

Searching for Economic Diversity: Community Revitalization in Tumbler Ridge.

In the spring of 2000, Teck Corporation announced that it would be closing the Quintette Mine in Tumbler Ridge two years earlier than expected. In 2003, the company also announced the closure of the Bullmoose Mine. Closure of the town's two main employers and the associated loss of jobs and property tax revenue, precipitated a crisis and raised questions about the town's viability. Previous to the mine closures, diversification efforts had not been initiated. Within six days of the Quintette closure announcement, however, local leaders had a plan for revitalization, which they have been working to implement over the past five years.

Certain elements appear to have been instrumental in Tumbler Ridge's revitalization. The first involves the highly developed levels of

social capital and social cohesion in the community. Individuals and groups were able to respond quickly and to draw upon a wide range of experiences and skills. They also knew "who could be trusted" to deliver on key revitalization tasks. Even in cases where particular



groups may have had different visions for the future of the community, they were willing to work cooperatively due to this sense of trust between groups and leaders. This social capital and cohesion had been built up in Tumbler Ridge over many years of community development activity.

Secondly, having worked hard to

diversify and build upon their resource strength, new industry developments are emerging, as are other economic initiatives. Mayor Clay Iles acknowledged that Tumbler Ridge does not "want to be where we were 3-4 years ago." For a community developed around a

single industry, breaking into new industries is extremely difficult. However, Tumbler Ridge has responded to these challenges:

- Paleontology has significantly diversified the local economy following the 2000

discovery of dinosaur tracks and skeletal material in the Tumbler Ridge region. These findings sparked national and international interest leading to the formation of the Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation. In 2003, a new "Dino Camp" pilot program for children was conducted during the summer with funding from sources like the Vancouver Foundation

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and the local Rotary club. The Dino Camps have been very successful and have attracted families from southern British Columbia and Alberta, which has increased the use of hospitality and recreational services. There has also been an increase in museum memberships and post-secondary education courses at the community college have been promoted.

- In 2004, the museum foundation obtained funding through the federal Softwood Industry Community Adjustment Economic Initiative (SICAEI) leading to the creation of the Peace Region Palaeontology Research Centre in Tumbler Ridge. Regional municipalities and tourism organizations are planning the Northern Dino Tour, which may become an international draw for the region. The Palaeontology Research Centre adds another attraction to Tumbler Ridge's suite of tourism destination drawing cards.



- Just recently, Tumbler Ridge was selected by Bell Canada as one of three "True Sport Communities" and will be recognized on national television at a ceremony in Toronto on March 29th, 2004.

- Though committed to maintaining the diversification of the local economy, Tumbler Ridge has recognized the importance that natural resource extraction has played in local and regional economic development. In November of 2004, Tumbler Ridge saw Western Canadian Coal transport its first load of coal in two years by rail to the

Rockies, starting a new era of mining in the region.

Bottom up revitalization enjoyed success in Tumbler Ridge due to the ability of residents to work collectively, to draw upon the availability of high quality service infrastructure, to deploy innovative visions with respect to local assets, and efforts to encourage economic diversification.

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