

BC/Asia Twinning Toolkit

by Karl Hourigan

BC is situated between the world's two largest economic regions — North America and Asia. The potential economic benefits of this opportunity will not be realized in BC without a fundamental shift in how businesses and governments think about the Asia Pacific region. According to the provincial government, that attitude shift is fast-tracked when BC communities partner or 'twin' with similarly-sized Asian communities to establish relationships at the community level.

To promote the concept, the province has created the BC/Asia Twinning Toolkit, a practical, "how-to" guide for local governments interested in finding out more about the benefits of international twinning, from establishing new twinning arrangements to enhancing existing ones. It includes information on how to get started, work out the details, and measure progress. It also highlights existing twinning arrangements to illustrate the benefits.

The emerging Asian economy is set to transform the 21st century into what's being hailed as the "Pacific Century." But, the province warns, an interest and willingness to participate in Asia Pacific trade is not enough-it requires action. BC exports to Asia have actually declined recently, while imports continue to climb.

The province and the Union of BC Municipalities have identified international twinning as one way to promote economic development. While it may not be a practical option for all communities, international twinning arrangements can be an appropriate part of new development strategies for many BC communities.

Kelowna has enjoyed a sister-city relationship with Kasugai, Japan, since 1981. The arrangement has fostered cultural exchanges and business ventures. The two cities signed an Agreement on Environmental Protection in 2001. Kelowna's other sister city is Veendam, Netherlands. Kelowna Mayor, Sharon Shepherd, says "I can wholeheartedly testify that these relationships have strengthened our community economically, culturally, and environmentally, and we hope to continue to foster them."

In 1990, the city of Kamloops signed a formal Sister-City Agreement with the City of Uji, Japan, and in 2005 signed a Sister-City Agreement with Changping. Mayor Terry Lake says "Our relationship with Changping, a district of

Sister cities shake it up!



The City of Williams Lake recently 'twinning' with the Chinese City of Fusong to help build economic opportunities for both communities. Shown, from left, are Cliff Wong (Wyatt Marketing), Ed Mead (Williams Lake councillor), Albert Yu (S.U.C.C.E.S.S.), Brian Carruthers (City of Williams Lake), Sylvester Leung (Golden Field Investments), and Scott Nelson (Williams Lake mayor).

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Beijing, has tremendous potential to ensure Kamloops does not miss out on business, education, and cultural opportunities with this economic behemoth."

One of the more recent BC cities to twin with a Chinese city is Williams Lake. In 2007, the cities of Fusong and Williams Lake signed a formal Sister-City Agreement. "This is the first time we have established a direct economic relationship with China to develop business opportunities. Companies at Williams Lake are very excited about this initiative and we are expecting long-term mutual benefits and economic development for both communities from this project", enthuses Mayor Scott Nelson. He expects to see benefits locally from the demand for natural resources from China, and an increase in Chinese visitors to the region.

With proactive participation, the annual economic benefits of enhanced BC/Asian relationships will drive economic prosperity in this province and Canada for decades. By 2020, the annual trade gain is estimated at \$76 billion for BC and \$230 billion for Canada. The total employment impact is estimated to be 255,000 jobs in BC alone — more than the entire manufacturing sector in the province today.

Karl Hourigan is professional writer who lives in Kelowna and is passionate about sustainability. Since setting up his home office, he's cut down his commuting time dramatically.