

Community Futures Boundary celebrates 25 years serving the Boundary region

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Community Futures Boundary marked a major milestone this year, celebrating 25 years of providing business and economic development services to the Boundary region. And they have much to be proud of.

Since first opening its doors 25 years ago, Community Futures Boundary has grown from one employee to a staff of 15 with offices in Grand Forks and Greenwood. During its first five years of operation, the non-profit organization disbursed just \$75,000 in loans. Since then, that portfolio has grown to \$2.8 million and they have loaned over \$13 million to more than 360 entrepreneurs and small businesses, resulting in the creation and maintenance of more than 700 jobs. Those investments have helped leverage additional funds from other sources, funds that have also been invested directly into the local economy.

Founded in 1992, the Boundary area was one of the last regions in the country to receive Community Futures designation as part of a federal government plan to help rural communities cope with a downturn in the economy. “We had probably two weeks to get all the paperwork done,” said Gary Ruley, a former city councillor for Grand Forks and a founding board member of Community Futures Boundary. “So we really got in under the wire.”

To celebrate, Community Futures Boundary hosted a Silver Anniversary luncheon at the end of October to pay tribute to its current and past board members, staff, and community partners. Among those in attendance were founding board members Dave Marshall, John Maximenko and Jim Smith who reminisced about the organization’s early years.

“We started off in a small facility located at 72nd Avenue in Grand Forks with one staff member delivering loans to the entire Boundary Region,” said Dave Marshall, founding chair and member of the board for more than 20 years. Dave told the packed house that he

was very proud of the work that the organization has done. “It’s probably pretty evident that I’m passionate about Community Futures Boundary,” he said.

“Everyone is here today because at some point in the past or present they have made a difference to our organization,” said Wendy McCulloch, general manager for the organization. “And Community Futures Boundary is here today because 25 years ago a small group of individuals had the foresight to act on an opportunity to make the Boundary region a better place to live and work.”

And that work continues, she said. “We want to make a difference because we live and work in the Boundary and we have the tools, resources and connections to create and maximize opportunities.”

Board chair Joan Thomas introduced the current board of directors – Alan Peterson, Leigh Starchuk, Alan Cooper, Alan Wilkie, Joe Sioga, Jeanne Campbell, Mark Olson, Dave Turner, and Duane Eek – as well as the staff, thanking them for their hard work and dedication.

“We are deeply rooted in this region,” she said. “And we’re committed to making it viable and sustainable.”

She said that the board has a clear vision for the future, one that involves looking for innovative ways to work with employers, local government and community organizations on initiatives and activities that matter to the Boundary and that truly make a difference. In fact, she said, they had just received funding from the Rural Dividend program for a joint initiative between Community Futures Boundary and the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary to explore the feasibility of a community centre for Grand Forks.

“Community Futures thrives when we bring together groups to develop a locally-driven vision for the future of our region,” said Joan.

Community Futures Boundary is part of a national network of 267 Community Futures organizations across Canada comprised of 3,000 volunteers and more than 1,300 staff. Ron Trepanier, executive director of the national Community Futures Network of Canada, said that, since 2000, CFOs across Canada have disbursed more than \$3.8 billion in loans and leveraged an additional \$7 billion from other sources, creating more than 551,424 jobs. “Last year alone, 41,712 new jobs were created in Canada due to Community Futures,” he said. “That’s 114 jobs each day and 800 jobs each week.”

Ron has been involved with Community Futures since 1989, and served as the founding executive director of the provincial association from 1992 to 2002. He stated that Community Futures Boundary has always played a leadership role, not only in the Boundary but also at the provincial level. He attributed the organization's success to three key factors – partnerships, strong leadership, and competent, dedicated staff.

The board and staff received a standing ovation in recognition of their hard work on behalf of Community Futures Boundary. Several long-term employees were also given special recognition for having served more than 10 years with the organization, including Sandy Elzinga (18 years), Susan Green (17 years), Andrea Zibin (15 years), Wendy McCulloch (12 years), and Anna Lactin (11 years).

Among the invited guests attending the Silver Anniversary celebration were Frank Konrad, Mayor of Grand Forks; Julie Butler and Chris Hammet, Grand Forks City Councillors; Grace McGregor, Area C Director for the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary and chair of the Boundary Economic Development Committee; Roly Russell, Area D Director for RDKB and member of the BEDC; Marguerite Rotvold, Village of Midway City Councillor and member of the BEDC; Bob Huff, executive director for Habitat for Humanity Southeast BC; Cheryl Johnson, executive director for Community Futures British Columbia; and Gary Angus, provincial coordinator for the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Program.