



# The Rebirth of Prince George

The economic engine of the north will be in the spotlight in 2015—and not just because of a certain royal baby

INNOVATION  
NORTH In 2015  
UNBC celebrates  
its 25th  
anniversary.

**V**ou could say Prince George has a reputation problem—partly stemming from the unfortunate title “Most Dangerous City in Canada” bestowed upon it by *Maclean’s* magazine in 2010, 2011 and 2012. According to Heather Oland, CEO of Initiatives Prince George, the city’s economic development corporation, one-sided press is the plight of those cities many miles from a media centre; when we read about them at all, it’s headlines about fires, floods and murders. “I think that’s really unfortunate because mid-sized Canadian cities give people incredible opportunities that they miss out on in the big cities,” says Oland.

In the coming year, though, the press is poised to change for Prince George. With the city’s centennial, the University of Northern B.C.’s 25-year anniversary and the arrival of the Canada Winter Games, 2015 provides an undeniable opportunity for the northern B.C. city of 80,000 to capitalize on its growing (if more quietly trumpeted) reputation for innovation

in the forestry sector, an acclaimed university and an increasingly diverse economy.

Perhaps nothing embodies the new face of Prince George more than the \$25.1-million Wood Innovation Design Centre. Once complete this fall, the centre will be North America’s tallest contemporary all-wood building, standing 29 metres high, and will be a living example of new wood-construction possibilities; it will be home to office space, plus academic and research programs from UNBC that focus on advanced building systems, including a Master of Engineering program specializing in wood building and innovation. Located downtown next to the recently renovated Ramada hotel, the centre is expected to contribute to the broader downtown revitalization project underway in advance of the Winter Games—which includes improving building

by KRISTEN HILDERMAN

facades, updating accommodations and adding stores and services.

Rob van Adrichem, vice-president of external relations at UNBC, says the centre will be “another example of how there can be innovation in the resource sector, and that Prince George can be at the centre of that.” He sees the overlapping celebrations in 2015 as more than just a soapbox to market Prince George to the nation, arguing that each milestone has the capacity to complement the others.

“The fact that the Canada Games is bringing almost 3,000 young people to Prince George is terrific,” he says, adding that the future of the region is being shaped by the next generation of leaders coming out of UNBC (which was recently named one of Canada’s Top 3 Small Universities—ironically, also by *Maclean’s*). “You can’t go anywhere in northern B.C. without running into grads in municipal offices, in economic development offices, in industry, in health care—it’s grads everywhere,” says van Adrichem.

Canada Winter Games CEO Stuart Ballantyne, who moved to Prince George from the Lower Mainland in 2011, hopes the 2015 Games “reestablishes civic pride for the people that live here.” The Games will be the largest event ever hosted in northern B.C.—with an estimated 15,000 visitors descending on Prince George from February 15 to March 1—and pulling it off will prove to the city, and the country, that it has the capacity to host major events of this calibre. Games organizers have been working with Initiatives Prince George, tourism organizations, the downtown business improvement association and the chamber of commerce to ensure local businesses are prepared to capitalize on opportunities to supply and serve the Games, as well as the influx of visitors. Ballantyne hopes the Games will help to establish Prince George as a destination and he sees more major sporting and cultural events in the city’s future.

“I think this could be a fascinating period if we as a province and we as a country really see what’s going on in northern B.C.,” says van Adrichem. □

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