



THE VOICE OF BUSINESS

NEWSLETTER

2025 FALL EDITION

Hoop Dancer Justine Billyboy, performed at the 2025 Business Excellence Awards evening on October 18, 2025. Incredible!

Photo credit Linda McCague

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- AffordTech IT Solutions
- Four Rivers Co-op
- Sunlife - Jeremy Hill

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President's Message



I write this message with mixed emotions. This will be my last newsletter as chamber president. Our bylaws dictate how many times an executive can hold office, and I step aside as the chamber will welcome a new president.

I have had the pleasure of working with an incredible board of directors and Staff! Their energy and enthusiasm have made the chamber very successful and a joy to do my job!

New members are joining, and their fresh ideas are very much appreciated. Our monthly meetings are well attended and makes one proud to be part of such a diverse business community.

Along with looking out for members issues, the Chamber has a contract to run the Visitor Information Centre at the tourism discovery centre. This is a huge undertaking, especially in the summer when we welcome so many outside visitors. We also share the building with the Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin. Although the building wasn't built for two identities, we are striving to make this an incredible place to visit and learn about our area!

By the time this newsletter comes out, we will have just held our business excellence awards. The amount of nominations was overwhelming, and a true reflection of what the business community means to Williams Lake and surrounding area.

On behalf of the board of directors and staff, I wish to thank and welcome all our new and long-term members for making the Chamber what it is.

Have a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year!

Paul French, President
Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce

*Businesses working together to
make our community even better*

The Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce

is "The Voice of Business": Businesses working together towards economic and social well being to make our community a better place to live. We promote the well being of business and foster a work, shop and play at home atmosphere.

Executive Director's Message

As we move into fall, I'm reflecting on how busy and rewarding the past few months have been for the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce.

We recently hosted our first-year check-in session for the Recruitment & Retention Network. It was a great opportunity to review the progress we've made together and discuss next steps to continue supporting local employers and attracting professionals to our region.

I also had the opportunity to attend the Regional Economic Development Roundtable in Barkerville. Leaders from across the region shared updates from tourism businesses stretching from 100 Mile House to Prince George. A personal highlight for me was a private tour of Barkerville, one of my favorite places to visit in our area.

This summer, we proudly sponsored a Performances in the Park evening, where our summer students provided crafts and face painting for the kids. We also joined several Farmers Markets to promote both the Visitor Centre and the Chamber. Our summer team took part in familiarization tours to Hotels, Campgrounds, Bella Coola, 100 Mile House, and Mahood Falls, strengthening our regional connections and tourism knowledge.

On the community front, I continue to be involved with the Social Planning Council's Communities Ending Poverty Leadership Table. Together, we're planning a series of pop-up events and an annual forum to highlight the incredible work of our local social service agencies.

I also participated in a Community Discussion on addiction, housing, and crime led by our local MLA and representatives from Prince George and Surrey. Additionally I took part in an Initial Community Task Force led by Silvia Dubray, Community Well-Being & Safety Coordinator with the City of WL to explore future housing and homelessness needs. In partnership with the Downtown BIA, we launched a community survey on the impact of crime on local businesses and organizations. The



results have already been presented to community leaders to ensure the voices of our business community are heard.

And of course, we ended the season on a high note with the 28th Annual Business Excellence Awards. This sold-out event was a night to remember, celebrating the outstanding businesses, organizations, and individuals who make Williams Lake such a special place. Thank you to our sponsors, silent auction donors, staff, board, volunteers, and guests for making it such a success. We're already looking forward to next year's celebration!

Warm regards,

Tamara Garreau, Executive Director
Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce

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Kim's Korner

A Busy and Inspiring Summer at the Williams Lake Visitor Centre

This summer at the Williams Lake Visitor Centre was one to remember! We had an interesting and rewarding season with four enthusiastic students who joined our team to learn about tourism and gain hands-on experience helping visitors explore the beauty of our region. Ava, Gerald, Marcel and Claire's energy, curiosity, and creativity made the summer both educational and fun for everyone.

One of our students Ava Veenkamp created a Haunted Places Brochure, which has quickly become one of our most popular takeaways for visitors looking to uncover the spookier side of the Cariboo. Another student Claire Munroe adventured out to Bella Coola and explored Canim and Mahood Falls, capturing the natural beauty of these destinations and assisted in the design of a Cariboo Scavenger Hunt Brochure, a wonderful new way for families and travellers to engage with the area. Marcel Phung worked hard on designing brochures including Esler walking loop. Gerald Hance had a blast dressed up at Williams Lake Willie in the Williams Lake Stampede Parade. All students worked on the parade float and the stage decorations for the 28th Annual Business Excellence Awards.

Although the summer started off slowly, we saw things ramp up quickly as the season progressed. August was particularly strong, with visitor numbers up 18% compared to last year. It was great to see so many travellers from across Canada and abroad discovering what makes Williams Lake such a special stop on their journeys.

September brought some challenges due to wildfires out west, leading to a dip in visitation. However, our dedicated Visitor Centre team rose to the occasion. They ensured that every visitor

still had a great experience by helping them find alternative adventures and hidden treasures throughout the Cariboo.

As we transition into the fall and winter seasons, we're excited to host two beloved community events at the Tourism Discovery Centre. On Saturday November 22nd, we'll welcome local artisans and shoppers to the Made in the Cariboo Craft Fair, running from 10 AM to 3 PM, a wonderful opportunity to find unique, handmade gifts while supporting local creators. Then, on November 28th, we'll be lighting up the season with Spark into Christmas, our festive light-up of the Tourism Discovery Centre. This year, we'll be fundraising for the Salvation Army throughout the month of December, helping to spread warmth and kindness throughout the community.

It's been a dynamic and memorable summer, and we're so proud of our staff and students for their creativity, enthusiasm, and dedication to showcasing all that Williams Lake and the Cariboo have to offer. As always, we're grateful for the community's continued support and look forward to welcoming more visitors in the seasons to come.

Kim Abel
Visitor Centre Manager

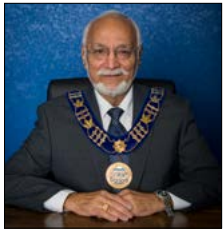


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Mayor's Message

With fall in full splendour and winter just around the corner, I am pleased to provide an update from the Mayor's desk.

As of the end of October, the City of Williams Lake has issued 40 new business licences, for a total of 1141. Investment remains strong, with 115 building permits issued, for a total value of \$59,629,040. We are grateful for the ongoing confidence in our community and are excited for the new developments in Williams Lake.

Mayor and Council were pleased to attend the annual Williams Lake First Nation Father's Day Traditional Pow Wow June 14 and 15. It is always an exciting and enjoyable celebration and showcase, and we look forward to attending each year. We were also happy to participate in the National Indigenous Peoples Day parade and events held on June 21. Celebrating and learning about Indigenous culture and traditions is so important.

This year's Williams Lake Seniors Village Stampede BBQ was held on June 18, and it was a wonderful opportunity to connect with seniors in our community, and learn more about what the Seniors Village offers its residents.

The BC Cowboy Hall of Fame's "First Ol' Cowboys Gathering" was held at the Museum on June 28. Congratulations to 2025 Cowboy Hall of Fame inductees Merv Churchill, Gene Allen and Daryl Mills.

The 97th annual Williams Lake Stampede was a huge success again this year. As always, a heartfelt thank you to all the sponsors and volunteers who make the Stampede a world-class event. The City of Williams Lake is a proud sponsor of the Stampede and the parade, and is also grateful to the volunteer group led by Willie Dye who put on another excellent parade. Many thanks as well to Honourary Parade Marshal John Margetts – it is always a pleasure to see our "hometown heroes" recognized. Congratulations to the Williams Lake Stampede Association for being named the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association's Rodeo of the Year – we are so fortunate to be home to so many amazing volunteers and sponsors!

In July, I was pleased to welcome Minister of Health Josie Osborne to Williams Lake, and participate in a CMH construction site tour and meet with Minister Osborne to discuss our community's healthcare concerns. We are looking forward to positive developments for our region.

I was honoured to share a welcome to the NSTQ Citizens Assembly on July 30, hosted by Williams Lake First Nation. As I shared at the Assembly, the challenge of reconciliation begins at home, and that challenge extends to every corner of Canadian society. The four nations of the NSTQ have been working toward self-government for over three decades, and we congratulate the Northern Shuswap Tribal Council for its ongoing advocacy and dedication.

On August 14, the City was proud to join the District of Chetwynd, Williams Lake First Nation, Cariboo Regional District, Jerry Price and Lynda Price to unveil 'The Goalie' – a chainsaw carving of Anahim Lake's Carey Price now on display in the Cariboo Memorial Recreation Complex arena lobby. Created by artist Jeffrey Samudosky of JMS Wood Sculpture and gifted to the City by the District of Chetwynd, the carving celebrates both Price's remarkable hockey career and the community spirit that helped shape him. We are grateful to the District of Chetwynd for this generous gift, and are proud to display this carving in our community.

I was excited to attend the Kidcare Daycare grand opening family event on August 20. In May, the School District hosted the grand opening of 119 new childcare spaces on the Columneetza campus. Shortly thereafter the Women's Contact Society started welcoming

families to the Kidcare Early Learning Center. Many thanks as well to Interior Health and Taseko Mines Limited for their support in seeing this important new space opened.

I was pleased to attend Pride in the Park events on August 16. Thank you to the Williams Lake Pride Society for organizing inclusive events such as the community Pride flag raising, parade and festival.

On August 22, Council was honoured to attend a groundbreaking ceremony hosted by Williams Lake First Nation to celebrate the commencement of the Memorial Park project across from the WLFN Yorston office. We look forward to seeing this important project take shape.

The BGC Street Party was another fun-filled event at the end of August. We are so fortunate to have organizations such as this supporting our youth.

September is, of course, "back to school" time, and members of Council attended the TRU back to school barbecue on September 2. This annual event is always both informative and fun.

The Union of BC Municipalities convention held in Victoria in September was a good opportunity for the City's delegates to advocate for Williams Lake. We had many productive meetings and will continue to advocate for businesses in our entire region, and are following up on our discussions.

September 30 marked National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day. This is an important opportunity to continue meaningful reflection while honouring Indigenous residential school survivors, their families and communities. We are grateful to the Orange Shirt Society for its tireless dedication and advocacy.

Special thanks to the Chamber for organizing another amazing Annual Business Excellence Awards event this year. The hard work and dedication of local business owners and their employees are a huge part of what makes Williams Lake such a vibrant and welcoming place to live and visit. The City continues to support the Chamber in its important work, and is pleased to sponsor the Hugo Stahl Memorial Award. We deeply appreciate every local business and I would like to offer sincere congratulations to this year's Business Excellence Award and Hugo Stahl Memorial Award nominees and winners. Thank you all for your dedication to Williams Lake!

As we head toward the winter months, I would like to wish everyone a very happy and healthy holiday season. Please look out for your neighbours and lend a hand with shovelling if you are able. I am proud to be a part of this community, and look forward to continuing to grow in 2026.

Surinderpal Rathor
Mayor, City of Williams Lake

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Williams Lake First Nation Chief's Message



**Weytk-kp
Xwexweyep.**

As we head into
another beautiful Fall

within our territory, I am proud to reflect on the busy summer Williams Lake First Nation had. In August, we released our 2024 Annual Report, showcasing the hard work of our team across many projects and initiatives, including breaking ground on a new park in downtown Williams Lake, creating a Youth Council, and renovating our Culture and Language building.

We were also grateful to see the salmon return in abundance this year, celebrating with two

community events where members came together to process and share their catches. In mid-September, we hosted our "Tee Off for Youth" golf fundraiser, with all proceeds supporting our youth recreation program.

As we move into Winter, we pause to give thanks to our members, families, community partners, and supporters. Together we are building a future rooted in our culture, strengthened by our youth, and guided by the values shared with us by our elders and knowledge keepers.

Kukwstép-kucw,
Chief Willie Sellars



L to R:
Diane Boerg, Shannon Pigeon,
Dawn Tait, Kaitlyn Green

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Thoughts from Victoria

As we begin this month, I want to extend my sincere thanks to all of our frontline responders, lodge operators, restaurant staff, flaggers, and everyone else who played a role in supporting our very late fire season—particularly in the West Chilcotin. Many businesses from across the Cariboo–Chilcotin stepped up during this challenging time, and I remain deeply grateful for the incredible strength and dedication of our local business community.



have in our community.

I want to thank the Chamber, along with its members, staff, and board of directors, for their outstanding work in supporting and representing local businesses. The Chamber has a long and proud history of service to Williams Lake and area, and its ongoing commitment to excellence continues to strengthen our community.

At the time of writing, the Legislature is not currently in session. However, the fall sitting is set to begin soon, and I anticipate it will be a lively one. British Columbia faces many pressing challenges, ranging from healthcare pressures to job action within the public sector. I am certain the upcoming debates will also focus heavily on crime, housing, drug use, mental health, and addictions—issues that touch communities across our province. As always, I will take every opportunity to ensure the voices of Williams Lake and the broader Cariboo–Chilcotin are represented in these important conversations.

Closer to home, I am looking forward to hearing the nominees for this year's Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards. While I will be joining the celebration later in the evening this year, I am eager to see the announcements. It is always a proud moment for any business to be recognized for its contributions, and these awards highlight the remarkable entrepreneurial spirit we

I look forward to returning with updates from the fall session of the Legislature soon. In the meantime, thank you once again for everything you do to make the Cariboo–Chilcotin such a resilient and inspiring place to call home.

Lorne Doerkson - MLA, Cariboo – Chilcotin
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Lorne Doerkson
MLA for Cariboo-Chilcotin

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Chamberly Jane is still in a daze,
From a night that truly amazed!
Glitz, good vibes, and goals achieved,
A celebration not to be believed!
Thanks to all who joined the cheer ...
Let's do it bigger again next year!




**See page 18 for the winners
of the BEX awards 2025!**

Todd Doherty, Member of Parliament, Cariboo-Prince George

Dear friends and neighbours,

After a few months back in Ottawa, it's clear that the so-called "new" Liberal government is the same old one Canadians have come to expect—full of broken promises, misplaced priorities, and empty rhetoric. Since Parliament returned this fall, Canadians have realized that nothing has changed since Justin Trudeau was Prime Minister. In fact, Carney's proven he wants to spend more than his predecessor, as Canada's debt soars over \$1.2 trillion.

Mark Carney promised a fresh start. He promised to negotiate a "win" with President Trump" on tariffs—a promise that mattered deeply to us here in the Cariboo, where thousands of families depend on forestry to make a living. Instead, we've seen softwood lumber tariffs skyrocket to 45%, forcing mills to cut shifts, lay off workers, and shut down altogether. Every time the Liberals talk about "standing up for Canadian jobs," they forget the men and women in our forestry sector who built this country.

Recently, in the House of Commons, Conservatives brought forward a motion to fix the Liberals' broken catch-and-release bail system. It's simple: violent repeat offenders belong behind bars, not back on the streets terrorizing our communities. Unfortunately, the Liberals, backed by the NDP, voted it down. Once again, they chose ideology over common sense, leaving police officers, business owners, and law-abiding citizens to deal with the consequences of increased crime, arson, vandalism, drug use, and disorder.

Meanwhile, the challenges facing our country are piling up. We have a full-blown immigration crisis. At the same time, young Canadians can't find jobs. We have students and apprentices here in the Cariboo who want to build their lives in our region, but the opportunities just aren't there as long as this Liberal government keeps importing labour and strangling small businesses with taxes and red tape.

And when it comes to public safety and health, this government continues to lose touch with reality. In a shocking display at committee, the Minister of Health refused to commit to blocking so-called "safe" drug consumption sites from opening next to schools and playgrounds. Instead of fighting the addiction crisis with treatment and recovery, Mark Carney is doubling down on Justin Trudeau's failed

drug policies that have turned our communities into warzones.

It's a familiar story with these Liberals. Whether it's failing to protect our natural resource jobs, turning their backs on rural communities, or ignoring the voices of everyday Canadians, this government is simply out of touch.

Conservatives, on the other hand, are laser-focused on fighting every day for accountability, affordability, and safety for all Canadians. We will stand up for the forestry workers in Williams Lake, for our small businesses, for parents, and for every Canadian who believes in the potential of our country.

The message I'm hearing from my constituents in Cariboo—Prince George is clear: we've had enough of the same old Liberal government. It's time for a government that will put Canada first.

Wishing you all the best,

Todd Doherty
MP, Cariboo — Prince George



Todd Doherty

Member of Parliament (Cariboo-Prince George)

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT **Sunlife, Jeremy Hill**

Jeremy is an Associate Advisor with Sunlife who works tirelessly to provide Clients with the knowledge, guidance and motivation to fulfill their financial goals. Jeremy strives to give Client's peace of mind and comfort with their finances, through planning, protection and investment advice. He is dual licensed (insurance and investments)



makes him a great advisor.

Jeremy is married to his beautiful bride and they enjoy spending time together with their children. They have a busy household that keeps him on his toes. In his spare time, he works on maintaining their acreage and animals. He also enjoys visiting and hosting other friends and families.

Jeremy Hill, AA

Associate Advisor for Mark Noble

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He is always expanding his knowledge and skills and qualifications and is studying for his QAFP Financial Planner designation at the moment.

He also specializes in Group Benefits and is a full-service group benefits broker. He is always eager to tout the advantages of Group Benefits for all sizes of companies. He provides benefit to companies by working hard on their behalf to develop a competitive, relevant and cost-effective plan. At the end of the day the purpose of the Group Benefits Plan is to attract stronger candidates and hold on to key team members with a long-term, competitively priced, value packed benefit plan.

He comes with firsthand knowledge and real life experience in regards to investing, saving and working hard to achieve your goals. His positive attitude, strong work ethic, and love of Clients

Member to Member

Any members looking to join the member to member program, or if you have questions about it, contact Tamara at 250-392-5025 or tamara@wlchamber.ca



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT **AffordTech IT Solutions**

Your Strategic Technology Partner in Williams Lake

AffordTech IT Solutions is proud to be Williams Lake's newest comprehensive IT service provider, bringing extensive industry expertise to the Cariboo Chilcotin region. Founded by Yasir Anwar in 2023 and originally established in Kamloops, AffordTech expanded to Williams Lake this year, drawn by the vibrant community where Yasir and his family now call home.



Yasir Anwar, Owner of AffordTech IT Solutions

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AffordTech specializes in providing end-to-end IT solutions for businesses of all sizes across multiple industries including healthcare, education, automotive, engineering, retail, and manufacturing. Their comprehensive service offering includes:

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Industry Expertise That Makes a Difference

What sets AffordTech apart is their solutions-based approach. "We are solution providers - every business has unique requirements and different

challenges that we serve," explains Yasir. "Even if there are no solutions available globally, we can do in-house research and development to deliver solutions for business success."

Yasir brings impressive credentials to Williams Lake's business community, holding a BCA Bachelor's degree in Computer Science & Applications and an MBA in Technology. His expertise is backed by major certifications from Microsoft, Cisco, Project Management Professional

(PMP), ISO Information Security Management, and Certified IT Audit from ISACA. With over 20+ years of global industry experience, Yasir has worked in positions ranging from technician to director level, bringing comprehensive understanding of technology from both technical and strategic perspectives.

Committed to Community Growth

As a new member of the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce, AffordTech is excited to contribute to the local business community. "We extended our business to this vibrant community because my family and I love living here," says Yasir. "We want to be part of Williams Lake's growth story, helping local businesses leverage technology to achieve their goals."

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"Whether it's a small question, a complete digital transformation, or developing a completely new solution, we're here to help Williams Lake businesses succeed through technology."

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT **Four Rivers Co-Op**

Four Rivers Co-operative is Fuelling Williams Lake Community Engagement

Four Rivers Co-op has always believed that strong communities build strong communities, and that belief continues to guide every investment, partnership, and project we undertake. As a new member of the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce, we're excited to strengthen our connection to the business community and continue building relationships that reflect the Co-op spirit of working together for a shared purpose.

We recently celebrated that commitment through the Grand Re-opening of our Highway 97 South Gas Bar, a modernized site designed to better serve our members and support the growing needs of the Williams Lake area.

The event brought together Co-op members, employees, and neighbours for a day that truly reflected what being part of a co-operative is all about: connection, collaboration, and community pride. Guests enjoyed prize draws, a fundraising BBQ in support of the Cariboo Memorial Hospital Foundation, and tours of the upgraded site. Thanks to community generosity, the BBQ raised over \$800+ for the Williams Lake Hospital Foundation, a meaningful contribution toward supporting local healthcare.

Now equipped with two Gas Bar locations in Williams Lake, Four Rivers Co-op is proud to offer members greater convenience and choice. The updated Highway 97 South site features an improved, more efficient fueling experience, designed with accessibility, comfort, and service in mind. But beyond the upgrades, this project represents something larger, an ongoing investment in the future of Williams Lake and the people who call it home.

At Four Rivers Co-op, every decision we make is guided by our Co-operative principles by putting people before profit, supporting local suppliers, and ensuring that the success of our Co-op directly benefits



the communities we serve. Every dollar spent locally helps to create jobs, strengthen partnerships, and support programs that make a real difference close to home.

In 2024 alone, Four Rivers Co-op contributed over \$41,800 back into the Williams Lake area through sponsorships, donations, and local initiatives, helping to fund programs and events that build stronger, more vibrant communities.

Our values - Responsibility, Integrity, Service, and Excellence are at the heart of everything we do. They guide how we serve our members, how we support our employees, and how we invest in the communities that support us.

From sponsoring local fundraisers and agricultural programs to investing in essential community projects, and even partnering with local businesses, Four Rivers Co-op remains dedicated to doing what we've always done best, which is putting community first. The modernized Gas Bar is more than an upgrade; it's a reflection of how Four Rivers Co-op continues to grow alongside its members, listening, adapting, and investing where it matters most.

Thank you, Williams Lake, for continuing to fuel the Co-op difference. Together, we're building a stronger future - one rooted in local ownership, shared success, and community pride.



Celebrating the 28th Annual Business Excellence Awards

The Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce proudly hosted the 28th Annual Business Excellence Awards on October 18 at the Gibraltar Room. This sold-out celebration brought together more than 200 guests for an unforgettable evening honouring the outstanding businesses, organizations, and individuals who make Williams Lake such an incredible and welcoming community.



Board President Paul French

This year saw a record-breaking 153 nominations across ten award categories, an amazing reflection of the community's enthusiasm and support for local business.

The venue glowed under a Northern Lights theme, with shimmering light projections that created a truly magical atmosphere. Elegant floral centrepieces from Lo's Florist added a beautiful

touch to each table. Two large video screens provided by Origin 8 showcased every highlight in style, and guests enjoyed a delicious dinner prepared by CJ's Catering, featuring locally donated salmon from Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN).

The evening opened with an exclusive welcome video gifted by WLFN, followed by a dinner prayer from Geraldine Bob. A highlight of the night was an extraordinary Hoop Dance

performance by Justine Billyboy, whose energy, artistry, and grace captivated the audience.

Chamber Board President Paul French took the stage to recognize the dedication of the Chamber's Board of Directors and staff who worked tirelessly to bring the event to life. He acknowledged board members Sandi Jessee,



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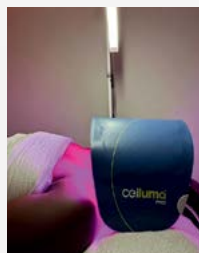
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"Under the Northern Lights"

Laurie Walters, Alison Sutherland-Mann, Geraldine Bob, Philippa Mahon, Joao Gaspar, Beth Veenkamp, MJ Vigeant, Vanessa Riplinger, Christie Blaquiere, and Erin Trott, along with Chamber staff Tamara Garreau (Executive Director), Sherri Heraid (Finance Manager), Tanya Hutchinson (Special Projects Coordinator), Kim Abel (Visitor Centre Manager), Cheyanne Greening (Visitor Centre Counsellor), and Gay Sanders (Finance Assistant). Volunteers Darrell Garreau, Alexia Stolz, Reid Garreau, Connor Kelly, and Mark Law also received special thanks for their support.

The evening's emcee, Beth Veenkamp from the City of Williams Lake Economic Development, guided the program with warmth, humour, and charm. Adding to the ambiance were talented Lake City Secondary band students Brian Kwon and Kathryn Navratil, who performed beautifully during dinner.

The RCMP, dressed in full red serge, joined in to present awards and take photos with winners, a memorable touch that added to the sense of occasion. Guests also enjoyed a Spirit of the North Dog Sled Quest Mystery Prize Draw with a gift basket from South Broadway Liquor, and a door prize from the Horsefly Women's Institute.

Before announcing the awards, the judging process was shared. Each year, five new judges are carefully selected to review the nominations. The judging panel is anonymous; judges do not know who the other judges are and do not confer with one

another during the process. Each judge receives a spreadsheet with all nominations, along with the criteria for each category. They review each nomination independently and, based on the criteria and quality of each submission, select their first and second choices. This week-long process requires careful thought and impartiality. All results are kept strictly confidential until the Awards celebration, ensuring that every announcement is a genuine surprise.



Photo credit for all of the BEX
Photos: Linda McCague



Chamber Board of Directors (Left to right) Sandi Jessee, Christie Blaquiere, MJ Vigeant, Erin Trott, Vanessa Riplinger, Laurie Walters, Tamara Garreau, Philippa Mahon, Geraldine Bob, Paul French, Joao Gaspar, Beth Veenkamp



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Celebrating the 28th Annual Business Excellence Awards



Beth Veenkamp Emcee

The celebration continued late into the night with a lively after-party featuring music from The DJ Music Factory.

The nomination process is the heart of the Business Excellence Awards. Each nomination represents someone taking the time to acknowledge a business or individual who has made a meaningful impact. Whether submitted by a customer, a colleague, or a family member,



Christie Blaquiere Go2HR presenting the award for Tourism & Hospitality to the Osprey Nest



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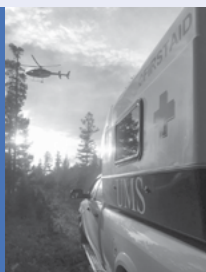
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every nomination reflects genuine appreciation and community pride. Being nominated is an honour in itself, someone thought highly enough of you or your business to share your story.

Congratulations to every nominee! This year's record-breaking 153 nominations show just how much our community values and celebrates excellence. On behalf of the Chamber, we thank everyone who attended and helped make this year's event such a success.



Award Sponsors MNP LLP, Kane Fraser presenting the Ken Wilson Chamber Business of the Year award to Karen Eden, Community Futures Cariboo Chilcotin



Service Excellence Award Winner – Lo's Florist



RBC, Cory Van Horn presenting the Retail Excellence Award to Seamaiden Boutique Courtney Samway

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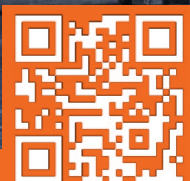


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----- Retail Excellence -----

(Sponsored by Royal Bank of Canada)

Winner: **Seamaiden Boutique & Dress Hire**

----- Newsmaker of the Year -----

(Sponsored by Williams Lake Tribune)

Winner: **Kukpi7 (Chief) Willie Sellars**

----- Production & Manufacturing Excellence -----

(Sponsored by Atlantic Power)

Winner: **Schickworks Signs & Stitches**

----- Tourism & Hospitality Excellence -----

(Presented by Williams Lake Visitor Centre)

Winner: **Osprey Nest**

----- Greatest Improvement -----

(Sponsored by: Evolve CPA)

Winner: **Scout Island**

----- Hugo Stahl Memorial -----

(Sponsored by City of Williams Lake)

Winner: **Brian Hansen**

----- Service Excellence -----

(Sponsored by WL & District Credit Union)

Winner: **Lo's Florist**

----- Ken Wilson Chamber Business of the Year -----

(Sponsored by MNP LLP)

Winner: **Community Futures Cariboo Chilcotin**

----- Business of the Year -----

(Sponsored by Community Futures Cariboo Chilcotin)

Winner: **Progressive Printers**

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The Chamber extends sincere appreciation to the sponsors and partners who made this event possible:

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An inspiring season of Learning, Connecting & Engaging in the Cariboo Region



Attending the Every Child Matters Flag raising at City Hall

This summer has been an inspiring season of learning, connecting, and engaging with the broader Cariboo region. As part of my role with the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce as the Special Projects Coordinator, I had the unique opportunity to take part in several meaningful experiences that highlight the strength and diversity of our communities.

One of the summer's most memorable initiatives was participating in familiarization (fam) tours to Dog Creek and Canoe Creek, hosted in partnership with the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation. These tours gave us the chance to visit several ranches managed by the Nation, where we witnessed impressive agricultural operations rooted in traditional knowledge and sustainable practices.

While in Canoe Creek, I had the honour of harvesting traditional medicines, which we later used during a National Truth

& Reconciliation Orange Shirt Day ceremony. This experience was deeply meaningful and offered a space for reflection, learning, and cultural sharing. It reminded me of the power of connection, not just between communities, but between people and the land.

I also had the privilege of attending the Orange Jersey Project hockey game, a powerful event promoting reconciliation through sport. Retired NHL player Jordan Tootoo, Chief Willie Sellars, and actor Kelly William all took part, alongside local community members. The evening was made even more special with live performances by Jordan Hart, KASP, Natasha Fisher, and Evan Fuller, creating a vibrant and celebratory atmosphere.

In addition to these experiences, I'm excited to share an update on the Indigenous Signage Project, a meaningful initiative celebrating the Secwépemc language and culture. The project is now nearing completion, featuring an



*Prayer Tie Offering to the fire
for the School District 27
Orange Shirt Day Event*

amazing hand-carved sign in Secwépemctsin that will soon bring a powerful cultural presence to our community's landscape. While we wait for spring to unveil this beautiful piece, the anticipation is building for how it will enrich our connection to the land and its stories.

I was also honoured to attend and sing at the Every Child Matters flag-raising ceremony at City Hall. This deeply moving event brought the community together to reflect on the legacy of residential schools and to stand in solidarity with Survivors and their families. Raising the flag is a symbolic act of remembrance, respect, and commitment to truth and reconciliation and I was proud to lend my voice to this important moment.

Another powerful event this summer was the opening ceremony of the Duncan Sticks Memorial Site, a sacred space dedicated to honouring the lives and histories of Indigenous peoples in our region. The memorial stands as a lasting reminder of resilience, healing, and the importance of acknowledging our shared past as we move forward together.

I also had the opportunity to attend the Indigenous Tourism Roundtable, where I gained valuable insights into the growing importance of Indigenous-led tourism in our region. The discussions emphasized the need for respectful partnerships, cultural authenticity, and community-driven storytelling in tourism development. I left with a deeper understanding of how tourism, when centered around Indigenous voices and values, can serve as a powerful tool for economic development, education, and cultural preservation.

This summer, we were also thrilled to welcome a team of enthusiastic summer students who brought fresh energy and creativity to the Chamber. Together, we developed a new TikTok platform to engage younger audiences, created an interactive scavenger hunt to highlight local businesses and landmarks, captured stunning visuals through a community photography project, and thoughtfully designed a welcome package for newcomers to help them feel at home in Williams Lake and District. Their contributions have helped us connect with the community in innovative and inclusive ways.

As we reflect on the incredible connections made this summer, we invite you to stay engaged with the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce. Together, we can continue to celebrate our rich cultures, support local businesses, and build lasting partnerships across the Cariboo region. Watch for updates on the unveiling of the Indigenous Signage Project this spring, a beautiful symbol of respect, language, and heritage coming to life. To learn more or get involved, please visit our website or reach out to the Chamber office.

Let's keep moving forward together.

Tanya Hutchinson,

Special Projects Coordinator & Visitor Counsellor
Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce Visitor Centre



Duncan Sticks Memorial Opening Ceremony



Calvin Dubray, Esk'eteme Education Coordinator, and Esk'eteme Elder Marcella



The Prayer ties and medicines SD 27 Orange Shirt Day Event

Building a Stronger Workforce for Williams Lake

The Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce has been leading a collaborative effort to strengthen local workforce recruitment and retention. In the fall of 2024, the Chamber brought together business and industry leaders to identify solutions to one of our community's biggest challenges, attracting and keeping skilled professionals.

With support from the Economic Development offices of the City of Williams Lake and the Cariboo Regional District, a Recruitment and Retention Forum was held to explore strategies and share ideas. From that event, several working committees were formed to develop actionable recommendations. Over the following year, these committees met regularly and presented their findings to a central "Core Committee."

In September 2025, the Core Committee shared its recommendations at a follow-up community forum, where participants endorsed the proposed action plan. The Chamber and its partners are now exploring funding opportunities to support the implementation of these recommendations and ensure long-term success.

The City of Williams Lake and the Cariboo Regional District continue to play key roles as partners in this work, alongside the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce, which will

coordinate day-to-day operations and community engagement. This collaborative approach ensures that the tools and resources developed through the project will continue to benefit the community well into the future.

This initiative is supported by a wide range of community and industry partners, including Taseko Gibraltar Mine, Interior Health, School District No. 27, Community Futures Cariboo Chilcotin, Williams Lake First Nation, the Cariboo Regional District, the Cariboo Child Development Centre, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Go2HR, Central Interior Rural Division of Family Practice, and Williams Lake Physiotherapy. Each has committed to an advisory role to help ensure the project aligns with local workforce needs.

The work also builds on the momentum of ongoing regional projects, such as the Health Care Landing Project and the Cariboo Regional District's "Make the Move" campaign. By expanding the focus beyond health care to include a broader range of professional sectors, this initiative aims to strengthen Williams Lake's ability to attract, welcome, and retain new professionals. With increased national attention through "Make the Move," Williams Lake is well-positioned to turn that visibility into meaningful growth for our community and economy.



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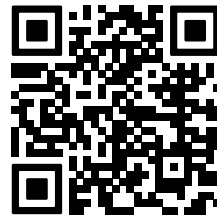
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