

PRESS RELEASE

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Nanaimo positioning itself as a destination of choice for Francophone visitors to BC in the lead up to 2010 Olympic Games

L'Association des francophones de Nanaimo (AFN), in partnership with key business and tourism organizations launched the **Bonjour! Action Plan** today with a vision to position Nanaimo as a destination of choice for national and international French speaking tourists to British Columbia.

And, what better time to introduce **the Bonjour! Action plan** when Canada will be proudly promoted as a bilingual country to media, visitors and the world when their eyes are on British Columbia in the lead up to the 2010 Olympic Games. Not only will many Francophone visitors be visiting this region, but Mt Washington is hosting training teams from France & Switzerland, it is predicted that 23% of the Canadian Olympic team will be from Quebec, AND there are 60,000 Francophone residents in British Columbia of which approximately 18% live in our region (Duncan to Parksville). Nanaimo will also be hosting the biggest Francophone event on Vancouver Island during the 2010 Olympics, the 10th annual Maple Sugar Festival.

The **Bonjour! Action Plan** encourages business and organizations to provide services in French through 5 key components: 1. Customer Service Program, 2. French language Service Hotline, 3. Bilingual Ambassadors, 4. French Language Tourism Promotional Materials, and 5. Bilingual Signage.

A number of Nanaimo tourism-based businesses have already signed on in support of the **Bonjour! Action Plan**. Several tourism operators are providing a Customer Service Program including the Coast Bastion Hotel, Painted Turtle Guesthouse, Travelodge, Nanaimo District Museum, and Nanaimo Art Gallery and this number is expected to grow to at least 50 businesses city-wide with the launch of the program. L'AFN is currently providing the French-language hotline, which operates Monday-Friday 9am-5pm. Both Tourism Nanaimo and the Downtown Nanaimo Partnership Society which provide Visitor Information Services, are in support of the Bonjour ! Action Plan, and will be looking at ways to help promote Nanaimo as a destination of choice for French-speaking visitors through tourism promotional materials.

The Nanaimo District Museum was the first business to sign up in support of the Bonjour! Action Plan, and they intend to introduce select museum promotional material and documentation in French. *"The Museum is happy to be part of the Bonjour program,"* says Debbie Trueman, General Manager. *"Visitor service is very important to us and "Bonjour" will help us improve the total museum experience."*

"Approximately 50% of our guests are long-haul Canadian or international visitors to Nanaimo, with a significant number of them having French as their first language," says Angie Barnard, Sales & Marketing Manager for the Painted Turtle Guesthouse. *"When we heard about the Bonjour! Action plan, we wanted to get involved to add value to current French-speaking guests and we clearly see it as an opportunity to draw more business by attracting new Francophone clients."*

Nanaimo is maturing as a community - becoming less reliant on traditional primary industries such as logging and fishing, and developing secondary service-based industries such as tourism. In these times when economic diversification is necessary and there are less personal resources available for leisure pursuits, the **Bonjour! Action Plan** is a welcome initiative to help foster new tourism business and send the message that Nanaimo is open for business to the niche Francophone market.

Businesses who are interested in finding out more about how to get involved in the **Bonjour! Action Plan** are invited to attend one of the following Workshop Sessions:

- a) Thursday 26 February 2009; 4:00-5:30pm, 121 Bastion Street, downtown Nanaimo
- b) Thursday 19 March 2009; 3:00-4:30pm, Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce, 2133 Bowen Rd

For more details, visit L'AFN website at www.francophonenanaimo.org or contact:

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