

news

■ LABOUR

Cementing economic ties

July 6 workshop aims help local employers tap into Mount Currie labour market

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A workshop planned next week will give Whistler employers and Mount Currie residents a chance to build mutually beneficial relationships, leading to gainful employment for more Mount Currie Band members.

"The times are really changing for aboriginal people in general, for communities like (the Lil'wat) nation," said Bob Joseph, the founder of Indigenous Corporate Training, who will lead the July 6 workshop.

"Businesses look at future and current labour needs and a lot of aboriginals from the St'at'imx territory can help fill those labour needs.

"The overall emphasis is on relationship building. Whether retailer or the hospitality industry, aboriginal people can make great contributions and become the supplier of choice and (businesses) become the employer of choice."

Whistler employers are invited to participate in the free, all-day program entitled "Working Effectively with Aboriginal People," July 6 at the Whistler Chamber of Commerce boardroom.

The project was launched after those involved with Whistler and Mount Currie Learning Communities program noted the lack of visibility of First Nations workers in the community.

"There are a lot of opportunities coming available to our nation, and through this partnership we can give our members some experience, and develop a work force that is very much needed with the expected shortage of skilled labour (work force)," said Christine Leo, director of Community Advancement for the Mount Currie Band.

Leo attributed aboriginal unemployment to the lack of jobs in Mount Currie/Pemberton. She said vocations in the area were restricted to forestry and farming. She said transportation was a major inhibiting factor until a regular transit connection was established.

Leo said 45 per cent of the Mount Currie population is unemployed. However, in previous years, unemployment was an astounding 70 per cent, she added. The reduction is a result of reforms to the income security program that was included in the Aboriginal Human Resource Development agreement, Leo said.

Other organizations have also helped reduce the unemployment rate, with university transfer courses and Adult Basic Education being offered through the Ts'zil Learning Centre in Mount Currie.

The Mount Currie Band also entered into a partnership with the Canadian Homebuilders

Association this spring to train 60 people as framing technicians.

The July 6 workshop will target various obstacles to create a better relationship between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities.

"Some of the obstacles that we have identified is the lack of cultural awareness between employers and employees, and a difference of work expectations between employer and employee," Leo said.

"The leaders of Whistler and the leaders of Mount Currie First Nation have met and discussed these obstacles and are willing to find solutions."

Other obstacles include misconceptions employers may have toward aboriginal employees — one of them being the stereotype that aboriginal people often don't adhere to strict time schedules.

"I believe that some of the misconceptions (in regards to attendance and tardiness) came from the time there was no transportation and our members had to hitchhike or arrange a ride to Whistler," Leo said. "Even now that the transit is running, it does not operate on a schedule that suits most jobs (such as) food and beverage jobs that end late in the evening."

Building cross-cultural understandings will be a key focus at the workshop. Joseph said aboriginals are a diverse culture with more than 197 bands and more than 30 tribal councils in B.C. alone. Employers will learn about aboriginal culture and history, the Indian Act, self government, land claims and aboriginal resources.

"We will be talking about recognition and respect as opposed to integration and assimilation," Joseph said.

Joseph has provided counsel and training in aboriginal relations for 10 years and facilitated cross-cultural awareness training programs to most of B.C. Hydro's 5,500 employees. An associate professor at Royal Roads University in the Indigenous Corporate Relations program, he has worked with more than 100 organizations in his effort to educate and connect aboriginal with non-aboriginal. Joseph is a status Indian from the Gwa-wa-aineuk Nation on Vancouver Island.

In addition to the workshop, Learning Communities officials are looking into a specific customer-service training for potential Mount Currie workers in Whistler. In the future, they plan to stage a workshop for 15 Mount Currie residents in Whistler, drawing on aspects of the Whistler Spirit Program and the Tourism Visitor Information Counsellor program to create a personal action plan for participants.

"The objective of the program is to increase the Mount Currie work force in Whistler, and to build skill within our work force," Leo said of the July 6 workshop.

Only 30 spots are available and already the workshop is almost half full. To register, please call Stephanie Wells at (604) 932-5922 ext. 34.