, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce is a valued resource for our government. In your membership, you have a proven and made-in-the NWT business community that is committed and equipped to move our economy forward.

I look forward to our continued collaboration and success.

**Honourable Wally Schumann**  
*MINISTER OF INDUSTRY,  
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