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FORT ST. JOHN'S VIBRANCY AND GROWTH IS FUELLED BY THE NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY

British Columbia is Canada's second-largest natural gas producing region and home to the Montney and Horn River basins. Fort St. John lies along the Alaska Highway at the heart of the Montney basin. It is the largest city in the region and an important service centre for the natural gas industry.

For Fort St. John, the energy capital of B.C., the boom times began in the 1950s with the discovery of petroleum. Subsequent drilling led to a large natural gas find with an estimated worth of \$1.3-trillion. The area is also home to a vibrant forestry and agriculture sector, as well as mining, commercial enterprises and a growing service industry.

Lori Ackerman has served the people of Fort St. John for almost a decade, first as a city councillor and more recently as mayor. She shares her thoughts about the vibrant and growing city she calls home and what the future holds for those who choose to settle there.



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Q: Fort St. John is known as The Energetic City – why is that?

A: Fort St. John has been in the energy industry for decades. Add to that the energy that residents put into their work, volunteer and recreational activities, and the moniker just fits. We are a very energetic community.

Q: How does Fort St. John differ from other communities across Canada?

A: While we're a young community, our fastest growing demographic is seniors. That's because people are choosing to stay here after retirement. Their families and social networks are here, so it's a great place for them to

be. This is a community where skilled workers and trades people will never be looking for work. Many come here because they want to kick-start their career and their partner has the same opportunity. Ten years ago about 50% of our roads were gravel with open ditches. Now only a handful of blocks remain unpaved. We are able



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to work hard here and enjoy life on our time off work. I often say you will never have to look far for a helping hand. Residents here understand the importance of neighbours and that was just shown with the recent evacuation of our neighbours in Hudson's Hope. We did not even begin to tap into the resources offered by Fort St. John residents, businesses and the industry.

Q: What is the importance of the natural gas industry to the region?

A: It is the backbone industry of our region. We have been at this

for decades and are experts at it. We see a lot of cross-pollination between industries where they connect. Technologies used in the natural gas fields to build roads in our climate are now being used for log yards to maintain their base. While we can't forget the contributions of agriculture and forestry, the natural gas industry is vital to our province and to our nation as an exported resource that's helping to balance Canada's trade deficit.

Q: How has the natural gas industry changed the regional economic outlook?

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A: With the growing potential to export more natural gas by compressing it into liquid form, we expect to see our economy expand three to four times over the coming years. This will increase demand for commercial, retail, housing, professional services, recreation and culture. Imagine adding all the necessary aspects of a whole new community to an existing one. That is what we are facing, and it is exciting because we can create a municipality that works for residents and businesses.

Q: How closely is the regional economy linked to the natural gas industry?

A: Natural gas is the largest contributor to our economy, so there's an impact when changes occur in the industry. We feel slowdowns when natural gas prices fall or when new technology requires the service sector to invest

in new equipment. However, the stability of agriculture and forestry in the region, the long-term stability of our natural gas transmission business and the production of the byproducts of natural gas help take us through the downturns.

Q: What are the benefits of being linked to one major industry?

A: One of the key benefits is that we know the players well and are able to create a working relationship to help build a sustainable community. The natural gas industry for us isn't just extraction. We also build the pipelines to transport it, the facilities to condition the gas, and then transport it for use to consumers. So while the rest of B.C. waits for final investment decisions on LNG, we continue to provide natural gas for the domestic consumer. Another benefit is

having a service sector able to work in multiple industries. For example, welding, heating and ventilation, environmental consultants, technology providers or electrical suppliers that work with the natural gas sector can also provide their services to agriculture and forestry.

Q: And challenges?

A: First and foremost is the lack of energy literacy across the country. There are those who pass judgment based on information that's not always fact-based or balanced. The reality is the energy industry allows us to travel the globe, to power life-saving technology and to fuel our gadgets. While every industry leaves a footprint, we as consumers can decide how much of a footprint we leave as individuals. I understand the desire to use renewables. Fort St. John is one of B.C.'s solar communities. We are just in the completion stages of the most northern passive house in North America and we have operational wind farms in our region. Those turbines are not made of bamboo. At some point we will see the tipping point. But it isn't now, not without a drastic change to our standards of living and quality of life.

Q: Are you prepared for increased activity should proposed West Coast LNG (liquefied natural gas) projects proceed?

A: A few years ago, we initiated a community consultation process to envision and manage potential impacts from the Site C dam. The result was a remarkable connection and conversation with the residents.

We're using the result of this for each project that comes our way. We want to ensure that all the foundational components of our community — including health, education, safety and housing — are protected.

Q: Are you concerned about rapid population growth?

A: We have been proactive and recognized the potential impact. When initiating the Site C conversation, recognizing the divisiveness of the project, I mentioned that Noah was in all likelihood not in favour of the flood, but he built an ark. So we are planning. Are we concerned? Of course, this will be unprecedented growth for a community our size. But recognizing that is half the battle. One of our strategic priorities is to determine how a social framework will look. We're working to bring together all stakeholders and agencies to ensure that social, recreation, arts and culture programs are delivered efficiently and effectively, now and into the future.

Q: What about infrastructure challenges?

A: We've been growing at a fast pace for the past 10 years, and we have had to be innovative in our expansion approach and guidelines. We've implemented development charges to pay for additional water and waste-water systems, and for all new subdivisions developers must build roads, sidewalks, streetlights, parks and walking trails that connect to the existing system. We're already paving the way for the future.

Q: Other challenges

for the community?

A: Our biggest challenge is health care. We have a fabulous new hospital but a physician shortage. While physician shortages are a concern Canada-wide, ours is exacerbated by the rate of growth in the community. The new generation of physicians wants a different quality of life than those who are retiring, and they're looking for a different compensation model than the traditional fee for service. We have to be creative in finding solutions to this issue.

Q: How do you envision development in Fort St. John over the next two decades?

A: Using a model that is sustainable. Development will be fast and furious, but we have the ability to hold the reins so that it's well managed. As the community grows, we're able to build entire subdivisions with parks, walking trails and streetlights. Not every community gets to do that.

Q: What might people not know about Fort St. John?

A: A lot of young professionals come here to kick-start their career. They

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gain experience in many aspects of their profession. For doctors interested in obstetrics, this is the place to be. In the first three weeks the new hospital was open, 33 babies were born. Lawyers are in the courtroom a week after they arrive. There's a great demand for skilled professionals here.

Q: What advice can you give those considering a move to Fort St. John?

A: Do your homework. Have an employer to come to and a place to stay when you get here. Reach out to social clubs and visit TownWall.ca, an electronic bulletin board for sports, arts, youth, education, entertainment, food and more, to help you instantly get involved in the community. The only thing preventing you from having a fabulous life here is you.

Q: What does it mean to be mayor in such an important region of the country?

A: It's a privilege to be mayor of Fort St. John. The community has done a lot of growing and there's more on the horizon. I'm in the right place at right time and looking forward to building a community my grandchildren can call home as they snuggle with their own grandchildren. And it's a community that will, very energetically, capture your imagination.

Fort St. John fast facts:

1. First established as a trading post in 1794.
2. The oldest non-native settlement on British Columbia's mainland.

3. One of only four Canadian cities north of the 56th parallel.

4. Canada's most northern agricultural area.

5. Population close to 20,000 and growing at 2.8% per year.

6. Primary industries: natural gas, agriculture, forestry, mining.

7. Supports a trading area of more than 69,000 people.

STOCKWELL DAY JOINS COMPANY PLANNING TO BUILD B.C. BITUMEN REFINERY

Proposed refinery 'could be a legacy project for Canada' Stockwell Day has joined the leadership team of a Vancouver company that's planning to build a \$10-billion oilsands refinery on the West Coast.

The former politician, who has held high-profile cabinet posts in the federal and Alberta governments, has been hired as a special adviser at Pacific Future Energy Corp. and will sit on its board of directors.

He'll also head an arms length advisory council that's expected to be formed over the next few months.

"I've been very gratified that I've been involved in a number of projects since leaving politics, but this has to be right up there in terms of something that's exciting for me," Day said in an interview from Vancouver.

He said the proposed refinery, which

bills itself as the world's greenest, could be a "legacy project for Canada."

Project could mean 'high-tech, long term' jobs: Day

Oilsands producers have been keen to access lucrative Asian markets, but stiff opposition to proposals such as Enbridge Inc.'s (TSX:ENB) Northern Gateway pipeline has put a damper on those ambitions.

One of the biggest environmental concerns has been the prospect

of bitumen-laden tankers navigating coastal waters.

The Pacific Future proposal — along with others being floated by B.C. newspaper magnate David Black and aboriginal businessman Calvin Helin — would mean refined products, rather than heavy oil, would be shipped on tankers to Asia, making a potential spill less damaging.

Day's political experience spans the two provinces with the most at stake when it comes

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to West Coast energy exports. After his time in Alberta's Progressive Conservative government, Day was the MP for the British Columbia riding of Okanagan-Coquihalla, first for the now-defunct Canadian Alliance and then for the Conservatives.

He also has insight into the thinking of potential buyers of Canadian resources on the other side of the Pacific, having served as the federal trade minister and minister for the Asia-Pacific gateway.

The Pacific Future proposal would mean "high-tech, long-term jobs" for Canada, said Day, who left government in 2011.

"We're talking about refining product here rather than shipping what really is raw product to other countries and seeing the jobs produced there."

The environmental aspect is also key, said Day.

"I've talked with enough people all over British Columbia to realize that this is a genuine concern and a real impediment in the minds of many people."

Day said he's confident there will be interest in the project from both sides of the Pacific.

"What I've seen over the last few years in Asia... they've got a sincere desire to deal with their own environmental issues and even for them, there are some political advantages for them to be seen as receiving refined product," he said.

And there's interest from Alberta, too, he added.

"I can honestly say I've never ceased talking with people from Alberta — investors and CEOs — since the days I was in Alberta about the challenges of a unique product, but a product that in my view needs to be refined and needs to be refined here," he said.

"Of course, you have to make the economic case as well as the environmental case and this project does that."

First Nations engagement a priority

Day said he hasn't talked to his former colleagues in Ottawa about Pacific Future, but "I have to think this would

align with many of the aspirations of the federal government vis-a-vis Canadian trade and Canadian jobs."

The Pacific Future leadership team includes venture capitalists and former provincial and federal government advisers.

Its executive chairman, Samer Salameh, has experience financing and building telecommunications infrastructure for Mexican conglomerate Grupo Salinas.

Pacific Future has also made First Nations engagement a priority.

One of Salameh's first hires for the management team was Jeffrey Copenace, who was deputy chief of staff to former Assembly of First Nations chief Shawn Atleo and has worked with the Ontario and federal government on aboriginal issues.

Pacific Future says the refinery will be built in 200,000-barrel-per-day modules, with the ability to expand to a total of one million barrels per day.

It aims to pick a location later this year for the plant and begin the regulatory process next year.

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