



BURNS LAKE LAKES DISTRICT NEWS



Talks continue to bring new college to Burns Lake

By Burns Lake District News

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The rural post-secondary education committee (RPEC), created in response to the cutbacks and restructuring at the College of New Caledonia, continues its efforts to bring a new college to Burns Lake.

The committee has been working diligently to create a rural campus of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) in Burns Lake. The Aboriginal public post-secondary institute currently has campuses in Merritt and Burnaby.

Ken Tourand, NVIT president, was in the Lakes District on Sept. 26-27, 2016. Tourand and other NVIT representatives met with RPEC and representatives of the six local First Nations groups.

Cathy Ashurst, RPEC member, said NVIT's visit was "very exciting and a refreshing change."

"The team expressed a strong interest in working with the communities of the Lakes District to expand and enhance post-secondary programs," she said. "They see the huge potential for strong partnerships with First Nations, local government, industry and the general community."

Ashurst also noted that NVIT supports local decision making and wants to invest in the communities through stable funding, predictable programming, services and employment.

Scott Zayac, RPEC member and executive director of the Lakes District Family Enhancement Society, said RPEC feels NVIT is "a good fit for Burns Lake."

"As one of only two public post-secondary institutions in B.C. with a provincial mandate, NVIT has been offering accredited programming since 1995 and is inclusive and open to anyone," said Zayac. "Administration at NVIT believes in building true partnerships by engaging with communities to identify post-secondary education needs and determine how they can be met."

Zayac added that a partnership with NVIT will provide the opportunity for post-secondary programs and services in the Lakes District to be rebuilt and expand.

"Increased student numbers, employment for local educators, and recruitment of professionals will lead to economic diversity and resiliency in the region," he said. "NVIT shares RPEC's vision of opportunity and growth, leading to a revitalized community hub of programs and services through collaboration and partnership."

The board of directors of the College of New Caledonia were invited to be partners in the creation of a new education model in Burns Lake earlier this year; however, the board "respectfully declined" the invitation.

Earlier this year, RPEC announced it had secured funding of almost \$170,000 to meet its goal of bringing a new college to Burns Lake. The committee is expected provide an update of their progress to Burns Lake council within the next few weeks.

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