

**Slave Lake Opportunity Seminar**  
Northwest Inn  
Slave Lake  
March 1, 2007

**Presented by:**  
The Slave Lake and District Chamber of Commerce  
and  
The Northern Alberta Development Council



**Slave Lake Opportunity Seminar**

## **Introduction**

The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) hosts opportunity seminars at various locations within its region to address and highlight opportunities for economic and community development specific to that area. The Slave Lake & District Chamber of Commerce hosted an opportunity seminar with the NADC. The seminar focused on labour issues and the housing crisis associated with a booming market in the province. The tremendous demand for employees and the shortage of affordable housing is severely limiting the ability of employers to find and retain employees. Topics discussed at the one day seminar included Hiring and Retaining Aboriginal Workers, Hiring Foreign Workers, the Impact of Housing on Employment in the Town of Slave Lake and Local Experiences of Finding Employees. There were 44 participants, and feedback was very positive.

## **Presentation Summaries**

### ***Welcoming remarks by:***

Michael Ouellette, NADC Councilor,  
Karina Pillay-Kinnee, Mayor of Slave Lake, and  
Denny Garratt, Reeve of the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124.

### **Peter Crossen, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada in conjunction with Connie Giroux-Snelling, Associate Director, HRD and Social Development, Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council and Trevor Gladue, Métis Nation of Alberta**

Mr. Crossen reviewed the Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative (AWPI) which is an excellent resource for employers to use as a recruitment and retention tool for Aboriginal employees.

Sixty-four per cent of Alberta's workforce is Aboriginal. Only 54 per cent are actually employed. Employers were encouraged to investigate opportunities to hire Aboriginals from the region.

There is a diverse amount of information presented on recruiting Aboriginal workers, effective practices of recruiting, Aboriginal awareness, resources available, training of Aboriginal awareness for employers is all readily available.

According to the presentation, the number one barrier to aboriginals seeking and retaining employment is transportation. One solution is the example of Driftpile First Nations joining into a unique partnership with Slave Lake's Wal-Mart and Canadian Tire. The three partners agreed to provide a bus or van that transports workers who are working the same shift from the reserve to Wal-Mart and Canadian Tire.

The next barrier is Aboriginal people trying to adapt to "mainstream" business world. There is a need for developing some type of "life skills" program for Aboriginals to assist in the transition of working and living on-reserve to them working off-reserve and adapting to the cultural differences in business and society.

AWPI can assist in developing these skills. For more information please contact Gordon Sawatzky by phone at (780) 495 2058 or email: [sawatzkyg@ainc-inac.gc.ca](mailto:sawatzkyg@ainc-inac.gc.ca).

### **Sandra Solleveld, Alberta Employment, Immigration, and Industry: Hiring Foreign Workers**

Ms. Solleveld spoke on the process of hiring foreign workers and on determining if foreign workers can help meet businesses' staffing needs. The presentation provided framework on current market conditions and skills shortages. It also covered government processes and requirements when hiring foreign workers.

The first step in hiring a foreign worker is to get a labour market opinion from Service Canada on the impact on the Canadian labour market if that person is hired. The labour market opinion is sent to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for their consideration. It includes proof from the employer that there have been recent efforts to hire and/or train Canadians for the job, that advertising for the position has been made, and that the foreign worker will be compensated at the same rate as an equivalent Canadian worker.

The Alberta government is working to streamline the process by identifying countries that meet the following criteria in order to increase the speed of the process

1. Recognition of credentials
2. Prevalence of English language skills
3. Availability of workers in occupations where Alberta has shortages
4. Minimal concern for security, criminality and health issues
5. Potential to adapt to Alberta's climate

Getting the foreign worker is only one step. To keep foreign workers, employers should review the best practices such as easing cultural transitions and support their foreign workers in all aspects to adapt to life in Canada such as banking and health care.

Call 1 (877) 427 6419 (toll-free), or visit [www.alberta-canada.com/immigration](http://www.alberta-canada.com/immigration) for more information.

### **Libby Yamsuan, Yamsuan and Associates Overseas Employment**

Yamsuan & Associates is an overseas employment service based in Slave Lake, Alberta and Milan, Philippines. Mr. Yamsuan spoke on his personalized employment service committed to assisting employers recruit overseas foreign workers. They ensure the rights of employers and employees are protected, and that the right employer is matched with the right employee. The presentation provided a practical example of what to expect and what the issues are when hiring foreign workers.

He advised, that you need well thought-out labour strategies and plans before hiring and bringing foreign workers to Canada, so that both workers and employers can be successful. Yamsuan and Associates match skilled, trained workers with employers. Yamsuan offers an orientation program to assist in the accrediting process of foreign workers to be successful with corporate businesses. Yamsuan assists the workers to complete the embassy interviews after all legal criteria is met. Yamsuan and Associates assists Canadian businesses and the Philippine foreign

workers to successfully complete the application processes and supports both parties to make the hiring successful.

Mr. Yamsuan discussed the work ethics of Philippine workers and the comparison of contemporary and historic immigrants in Canada, and noted that all immigrant workers want a better quality of life and are willing to work for it.

For more information contact Libby Yamsuan at (780) 849 9420 or visit [www.myworkoverseas.com](http://www.myworkoverseas.com).

### **Real Estate Panel**

- Debbie Jacobson, Mortgage Intelligence
- Dave Gaskell, ReMax
- Ken Gibblen, Century 21
- Judy Olsen, ReMax
- Cathy Degenhardt, Royal LePage

The real estate panel discussed challenges, trends, and issues on the availability of housing in Slave Lake.

The ceiling in the housing market prices has not been reached. Two key issues are availability and affordability. Slave Lake needs an adequate supply of housing and lots, then the demand for housing should lessen. The panel suggested the town and MDs need to get on a fast track plan to get land and lots available for developers, and that some restrictions should be eased to help with the crunch. For affordable housing developers need to “think outside the box.” Another issue is that the skilled trades people and workers needed build housing are hard to find. Buyers need to have access to the funds needed to purchase housing, they have to have access to banks and be able to qualify for increasingly large mortgages.

For more information contact Debbie Jacobson, Mortgage Intelligence at 780 805 8840 or visit [www.mortgageintelligence.ca/debbiejacobsen](http://www.mortgageintelligence.ca/debbiejacobsen); Dave Gaskell or Judy Olsen, Remax at 780 849 4085 or visit [www.remaxslavelake.com](http://www.remaxslavelake.com); Ken Gibblen, Century 21, at 780 849 2229 or visit [www.century21slavelake.com](http://www.century21slavelake.com); or Cathy Degenhardt, Royal LePage, at 780 805 3111 or visit [www.royallepageslavelake.com](http://www.royallepageslavelake.com).

### **Laurie Skrynyk, Slave Lake Town Planner**

Ms. Skrynyk spoke about Slave Lake’s plans for growth and sustainability. The town’s growth strategy and municipal development plan have been approved by council.

The latest developments causing growth for the town are

- the cornerstone highway commercial development,
- the new Tolko mill, and
- the oil and gas sector.

These three triggers created 600 new jobs in Slave Lake. The preliminary steps that the town has identified and completed concerning employment and housing are:

- identifying private and provincial vacant land to develop within the town's boundaries,
- issuing a letter to the provincial government requesting Crown land,
- a market analysis of housing, and
- the compilation of development incentives and a toolkit for developers.

The town has met with developers individually and asked questions about the developers concerns regarding local development, what the obstacles to development are, and what the solutions to address these concerns are.

Based on this feedback, the town is conducting long range planning and community sustainability studies.

The town is looking at a proposal to develop, in partnership with Sawridge First Nations, 34 acres. This development would occur over the next three years and result in 397 housing units. This includes 17 acres of municipal reserve lands for housing development, and 17 acres of Sawridge land.

The town is planning for growth and sustainability. It completed growth studies, land use bylaw studies, and developed a municipal sustainability plan. In addition, a regional planning and joint inter-municipal waterfront area structure plan is being worked on. There are six development plans for the 397 housing units:

- 83 affordable housing units
- 11 duplexes
- 102 apartment units
- 171 residential housing
- 30 row housing units – condos
- Triplex lots and multiple lot developing ( mobile homes)

The town development options are:

- local improvement levies,
- cost sharing,
- lobbying other government levels,
- town construction of the infrastructure for the proposed developments, and
- development flexibility and ongoing meetings with developers to keep options open.

For more information, contact the Town of Slave Lake at 780 849 8000 or visit [www.slavelake.ca](http://www.slavelake.ca).

## ***Concluding Remarks***

The information in this document was presented to employers on dealing with their labour shortage through hiring Aboriginal or foreign workers. Having labour is only one part of the solution, employees need places to live. Further information was presented on housing to help employers understand the issues and what is being done to resolve them. Plans are in place, it's a matter of getting the building done.