



## Prince Rupert Invests in its Future

June 2008

Prince Rupert is seeing investments not only in its economy with the container port redevelopment and cruise ship terminal, but also in the quality of life of its residents.

The importance of physical activity for health and quality of life has made its way into the City's revised Official Community Plan. City council developed the 2007 Quality of Life Community Plan to shape the City's growth and ensure Prince Rupert is a great place to live, learn, work, recreate and feel a sense of belonging.

A series of community engagement strategies, including forums, surveys, and First Nations outreach, provided input into the plan. Meanwhile, Prince Rupert's Active Communities committee—led by Northern Health and the City's Recreation and Community Services department—were developing an Active Community Strategic and Mobilization Plan. The Active

Community plan's development incorporated community feedback gathered for the Quality of Life plan.

*"We had a feeling if we asked residents what they wanted to help measure their quality of life or improve their quality of life, we would hear that recreation opportunities were among the priorities,"* said Michael Curnes, the City's Director of Recreation and Community Services and Active Communities committee member. *"And indeed through a very extensive community consultation process we did confirm that it's in the top 10 priorities for indicators for a healthy and successful community."*

The community engagement results showed the need for improved, affordable recreation services for children, youth and First Nation community members. Poverty was cited as the most important issue facing the community. The Active

Communities committee decided to expand its scope from traditional recreation programs to more creative, low or no-cost opportunities for people to get active.

*"We looked at ways that we could expand the walls of our complex and expand the definition of recreation. We wanted to be more involved in community outreach,"* Curnes said. *"It's kind of a new day in Prince Rupert—we hadn't had the ability or the luxury for the last 10 years with the economy downturned to actually focus on this creative type of community engagement. So I believe we're rounding a corner, and we're rounding it actively."*

In 2007, Curnes spearheaded an access program to reach out to children and youth who weren't participating in sport or recreation programs.

*"Our social statistics according to BC Stats are pretty grim,"* Curnes noted.



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*"We have the highest percentage of residents on income assistance. We have some real social challenges. We realized we were running a recreation complex that was all fee associated. That was fine for the people that could afford it, but it was completely excluding the people that couldn't—specifically the children who didn't have any control over their economic situations."*

He launched Prince Rupert's Everybody Gets to Play program, which he's now linking with the national Everybody Gets to Play initiative™, delivered in B.C. through the BC Recreation and Parks Association. The Prince Rupert program provides grants for children from single-parent, single-income or no-income families to get involved in recreation programs.

*"We want to give kids a chance to get involved and to be healthy and to pursue activities that can help them develop other skills: teamwork, discipline and focus,"* Curnes said.

In its first year, the program brought in \$12,000 in local sponsorship dollars.

*"It was very easy to get corporate sponsors,"* Curnes noted. *"Everyone is aware of the situation in town; everyone knows that it's kind of a tale of two economic realities. And when it comes to kids, it's not a very difficult sell at all. All of our corporate sponsors have said when you*

*run out of money, let us know and we'll replenish. It's going to be a healthy program here for quite some time."*

The fund allowed 660 kids to access recreation programs in 2007, ranging from swimming lessons to a season playing on a hockey team. The fund also provided starter equipment. One boy who had never played hockey before joined a minor hockey league and turned out to excel.

*"He was a star on the team for his age group,"* Curnes said. *"The foster parents of the child have come in and said this child is more manageable at home, he's more focused, he's happier, he's not as moody, he is doing better in school. And it just took the camaraderie that he got by playing on an organized team sport. He has a whole new outlook and will probably re-engage on his own because he has come across something that works for him."*

Curnes expects stories and successes like this to magnify as the program develops. This year, the program is expanding its reach. RCMP officers and school principals will hand out a thousand recreation credit tickets to children and youth to reward good behaviour. The tickets will provide free access to swimming or skating.

*"We're giving them a chance to do some*

- City revised its Official Community Plan into a Quality of Life Community Plan
- Developed an Active Communities plan with community input from Quality of Life planning process
- Received a \$2,150 grant from BCRPA in 2006 to develop Active Communities plan
- Northern Health and City of Prince Rupert partnered to deliver Active Communities initiative
- Secured sponsorships for an Everybody gets to Play program for children and youth in low-income families to access recreation
- Focusing on developing trails within the city
- City employee wellness program with free access to recreation facilities
- Hosted Rupert Routes group walks with varying levels of difficulty
- Held a free fitness day
- Organized a Healthy Heart Poker Walk at hospital
- Held Move for Health Day events with a \$300 grant from BCRPA through Active Communities in 2008
- Ran a Girls in Motion program in 2005/06 with a grant from ProMO-TION Plus and BCRPA

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*relationship building with this program,”* Curnes said.

Also this year, the first 50 kids that get involved in the Everybody Gets to Play program will receive a free basketball donated by the Rotary Club.

Another project the Active Communities committee has taken on to expand the definition of recreation and reach out to the community is its trails project. Prince Rupert’s Active Community plan acknowledged a national increase in participation in informal outdoor activities. It suggested the community’s best investment for the future would be in trails. Although the Active Communities committee had a number of ideas for local active initiatives, they decided to narrow their focus onto trails.

*“Once it was there and it was written down on paper, it helped us to really sit down and say this is where we’re going to start, this is our priority,”* said Elaine Lohnes, Exercise Therapist for the Northern Health Authority’s Health Promotion Program, who has led Prince Rupert’s Active Communities team since 2005. *“I work in the health industry so I hopefully will see that improved walking will also mean improved health for many people.”*

The trails development would provide free access to recreation for the community.

*“There’s quite a high population here of folks that can’t afford recreation services,”* noted Pat Holkestad, Recreation Manager for the Civic Centre. *“So we*

*were thinking that we needed to have something that everybody could do without having to pay anything.”*

A trails committee formed out of the Active Communities committee, linking with the Prince Rupert Backcountry Society to work on trails projects. The Active Communities committee and the City are seeking out grant funds to develop trails, while the Backcountry Society would maintain the trails.

The committee’s goal is to have a trail running all the way around Kaien Island where the City of Prince Rupert sits. Parts of the circle would be developed over time. In the meantime, the committee is aiming to raise awareness of existing trails of varying lengths, including the



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waterfront walking paths.

*"When I first moved to this town, waterfront to the people of Prince Rupert meant industry and fishing and business," Holkestad recalled. "So lots of people didn't ever think that we should be beautifying our waterfront or having walking trails. So with the coming of the cruise ships and key people in town, it's happening and it's really nice to see because we've got lots of waterfront walks now. So now it's just a matter of joining the whole thing."*

With governments, the healthcare sector, First Nations, schools, community groups and businesses coming together to put energy and funding into its Active Community initiative, the people of Prince Rupert are heading into a healthier future.



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## Prince Rupert Info

**Population:** 14,974  
(BC Stats 2005)

- Home to the Tsimshian First Nation
- Approximately 50% of population is Aboriginal
- Fairview Container Terminal opened in 2007, creating a new trade corridor between Asia and North America
- Northland Cruise Terminal constructed in 2004
- Recreation facilities include a civic centre, aquatic centre, golf course, racquet centre, Mariners Memorial Park, Rotary Waterfront Park

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