

Booming economy outpaces workforce

Supervisory shortfall could be major problem

By George Froehlich

Business Edge

British Columbia's booming economy will create more than one million jobs over the next 10 years – but the task of ensuring there are enough workers to meet demand is daunting and in some cases may be too late, a recent leadership forum was told.

Everyone is focusing on 2010 (the year B.C. hosts the Winter Olympics) and the jobs it will create . . . but all of that is being overshadowed by other major job-creation booms, said Roslyn Kunin, a Vancouver consulting economist.

Kunin, president of Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., was one of five speakers at the annual Greater Vancouver Leadership Summit. She has also written a report that projects the B.C. economy will create 1.045 million jobs – nearly 500,000 of them new positions.

One troublespot will be finding skilled tradespeople, given the many new expansion projects that are on the drawing boards in B.C, she said.

Those projects include a new Vancouver trade and convention centre, a new rapid transit line and a major expansion of the highway leading to Whistler.

It's almost too late to do anything about it . . . it takes four years for an apprenticeship program to be completed. The economy has taken off for the first time in 10 years. We have a project list, Kunin said.

All those nice numbers for 2010 are a small amount in relation to all the other demands that will be placed on the B.C. labour force.

Bev Briscoe, chair of the provincial government's Industry Training Authority – which oversees apprenticeship and industry training programs – echoed her comments.

B.C. definitely has turned the corner. It is now one of the most vibrant economies and it needs training programs to help the job boom, she said.

Kerry Jothen, president and CEO of Human Capital Strategies of Victoria, told the forum all sectors must work together to meet demand. The good news is that there are tremendous employment and career opportunities, he said. But we need real change collectively to make it happen.

The big challenge will be not just getting them into the door but how do we use them . . . 60 per cent of the labour force consists of women, aboriginal people, people with disabilities and immigrants, Jothen said. If you don't use them, you are missing out.

He also urged employers to consider older workers because they are another labour pool to tap into.

He suggested that governments consider a human resource investment tax credit. We do it for research, so why not for employers that create jobs . . . also the provincial and federal governments need to work closer together.

Kunin said the biggest demand for employees will come in the health-care sector at all levels.

But will we have the monies to pay these new employees? Kunin noted. Also, in many cases we have the people to do the work, but they are prevented from getting them on account of credential recognition. We should not be throwing snowballs at each other across the mountains.

The second-biggest demand will come in the area of trade and technical workers. Kunin cited a personal case of

her family purchasing a hybrid car that, when it needed to be fixed, required a software upgrade to make it work.

So don't think in terms of a grease monkey when you take your car to be fixed. We need a change in the attitude that you need a university degree, and that it is the only way to go, Kunin said.

Workers can make a lot of money in the trades these days, Kunin noted, with some 18-year-olds straight out of school making more than \$100,000 a year. To be sure, they have to work hard, do overtime and put in long hours, but they are being offered that kind of money.

Construction supervisors also will be in great demand as they can only reach those positions by working their way up through the ranks. Unless we do something soon, it's going to take longer to fix a plumbing problem than to get your hip replacement done, she said.

Tourism and the restaurant sector also will need to find workers, Kunin predicted. There will be a shortage there. Not in the entry-level jobs, but in the supervisory jobs. We have to change the image of the service, construction and technical areas. It will become harder to find those people than for business to get its financing.

Tony Knowles, president of the British Columbia Institute of Technology, said institutions and the business sector must work together to ensure the curriculum being offered to students is up to date.

Increasingly, the sector approach to curriculum development is being used, but there are always challenges, he added. In the automotive sector, there isn't a shortage of people wanting to get into it, but they need a different set of skill levels than before.

Changing the negative image of trades and technical education is key, said Jerry Lampert, president and CEO of the Business Council of B.C. We have a long way to go, Lampert said.

In a recent council survey of high school students asking what their educational ambitions were, only seven per cent said they intended to pursue a post-secondary education in the trades and technical area, Lampert said. And yet, 44 per cent of the jobs that will be created in B.C. will require some post-secondary education other than university, he added.

Barbara McLean, co-op co-ordinator for the Vancouver region of the University of Victoria, suggested employers take advantage of co-op programs such as those offered by her institution. It's a great way to recruit good people. In fact, it becomes an extended job interview.

McLean added major employers such as Telus, Tourism Vancouver and Electronic Arts all have been strong supporters of the university's co-op program.

HOT JOBS?

Vancouver economist Roslyn Kunin predicts some of the jobs with the largest number of openings from 2003-2015:

- * Motor vehicle and transit drivers.
- * Sales clerks.
- * Cleaners. * Mathematicians, analysts and programmers.
- * Auditors, accountants, investment professionals.
- * Chefs and cooks.
- * School teachers and counsellors.
- * Occupations in food and beverage service.
- * Managers in retail trade.
- * Managers in food service and accommodation.

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