

Talking Technology

The Okanagan Partnership launch

By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

I wanted to take the opportunity in my column this week to tell you about a very important initiative that is currently underway in the Okanagan and to encourage you to get involved.

My series on the four ways to grow your business will pick up again next week.



I made the short trek to the Vernon Performing Arts Centre yesterday for the launch of the Okanagan Partnership Competitiveness Strategy initiative (www.okanaganpartnership.ca).

Thank you to Gord McKenzie, controller of Packeteer Canada Inc., for graciously agreeing to drive in such difficult weather conditions.

The Okanagan Partnership, which is being led by co-chairs Gordon Fitzpatrick and Brad Bennett, is a valley-wide initiative that is designed to strengthen the Okanagan economy. The tag line of the initiative is Collaborating for Sustainable Prosperity.

Yesterday was the first step towards developing a broad vision of sustainable economic growth for the entire Okanagan economy.

With the help of consultants from California (www.icfconsulting.com) with deep expertise in helping regional economies realize smart grow, and key sponsors such as OUC and NRC, ICF has completed the most comprehensive analysis ever done of our regional economy.

Key industry clusters have been identified, which are critical to our growth as a region.

From my perspective the Okanagan Partnership is about more than cooperation across the Okanagan region than how any one city is doing versus another.

Rather, it is our opportunity as an entire region to put aside our diverse agendas and help to grow a regional economic powerhouse where everyone benefits.

It aligns perfectly with Stephen Covey's abundance mentality—that is, that together we can achieve more than acting on our own and in our separate ways.

It recognizes the reality that competing in a global marketplace, whether it be for the tourism dollar or for the technology investment, demands that we act and move as one.

After listening to the presentations and discussing possible strategies and actions, I was reminiscing about a moment that changed my life forever.

The day that I met with a CEO of a Fortune 500 company that issued our firm this challenge, "My bookshelves are bending over from ideas and reports that we have never implemented. I need your work to be radically different —I need you to work with all levels of our organization to help us reshape this company into something that we are not today.:

That project changed my life—it was no longer enough to have great ideas, rather all of us needed to work together to develop strategies and plans where the return on investment was clear and the ideas were realistic and implementable.

To the team the execution of the strategy was perhaps becoming more important than the strategy itself.

From my perspective, this is exactly what the Okanagan Partnership is all about—beyond study to execution that delivers tangible results.

The Okanagan Partnership has identified seven key industry clusters for the Okanagan region:

1. Tourism
2. Life Sciences
3. Forestry and Wood Products
4. Wine and Beverages
5. Knowledge Services
6. Value-Added Agriculture
7. Aviation

Over the next eight weeks workshops will take place for each of these sectors that will help to define the strategy for each cluster and the business plan for implementation.

This is your opportunity to get involved in your area of interest and make a difference to our economy.

I can only imagine what the results will be.

Project yourself a few years from now when our whole region has implemented the very strategies that you helped to develop—how different our entire Okanagan region can become.

I envision a time when all of our young people have the opportunity for a world-class education, where they no longer have to leave the region to find their dream job and where they are able to create the life they really want right here in the Okanagan.

I am sure that you will agree—if you and I could be but a small part of making that happen it would all be worth it.

If you would like to be involved in the workshops, please contact Nelson Jatel, executive director of the Okanagan Partnership at OUC's Innovation Centre at 979-6432 or via email at njatel@ouc.bc.ca.

He would be happy to discuss the next steps with you and put you in touch with the cluster co-chairs for the specific workshop(s) of interest to you. He He Keep checking the Web site at www.okanaganpartnerships.ca for workshop updates and information.

Special thanks to all of the volunteers that have dedicated so much of their time already and, in particular, to Gordon Fitzpatrick and Brad Bennett, our two co-chairs or, as Gordon referred to today, our two SOPS (Sons of Politicians), for their willingness to step up to the plate and lead our regional economy to Small Solutions Not Grand Illusions!

May we all look back 10 years from now on a movement that started at the Vernon Performing Arts Centre on Tuesday, Jan. 27, that revolutionized our valley— may it be so!

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