

FOREST COMMUNITY: TERRACE

By Robin Brunet



For anyone tuning into YouTube promotional videos or other social media channels, Terrace is portrayed as a trendy destination for mountain bikers, skiers, kayakers, gourmands, art lovers—essentially, people who love the finer things in life.

But not represented in these promotions is forestry, the industry that gave Terrace the economic wherewithal to evolve as a lifestyle destination. Nonetheless, forestry remains an enormous source of pride for locals and civic leaders—and something that will allow this city of 12,500 to continue to evolve in the future.

In fact, Mayor Carol Leclerc of Terrace laughs in astonishment when informed that some outdated websites portray her hometown as a place where once-thriving mills are moribund and forestry is on the decline. “Nothing could be further from the truth,” she replies, adding that while Skeena Cellulose’s sawmill closure between 1997 and 2008 impacted the regional economy, today as Skeena Sawmills and under the leadership of president and CEO Teddy Cui, it is one of the major sawmills in BC producing hemlock and balsam products for the Pacific Rim and the North American markets. “And it’s a major employer for us, in addition to all sorts of specialty millers and custom cutters thriving here.”

Forestry activity in the region also provides opportunities for First Nations. “Of the 22 licensees in this district, the largest tenure holder is Coast Tsimshian Resources with an annual cut of over 500,000 cubic metres,” says Danielle Myles, manager, economic development for Terrace. In addition, Kalum Ventures (the Kitsumkalum First Nation) and Kiteselas First Nation have tenure and run their own logging companies that strive to hire community members and create a flow of revenue for their nations.

When *Truck LoggerBC* paid Terrace a visit in February, Leclerc and Myles were busy promoting their city not just as a service, education, and medical hub of the Kitimat-Stikine region (a distinction it has enjoyed for decades), or as perfectly positioned to take advantage of the billions of dollars in major developments occurring in LNG (thanks to the announcement last year that the LNG Canada/Royal Dutch Shell liquefied natural gas plant will finally be moving forward in nearby Kitimat); they were also envisioning Terrace as being on the cusp of a tremendous new wave of forestry-related activity.

Leclerc explains, “our positive outlook is partly due to the fact that the second growth timber in the Coast Mountain Natural Resource District is now coming available for harvest.” These second growth stands are less than 100 years old,

dense, low in pulp, and easily accessible.

Better still, according to the 2015 provincial government study *Forest Investment Opportunities in Northwest BC*, a significant level of second growth timber will be available for decades. “Specifically, 600,000 cubic metres per year can be harvested, and the sustainability rate has been calculated at 30 to 40 years,” says Myles.

The prospect of harvesting this wood coincides with Skeena Sawmills in February opening its new pellet plant that has a capacity to process 75,000 tonnes of wood waste annually. “Currently, Skeena can process logs up to a four inch top, and it will be able to take smaller sizes in pulp log grades when the pellet plant is fully operational,” says Myles.

The plant, Skeena BioEnergy, is part of a \$40 million retrofit for the sawmill, which produces 250,000 cubic metres of wood annually. It consists of one belt dryer, two infeed lines, three pelletizers, and one cooling tower, all of which will produce pellets from residuals including planer shavings, sawdust, hog fuel, and bark. According to Skeena Sawmills’ vice-president Roger Keery, it may be possible for the plant to also receive feedstock from neighbouring sawmills or biomass harvesters, depending on the demonstrated capacity of the facility.

Myles and Leclerc are eager to cite other factors contributing to forestry’s



promising future in their neck of the woods. The latter says, “we have a secondary manufacturing facility ready for re-activation near the Skeena Sawmills, with two kilns on site and ample room for milling, warehousing, and loading. The kilns are critical, because one of the challenges of our industry up here is that the wood is wetter than in other districts; the kilns would make it lighter and more affordable to ship.” Reportedly, prospective buyers have been lined up, and a sale is expected in the near future.

First Nations opportunities are also promising. “Kitsumkalum and Kitselas are in advanced treaty negotiations, a focus of which has been on identifying lands for future forestry operations,” says Myles.

Yet another element driving the duo’s enthusiasm is the new 2,400-acre Skeena Industrial Development Park, a few minutes from Terrace’s downtown core. “Our intention is that this park will support the growth of the forestry industry,” says Leclerc. “We’re putting in roads and utilities, and there are opportunities for small and larger scale companies to lease or purchase land for manufacturing facilities.”

If the second growth opportunities are fully exploited, Skeena BioEnergy operates as intended, and companies flock to the development park, it would in a sense be a return to the glory days of forestry

for Terrace, once known as the cedar pole capital of the world. However, no longer will the city’s fortunes be tied exclusively to the resource. One benefit of Skeena Cellulose’s prolonged closure was that it prompted the fast-tracking of economic diversification, and the focus on forestry prospects notwithstanding, Leclerc and Myles are equally hard at work expanding other sectors such as tourism, on the strength of the region’s world-class fishing, exceptional downhill and back-country skiing, white-water kayaking and rafting, and golfing.

Terrace is also being promoted as the premier spot in Northwest BC to do business, and justifiably so: the city is centrally located at the crossroads of Highways 16, 37, and 113, and its close proximity to three deep water ports, rail service, and a bustling airport allows it to take advantage of other industries in Kitimat-Stikine, foremost of which is the LNG Canada project, which, at \$40 billion, is the largest private sector investment in Canada’s history and will bring in \$23 billion in revenue over the next 40 years (which in turn will be invested in healthcare, schools, childcare, and other key public services).

Guiding this growth is the City of Terrace Economic Development Strategy (EDS), which built upon other planning documents and initiatives and was put into effect four years ago with

several priority objectives, including working with neighbouring First Nations and supporting a thriving downtown. “Working with Kermodet Tourism to grow the number of visitors to this region and creating the Skeena Industrial Development Park were also identified early on as priorities,” says Leclerc.

One of the most promising outcomes of these efforts is an influx of new blood to Terrace. “More and more young professionals in the 20 to 40 age bracket are coming here to live,” she says. “This is partly due to our affordability as well as the lifestyle, and our institutes of higher learning—the University of Northern British Columbia and Coast Mountain College—play a huge role in fuelling this demographic.”

As Terrace continues to evolve, Leclerc, who was born and raised in the city and whose husband was a logging contractor until the 1990s, intends to preside over the growth while staying true to the region’s forestry roots. “For decades, people in our sector knew what newcomers are just discovering about us: that we’re a fantastic place to work and live,” she says. “And it’s all going to get even better. We’re very much looking forward to the future.”▲