

Annual Report – CEO for AGM

All of this is post-2020 AGM which was held May 20/20

First, may I offer my personal thanks to all on the Board over the past year. I'll be honest; I was quite worried early in the Pandemic that we'd fail, or that our Board might consider layoffs and other drastic actions. I thank each of you for ensuring that we remained stable. Your support of me and our staff allowed us to be part of the overall solutions and more importantly you allowed me opportunity to advocate on behalf of all businesses in Port Alberni. My voice (your voice) was loud and clear constantly with my peers and more importantly with the BC and Canadian Chambers. We were heard frequently and in many cases I felt that our input was instrumental in many decisions made.

In particular, I'd like to express my thanks to our outgoing President – Sarah Jones. As you all know Sarah has had to step back over the past 8+ weeks due to an unfortunate accident resulting in a concussion that she continues to deal with. Sarah has been our President for 2 years during which time our Chamber has continued on a strong path. She supported me in our quest for the McLean Mill contract and she was also a huge help during the Cruise Ship arrivals that seem so long ago. Those are but two of her highlights during her term as President. Simply put we are a better and stronger Chamber because of her lead on the Board.

Sarah enjoys fishing so.....she'll be receiving something aligned with that hobby very soon. Courtesy of all of us.

For the purposes of this report/summary I'll highlight things that happened over each of the past 12 months. This list is not exhaustive. We've done much more than I could possibly show on this report.

Late May - 2020

- Participated in the BC Chamber AGM which was also held via Zoom. There were some tech glitches in this event which bumped a few of us out a few times. Overall it went as good as could be during a Pandemic
- May end last year was when we had to be complete with the registrations for the www.BetterBuyPortAlberni.ca website. By the time May 31st hit we were just under 50 businesses on the site however a few never took the second step to become live within it.
- On May 28th last year I initiated a call between Stefanie Weber and other ownership of the Bulldogs. That call led to another held with Minister Scott Fraser. Intent was to get some clarity on fans permitted in the various arenas. From there I pushed the BC Chamber to assist us with a league wide letter approach to Govt. All 17 BC communities with a team ended up with support from their local Chamber.
- Late May included a visit to the San Group where they showed us progress in their local Mill operations.

- As approved at the AGM we applied for the CEBA loan program under its first rendition of \$40,000. Those monies were soon received and were used primarily for the upgrades to the Visitor Centre and Gift Shop within it.

June summary:

- Participated in a Membee Webinar surrounding our Membership Management Software Program
- I remind all that the VC was closed for 100 days between mid-March and early July. During this time, I worked the office on my own without any other staff members present. I also managed our lawn/garden maintenance as we had lost those workers to the pandemic challenges.
- June was busy with re-construction in the VC. We moved and refurbished the visitor counter so that we could be better positioned to greet guests. We purchased new computers for the re-opening, and we purchased new and improved seating for our front staff. Systems were altered such that our employees would never have their backs to guests coming into the building. The refurbish included the moving of overhead lighting systems, repair to the floor, paint refresh etc., etc.
- During June we populated and expanded the VC Gift Shop. This included the purchase of fixtures from a failed business in Nanaimo. Those cabinets now house most of our goods at the VC.
- In June I met with Lori Camire of Community Futures as well as my colleagues from Ucluelet and Tofino. The topic of our discussions was a Rural Dividend Grant that Lori wanted the three Chambers to assist with. This was a good contract for us that provided much needed revenues that helped offset revenue decline. It also gave us specific reasons to visit with local business owners. The grant allowed CFAC to identify unknowns in the business community leading them to access even more support programs.
- Hired a fellow named Gilles to assist us with the reopening of the McLean Mill Food Services. Part of Gilles' initial mandate was to develop the Safety Plan and Health Plan for VIHA.
- June also saw us make considerable inventory purchases for the two gift shops.
- As we did in March, April, & May we continued with a big push to the communication of information to the wider business community. Our Stats continue to confirm community engagement with these newsletters.
- The McLean Mill Gift Shop opened on Father's Day for a brief period and then opened on weekends following that.
- The Mill operations held a tour for local City Staff and Councillors at the McLean Mill in later June.

July Summary

- McLean Mill opened on Canada Day in the Gift Shop for the balance of the summer; 7 days per week
- We opened the Food Services on July 13th after receiving confirmation from Island Health on our Restaurant plans.
- The Campground was also open for business
- The Visitor Centre reopened to the public on Monday, July 6th

- During the summer many local meetings continued including the Community Health Network, Dry Dock Committee, COVID recovery committee, and others that I belong to.
- For the VC we used our tent as a means of stopping folks before they entered the building. This worked quite well and is something that we may continue with in a post-Covid world.

August Summary

- Due to staffing challenges, I spent a fair bit of time during the month of August at the McLean Mill. My time there included taking the lead on a Wedding booking that came to us after most others had canceled. This one was for a small group wedding with the couple both coming to Port Alberni from Fort McMurray. Wedding was scheduled for Mid-September but lots of pre-planning occurred in August.
- I spent some time in August working on a project to bring a Community APP into play for Port Alberni. This didn't materialize however there is renewed interest in an APP now.
- I also met several times in August with people on a committee that hopes to bring in **MOMENT FACTORY** to Port Alberni. Find their projects here: <https://momentfactory.com/home> check out the Reels page and the Lumina portion of it. Look at Whistler. This is what we have chatted about with Moment Factory for the McLean Mill.
- Met several times with Bruce Mollander of the SAN GROUP re a desire to have them consider support for a fence at the McLean Mill surrounding the caretakers' fence. Tentative approval for a donation was received however things did unravel a bit through the balance of the year due to unforeseen circumstances. The SAN GROUP remains interested in working with us. We will re-approach if/when the ALC situation is resolved to our satisfaction.
- Should remind that we were successful in 2020 with the HRDC Student Grant. We employed four people each with 8 weeks of work with us. (used in both the VC/Chamber and at the McLean Mill).
- In Mid-August during a meeting with others involved in the planned Salmon Derby (without the event) I learned of a desire of Al's from Gone Fishin' to provide \$3000. Worth of local gift cards to random people involved. I then approached Al about using us through our Better Buy Port Alberni Website to manage this process. Shortly after we were able to develop a cool program (thanks to Webmax) that met the objectives of the program. Not only were we successful in keeping money locally, courtesy of Al, we as the Chamber were fortunate to be involved and have a reason to demonstrate community support at a time when most needed.

September Summary:

- In early September our lead person for the McLean Mill opted out of her employment with us. It had become a rather bumpy road so this was for the better good for all involved. In the young woman's defense, she entered the Port Alberni workplace the day before the world shutdown. We collectively worked hard to keep her employed, keep her engaged etc., etc. but the job of course could not meet her expectations.
- The Gone Fishin' program started on Labour Day Weekend.

- That program went so well that a second, smaller one, was also initiated.
- Shortly after her departure we move Anita Sutherland into the Director of Operations role for the McLean Mill. Anita has jumped all over this position with us and has done a wonderful job. Anita also became very familiar with our Better Buy Port Alberni platform.
- The one and only wedding we conducted in 2020 occurred in mid-September. The wedding had just under 50 people which at the time was the max limit allowed. The wedding was held outside in its entirety and fortunately the weather cooperated. The bride/groom were very pleased with everything as were we.
- During September I worked a fair bit on the Sign Project which we had been given a green light to manage on behalf of the City. This project started earlier in the year. To date we have not received any further direction on how the city wishes to proceed. Our initial efforts included a survey of other community signs as found throughout Vancouver Island. We also included other signs from other parts of the Province to add further info to Council. An initial concept that was aligned with what we thought Council wanted was rejected thus sending us back to the drawing board.

October Summary:

- I took a few days off during the first days of October during which time I visited the Moment Factory light show in Whistler. I'd been given some free tickets to the event. The light show is fantastic and if we are ever able to get something here it would become a feature Tourism attraction the day it opened. The organization continues to prefer the McLean Mill area as does our committee involved. Should the MM be removed from the ALR which is the current objective we will then reach out to Moment Factory to restart discussions.
- We learned of the New Horizons for Seniors Grant program in October which then led to Anita and I discussing physical activity options for Seniors at the McLean Mill. These discussions led to the Bike S.E.A.T. concept which we then submitted to the Federal Government for approval. By this time, we had developed a rapport with the former owner of Bikes by Oz and through him we packaged up the grant application (budget).
- Also during October Anita and I began discussions about various Christmas Season options that might work at the McLean Mill. From there we sought sponsorship from various local organizations thus allowing us the flexibility to put on a major outdoor event through the month of December. Our plans were fully compliant with COVID/Health restrictions and we felt that even a tightening of the restrictions would still work for us. Hours after releasing our request for support through our Newsletter we were contacted by Daryl Robbins of Robbins and Co. He asked what we were looking for as a Title sponsor to which we responded a value of \$2500. Daryl then asked what our projected cost would be which we then confirmed would be in excess of \$10,000. Shortly after that Daryl sent us \$10,000.
- We were contacted by Pat Deakin's office in October to do a similar Gift Card program for a contest operated by the City and Community Futures. That program was also worth \$3000. And of course we leveraged the strength of the BBPA website.
- In later October we scheduled weekend teams to go out to the McLean Mill to begin the process of setting up lights for the planned event (Dec 1 – Dec 24). I estimate a total of no less than 300 person-hours involved for the lights over the course of about 6 weeks.

November Summary:

- We continued with the Lights display at the McLean Mill
- Also assisted with the set up of the lights for the Visitor Centre
- In mid-November I was contacted by Stefanie Weber of Tim Horton's to see how we could help her with their plans for Staff Gift Cards. After some discussion we agreed to use the BBPA website once again. This program was the biggest yet with over \$6200. In Gift Cards being awarded out.
 - The Chamber did not levy any sort of extra charge for any of these Gift Card programs. We felt that doing so was a service to the Business Community and we were most appreciative of the support from folks like Al, Stefanie and many others that followed. Each of those people spent their money in a way that ensured some success for other businesses.
- During November we also secured additional sponsors for the Christmas Heritage Village program that we'd been working hard on. Those sponsors included: Robbins and Co., Jowsey's Furniture, Tim Horton's, RLR Lawyers, Valley Vision Optometry, Canadian Tire, Rabinder Dhillon and others!
- The Heritage Christmas Event was subsequently canceled when further Health Restrictions were announced in later November. I point out that Daryl asked that we use some of the \$10k to assist in offset of initial costs and then hold the balance for 2021. We've done exactly that.

December Summary:

- Though we were not permitted to host any sort of Event through December we did opt to carry on with a Light up concept. In so doing we opened for at least 10 days between Dec 1 and Dec 24 with our hours of operation moving to late-afternoon through the evening. Typically, 4pm to 8pm. We scheduled two employees each evening whose duty it was to turn on all lights through the McLean Mill area and then operate the Gift Shop. At close when it was dark (very dark) either myself or Mike Sutherland returned to turn the lights off for the night. This was done to reserve power and reduce risk of fire. It should be noted that all lights set up in the historic area were done so without any adverse affect to the buildings. Lights used in that area were of the old incandescent version which helped authenticate the look of the 1950's and 1960's.
 - Our Gift Shop sales in December were exceptional with some evenings surpassing \$1000. In sales.
- We also rebuilt (for the second time) the McLean Mill Website in December. The initial attempt was done internally however we weren't thrilled with the outcome so in December we contracted WebMax to take us to the next step. As usual, they responded quickly and effectively. Check it out for yourself: www.mcleanmill.ca
- Much of my time over the month of December was spent on the Gift Card Program which included local purchases exceeding \$12,000. (Tim Horton's, INEO Employment, AV News, Panago Pizza, Valley Vision and others)

- We were successful in renting out the one remaining office effective January 1/21. That is now occupied by Suzanne Dube of Edward Jones. Welcome Suzanne!
- Our offices were closed for the Christmas Season for a period of just under 2 weeks.

January Summary:

- Lights' tear-down at McLean Mill and the VC
- More work on the Sign Project
- Do up application for the HRDC Youth Grant Program (we applied for well over \$45,000. Worth of Govt support). (Approved at just under \$40,000.)
- Applied for the ACRC annual Grant (approved at \$4,000.)
- Completed the project with CFAC resulting in a significant number of business contacts over the past 6 months.
- Initiated plans, again with WebMax to develop a new website for the Visitor Centre itself. Prior to now we've hosted the Visitor Centre on our Chamber website thus it was hard to find for people. See the results here: www.PortAlberniVisitorCentre.ca (note we have four domains including both spelling options for 'centre' and both Port Alberni and Alberni Valley).
- Was successful in getting both Anita Sutherland and Jennifer Richardson on the Chambers Group Insurance Plan. This took some negotiating but our rep was very helpful. I am pleased that we now offer this program to our FT staff.

February Summary

- In February I learned that the Rotary Club of Arrowsmith was planning a fundraiser but didn't know how to go about it virtually. I didn't either....but I thought we could help via the BBPA website so we offered to assist. Fast forward to now and you'll find the fundraiser on the www.BetterBuyPortAlberni.ca website. This is all done through proper legal and gaming channels. I credit both Anita and Mike from Webmax for their assistance in getting this done.
- Also in February I connected with Bob Cole regarding our Salmon Structure in the lot. I knew that he had contacts that might be able to assist with a much needed refresh. Fast forward to now and you'll see that the structure has indeed been refreshed including a full re-stain of it. We also got the fellow to do the Butterfly Bench on 3rd which was in really awful condition. The other pieces looked after were those at the Aquarium and Harbour Quay.
- During February we spent a fair bit of time sifting through documents pertaining to the ALC rules in place for the McLean Mill. This has become another major hurdle for us as we look to getting fully operational at the site. We've had to continue with a non-approach to marketing until such time as the site is removed (if its removed) from ALR designation.
- In February I approached Pat Deakin about the potential to do a one-year followup survey (in-person) with the business community. Pat agreed to the idea and then we both looked for ways to potentially do this.

March Summary

- In March we learned of a grant through ICET that would suit the objectives of a business survey. This grant was one that both Pat and I felt would be best suited to the City as the recipient and in turn we made plans to work with the city upon a successful application.
 - The grant was indeed successful leading us to a six-month contract with the city where we've hired two people on a FT term of employment. Both have started with us and are fully engaged in the process.
 - In addition to the hire of Elliot Drew and Terri Hebert for the above-mentioned project we also hired Jessica Aebig to assist us with the Bike SEAT program at the McLean Mill. Jessica and I led a trial run of the bikes; 5 of them purchased at Healthy Habits, with local Seniors – Dewayne Parfitt, Jeff Cook as well as Nancy Wilmot. They were joined by John Douglas on his own e-bike and our MP Gord Johns.
- In March we initiated a plan to correct our own internal HR standards. Knowing that we weren't doing things entirely correct I was successful in convincing the Board to agree to the contracting of an outside service to assist us.
 - We've since signed off with Peninsula Group who operate a very well known HR and Health and Safety program for employers. www.Brighthr.com
 - We now use the program to help manage documents and HR details with our employees. The H/S portion is underway and will be implemented very soon.
 - Today as I write this (May 25/21) we have more than half of our employees involved in a First Aid course
- In March we also hosted the virtual Paper Chase run. While not the same as previous years we actually ended up with more Port Alberni registrants than ever before. The Island Series which this is part of has done a great job of keeping afloat and its very possible that we'll end up with some revenues from the virtual run. Without any real expenses.

April summary

- We received confirmation of 8 student jobs each with 8 weeks of FT hours through the HRDC program. That's most ever for us.
- The Bike Seat Grant money of \$25,000. Was received and we immediately completed the purchase of the 5 e-bikes as identified earlier. We hope to purchase one more e-bike when it becomes available. They are very scarce right now. Find the website here: <https://mcleanmill.ca/bike-seat>
- Between Anita and Jessica they have developed a bike tour outside of the Bike Seat program. Said tour should be shown on the website soon. It'll be called.....wait for it..... The Green Chain
- Elliot got started on the ICET/City/Chamber project on the 13th of April
- During the week of April 19th I wrote a letter to Minister Osborne re the challenges of the Circuit Breaker and how it was/is affecting many of our businesses. The Minister responded quickly and then between us we organized a Zoom meeting for the 30th of April. That meeting was fairly well attended and helped all of us understand some important next steps.
- We applied for funding through NETP for both their summer student program and their Special Projects one.
- At our Board Meeting we agreed to pursue the BC Launch Online program as a means of rebuilding our Chamber Website

May summary

- Terri started early May
- We've hired two of the eight people for the Summer Student program
- We learned of the approval from NETP for the programs applied for. On the Special Projects this will help us with site maintenance including a refresh of the picnic tables on the site.
- Many know that I've been a proponent of the Municipal Regional District Tax (Hotel Tax) for many years. In late 2019 it was confirmed that Port Alberni was finally going to pursue this tax. I was/am part of the committee to lead the project but of course it was derailed once the pandemic took hold. We are now working hard on getting local businesses (hotels/motels/b&b's) to sign off on the concept. I am assisting in this project and so far have at least two businesses on board. Overall we are about ½ way to the goal.
- We received approval from the BC govt to redo our Chamber website. We've asked for the max permitted - \$7500.
 - This website – www.AlberniChamber.ca will be rebuilt by Alberni Online. Once complete we will have the following web presence:
 - www.BetterBuyPortAlberni.ca - hosted by Webmax
 - www.McLeanMill.ca hosted by Webmax
 - www.PortAlberniVisitorCentre.ca hosted by Webmax
 - www.AlberniChamber.ca (including the Membee Membership program) hosted by Alberni Online

Overall Summary:

While the year has been incredibly difficult and sometimes rather lonely it has also been one of great accomplishments by the Chamber. For me the highlights include:

- Financial Stability of the McLean Mill operations
- Visitor Centre improvements resulting if better customer service
- New gift shop at McLean Mill which might be the nicest in all of Port Alberni
- New gift shop at the Visitor Centre. Close second.
- www.BetterBuyPortAlberni.ca While this site has not garnered the overall attention it deserved it has nonetheless done very well for many. I'm especially pleased with the programs held within the site
- The new www.McLeanMill.ca website. Be sure to check it out
- The successful application for the Bike S.E.A.T program
- Proper licensing and procedures now in place at the McLean Mill (camping etc.,)
- Online stores at both the VC and MM
- Successful partnership with CFAC
- Benefits for our key employees
- New Visitor Centre Website inclusive of Chat feature: www.PortAlberniVisitorCentre.ca
- Implementation of HR/HS programs – professionally done

- ICET program through the City of Port Alberni resulting in two more employees with us.
- Statistics achieved through our 50+ Newsletters distributed over the past year. We are or have been number one in the Province for Chambers in terms of 'open rates and click through rates.'
- Success of some of our local businesses in accessing little known grants that were communicated by us to them. One in particular was for \$10,000.
- Success of some businesses in accessing other grants that we pushed them to apply for. Small Business BC grant in particular
- Success of the Video program now visible on the BBPA website. Thanks Pat!
- Heritage Christmas Event. Yes, it didn't take place but it is ready to go for 2021! Thanks Robbins and Co.!
- Successful Audit once again. Performed by R. Anderson and Associates.
- Distribution of over \$20,000. In local gift cards through the BBPA website – all of it paid for by business owners supporting business owners.
- Development of the Membee program which only came to be 4 weeks before the shutdown. Membee is now a valuable component of our Membership program
- More new Members in 2020/21 than I'd have expected and fewer drop-offs than I'd have expected.
- Overall staff stability
- Overall financial stability
- A supportive Board of Directors.