

## Economic Recovery Coordinator Report: Millie Stirling

Good afternoon everyone and thank you for coming to our AGM.

As many of you know I am currently under contract with ICET as Economic Recovery Coordinator for the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce. Something you may or may not know is that I have accepted the position of Executive Director in July when the contract with ICET is complete.

My presentation is to give you a bit of a summary of what I have worked on with the Chamber since I began my contract.

I conducted a Business Walk in October 2021 whereby I connected with 114 local businesses to take the “pulse” of local businesses. At the Christmas social, I reported in detail on the business walk, but will give a short summary for those that were not at that event. Although the world has felt like a pretty negative place over the past two years, the business walk in Ladysmith showed me something else. It showed me that we have a strong sense of community, that there were people who opened businesses during covid, people that expanded businesses during covid and businesses that thrived during covid. Yes, there was also hardship, but when I asked businesses what their plans were over the next 5 years, 70% plan to expand/grow. When I asked them what they like the most about doing business in Ladysmith 53% chose location and 40% chose clientele. This is where the seed was planted for Locals Love Ladysmith.

Another take away from the Business Walk was the lack of employees to fill the many job vacancies. I don't need to get into this as we are all very familiar and aware of this. In answer to this call, I have established a relationship with WorkBC (And thank my friend Johnna for joining us here today). Together we are currently in the process of organizing a Job Fair in Ladysmith on May 11, there are flyers for this event available which you are welcome to take and Johnna would also be happy to answer any questions you may have. We will be holding it at LSS and I am working with the principal and one of the counsellors to involve the students in the set up of the event as well it being open to grade 10-12 students to attend.

Next came the Shop Local initiative supported by our Federal Government and the BC Chamber. As you know, we applied for and were granted just shy of \$60,000 for our shop local initiative. It was both exciting and intimidating as Mark had left and I had never done anything like this. Initially we worked with LDBA and FOL to support the Old Time Christmas, we updated the Heritage Walking Tour App to remove the Church and we also created a Christmas Light walking tour that highlighted and explained several of the light displays in Town. This app has been upgraded and I have been advised that it has the capacity for us to add audio to the app as suggested by Rob Johnson. We created a poster with a QR code on it so that the app is easy for our tourists to download.

We also initiated a Gift Certificate program and a print ad campaign to educate and encourage the community to shop local. But, our Crown Jewel is our Locals Love Ladysmith campaign which has been a tremendous success! I want to thank our photographer Aleisha of Desert Rose Co for working by my side and for bringing such amazing energy to this initiative. Once again I found myself out in the community and we interviewed a diverse group of 41 local businesses, asking all of them the same 5 questions and getting amazing photos of their businesses. We then created a Locals Love Ladysmith Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok. These interviews now feed content into our Tourism Ladysmith Facebook page as well as the Chamber's Facebook page. They are advertising, but the best kind of advertising, we are telling their stories. Each business will have 3-5 posts and we are now getting requests from other local businesses for interviews to continue this program. Our initial post reached 2814 people in the first week and by 3 weeks, the page had reached 7840 people!

With this initiative we updated our website which now displays the photos posted on our LLL Instagram page. Our website contains the pages for Invest Ladysmith and Tourism Ladysmith. The photos freshen up our website and show the visitor our beautiful community on the first page.

LLL is a fantastic initiative that we would love to keep going. I hear a lot of tourists comment on how beautiful our town is and of course they come to us to help them decide what to do. Our next project is to create 3-5 "a day in Ladysmith" posts for LLL and the Ladysmith Tourism Facebook page whereby we give our tourists ideas of a great way to spend the day in Ladysmith, ie: cinnamon bun for breakfast, hike Holland Creek trail, relax and enjoy lunch at transfer beach, afternoon heritage walking tour with our app and dinner with a glass of wine on the patio at Zak's lounge. I also spoke with Rob Johnson and have reached out to him, Marina and the Historical Society to choose 3-5 buildings in town that we can feature with the same structure. We have posted a couple of old photos in LLL and they got a lot of social media interest and attention. These posts would peak our tourists interests and direct them to our business community, recreation and attractions.

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I brought a stack of publications that we have placed our LLL ads in. We have a beautiful, eye catching, ad this year that has been placed in all the publications we participated in last year. This includes the most popular map we have and use, we give out at least one a day.

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Our activity caught the attention of the Nanaimo Chamber and they have invited 8 of our local businesses to participate in their online business directory. I oversold this and sent 12 businesses their way. Nanaimo is considering one of our local businesses to offer a sponsorship to Island Good. I am just waiting to hear back from them.

Recently, I met with our MP Lisa Marie Barron, who we are fortunate to have presenting for us here today. She was curious about the business climate in Ladysmith. When I shared with her some of the stories I had heard in my Business Walk and Locals Love Ladysmith interviews, she was intrigued. I got a call from her staff after our meeting letting me know that Lisa Marie would like to come to our

community and meet some of our local businesses. We spent an afternoon together, she bought a cinnamon bun and I introduced her to 3 local businesses who got to share their covid journey and provide her with real life stories to take back to her office. I didn't arrange for her to meet the "easy" ones yet even the most challenged of the businesses she interviewed were professional and well spoken with their opinions and feedback. It was impressive

We have been working with Ron at Farm Fresh Design who originally built our website and has now done an incredible job all with the website updates and I encourage you to check it out if you haven't already. We now have pages created for our membership new and renew, and for our events. Some of you may have used them for this event and/or for your membership renewal. We have also created a page for our upcoming Golf Tournament. This is by no means a way to remove the personal touch that the Chamber has always provided but rather to assist Jacquie and I to manage the volume of work at the office and allow us to build the Chamber as it should be. If you require an invoice or prefer to pay by cheque or drop in, those options are always available.

Speaking of building the Chamber, I would like to take a moment to thank our sponsors for the AGM. You will find at your tables information from both Kubera and Johnson Group insurance.

Our Chamber staff are grateful to now have Health benefits provided by Johnson Group Insurance. Did you know that not only is any member business eligible to apply for our group health insurance but if the business has 3 or more employees, they do not have to be underwritten. If you would like more information about our Group Health benefit plan, please take a flyer and give Paul a call.

In addition, we have added a POS system through our benefit provider, Kubera. They work like insurance brokers where they have access to many different POS providers. They provide personal service, they do not have an automated phone system, when you call you always get a person. Their customer service is fantastic and they are very helpful. Our new system provider is Bombara is a Vancouver Island based company and because we are so small, we only pay for the transaction, we do not have any monthly fees. As we grow, we can add to, change or modify our system by talking to Chris any time. If you have any questions about their services or just want to call to see if there could be a better system out there for you, please take a flyer and give Chris a call.

And for some summer fun, you will notice on your table we have posters advertising our Golf Tournament. Yes, we are planning a golf tournament this year, it is set for June 17 and it is our first tournament since 2019! We are grateful to have LDCU on board as our Title Sponsor again this year and this year's tournament is a memorial tournament. Stalker Excavating has sponsored the memorial to honour their employee, Larry Ingram and a portion of the proceeds that we raise will be donated to the Canadian Diabetes Association. I hope that everyone here will come out and join us for a beautiful day on the golf course. We have printed some sponsorship and registration packages if you would like to

take one or, like I said, you can find an event page for the golf tournament on our website. This is always a fantastic event and I know for sure, it won't disappoint this year!

I am going to finish with a quick story about "what the Chamber does" for anyone who may have heard the question or asked the question themselves "why should I join the Chamber?" First of all, we have Chamber Executive coffee chats regularly as well as BC Chamber calls where we discuss matters at the forefront of our communities. I am fortunate to have an incredible team of mentors and partners that are more than willing to share their knowledge and assist with any and all questions that come up. It is an incredibly supportive group. In our meetings we discuss topics from mental health, to policies, to housing, to gas tax. And with respect to gas tax, I have a little story:

- \*small border chamber – gas and restaurants, people going to Alberta to save and not wear a mask

- \*emergency meeting (can we do what Alberta has done) not NIMBY

- \*feedback gathered (Alberta system is structured differently, they produce oil and the funds generated through that resource allows the flexibility, how do we reduce tax and then add tax, going to make people angry no matter what)

- \*we proposed a letter be sent to the province.

- \*result – rebate.

I have other stories such as this and the most recent one with respect to mental health has resulted in an upcoming meeting with the CEO of the Victoria Chamber who has a large, powerful chamber that is able to get things done. He is full of ideas and is very supportive with implementation for us smaller chambers.

Before I step down from here, I would like to express my extreme gratitude for our Chamber Board and in particular, our president Tammy Leslie. She has worn many hats and has supported us through the very busy fall and winter, the learning and the ups and downs of life at the Chamber after Mark's departure. Thank you Tammy. But even more essential to the Chamber is my friend Jacquie. Thank you Jacquie for everything you do, which is a WHOLE lot. Jacquie is a wealth of knowledge and an incredibly hard worker. These flowers can not adequately thank you for everything you do but I really want you to know how grateful I am to have you by my side and how much you are appreciated <3

Thank you everyone for your time, do you have any questions?