



**Grande
Alberta**
ECONOMIC REGION

GRANDE IDEAS

News from the Grande Alberta Economic Region

The **Grande Alberta Economic Region (GAER)** is an economic development partnership consisting of:

- **Brazeau County**
- **Woodlands County**
- **Yellowhead County**
- **The Town of Drayton Valley**
- **The Town of Edson**
- **The Town of Fox Creek**
- **The Town of Grande Cache**
- **The Town of Hinton**
- **The Town of Mayerthorpe**
- **The Town of Onoway**
- **The Town of Whitecourt**
- **The Municipality of Jasper**
- **Jasper National Park**

Workshops

Leadership West Yellowhead has harnessed real star power to launch its third program year. Dr. Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female astronaut and an expert on leadership, speaks at the Hinton Centre on October 7 at a celebration dinner hosted by Community Futures West Yellowhead in support of the LWY program. Tickets are \$65. For more information, contact Andrea Russell Coté at 780.817.0886 or info@leadershipwestyellowhead.com.

The award-winning Leadership West Yellowhead program builds regional leadership capacity. Recruitment for the class of 2010 is underway. Deadline for application is February 2010 but the time to start planning is now by allocating tuition costs in annual budgets and getting the application process underway. Don't leave it 'til the last minute! Contact is Andrea Russell Coté (as above).

A Grande Idea

The new Foothills interpretive highway project is working to build a "choose your own adventure" tale on a grand scale. Picture this: you're at the gateway to the Rockies—an endless stretch of road winding between mountains and rivers, where adventure and discovery abound. Where do you go? What do you do? The interpretive highway project, spearheaded by Foothills Research Institute (in collaboration with GAER, Community Futures and other regional partners), aims to answer those questions by building on the Institute's current eco-tour project. For the eco-tour, the institute is collecting historic and environmental information on over 140 sites spanning from Lake Louise to Jasper, Tête Jaune Cache to Hinton and north to Grande Cache. An eco-tour guidebook is slated for publication in spring 2010. The concept is to expand on that by developing GPS-guided tours and potentially, new infrastructure at key sites to support increased tourism. "It will be the ultimate interpretive highway," explains the institute's Sean Kinney. The need is obvious, he says. "Our partners are pulling tour buses into the ditch to run tours. There's a lot of missed opportunity for people travelling that highway." With new resources in place, Kinney says, the hope is to capitalize on the region's immense, untapped tourism potential. For more information contact Sean Kinney at 780.865.8329 or sean.kinney@gov.ab.ca.

Around the Region

The new Hinton Guild brings together arts, culture and preventive community services in one attractive venue. The ribbon was cut on the newly renovated facility—formerly occupied by Hinton's RCMP and fire/emergency services (now in the town's Civic Centre)—on September 19. Hinton's municipal Family and Community Support Services, municipal Arts and Culture and the Arts Society of Hinton (ASH) share the building, which combines office space and gallery/studio space for art shows or cultural performances. ASH members include the Athabasca River Potters' Guild, Hinton Art Club, Rocky Mountain Quilters and the Yellowhead Regional Arts Festival Society. The Guild is situated along a "learning and leisure" corridor which is also home to the town's recreation centre, library, curling club, playground and more. For more information contact Laura Howarth, Hinton Recreation and Culture Manager, at 780.865.6048 or lhowarth@hinton.ca.

GAER People

This issue we profile not one but three people from our own GAER office. Meet our two new hires, Kai So, Regional Sustainability Coordinator and Helen Kelleher-Empey, Tourism Development Specialist; and Heather Cokes, recently promoted to Diversification Project Officer.

Heather Cokes

Diversification Project Officer

Heather is a familiar, friendly face at the GAER office, having worked here since June 2006. In her former role as the office's administrative assistant she gained an acute understanding of regional challenges by assisting on initiatives such as GAER's Response to Mountain Pine Beetle, Energy Sector Opportunity Identification and Labour Force and Tourism strategies. Now, the graduate of the inaugural Leadership West Yellowhead program is taking on greater leadership and responsibility by coordinating efforts for the Diversification Strategy. Over the course of the two-year initiative her goal is to support the growth of "strong, viable and resilient communities within GAER." Heather believes this is crucial for GAER communities that are now "adapting to the new reality they face in light of changing economic forces."

Upon starting her new role on September 1, she was impressed with how proactive GAER members are. "Most of the communities are further ahead ... than was previously thought when this project was first developed. Many of them have already made decisions and set their course of action in light of receiving funding for economic stimulus projects."

Originally from Newfoundland, Heather attended Memorial University before moving west. For the past 17 years she has lived in Edson, where she is an active volunteer.

Helen Kelleher-Empey

Tourism Development Officer

In the tourism profession, it helps if you have international experience, an appreciation for people and an active lifestyle. Helen hails from Ireland, she's a hiker, cyclist and cross-country skier, and one of the first things she mentions when asked about her new role (starting September 14) is how much she's looking forward to getting to know all 12 GAER members. She also brings 13 years of experience working for Jasper Tourism and Commerce—the last five as general manager—during which she led a host of successful tourism initiatives. "I was involved with the very first promotional video of Jasper," Helen recalls. "I also played a key role in bring the Tourism Industry Association of Canada Conference to Jasper and in the creation of the Edmonton Jasper Connector daily shuttle, which led to the Edmonton-Jasper Friendship accord." She also helped lead key annual events such as Jasper in January.

As tourism development specialist for GAER, her goal is "to position GAER as a leading tourism area in Alberta." Key to achieving that, she believes, is "working together to develop relationships and create partnerships that will assist us all to market each others communities and be proud of the tourism product that the GAER community has to offer."

Helen and her husband Jerry live in Jasper with their standard poodle, Finnegan, who likes to accompany them on their many adventures.

Kai So

Regional Sustainability Coordinator

Kai brings youthful energy and perspective to his work in municipal administration. After graduating from the University of Saskatchewan in 2007 (B.A. political science), he served as municipal intern for the City of Grande Prairie. While there he championed environmental causes, assisting with waste audits and recycling initiatives that led to organization-wide reductions in the amount of packaging and office waste. He also participated in the City's long-term budgeting and strategic planning processes, then solidified that experience with some hard data skills as tangible capital assets coordinator for the Municipal District of Greenview.

Kai started as regional sustainability coordinator for GAER in April. In working to build a sustainability plan to support "active, engaged, vibrant GAER communities," some of the big challenges he foresees are economic diversification and water use. "As our population and industry grows, we will be challenged to meet water demand if we don't work on conservation," he says. "Another one is sustaining economic growth given heavy dependence on natural resources." To help define direction, he looks forward to engaging GAER communities, including non-traditional stakeholder groups such as youth and seniors. "We want to take a very inclusive approach to community planning," he says.

In his own time, Kai likes to travel. Getting to know all of Canada is his first priority before venturing abroad.

Congratulations

Here in GAER, we know a Grande Idea when we see one. Case in point: Brazeau County's 100K Kitchen Party. Fresh from the spotlight here this summer, the initiative is earning national recognition for its innovation and creativity. At its annual Marketing Canada Awards, the Economic Developer's Association of Canada awarded gold to Brazeau for best in category. Good cookin', Brazeau!

Whitecourt earned the community beautification equivalent of five Michelin stars when it took first in the Provincial Communities in Bloom (population category 6001 – 12,000) on September 19. In receiving five blooms, the competition's highest honour, Whitecourt qualified to compete nationally in 2010. Well done, Whitecourt, and good luck next year!