



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARTISANS AT WORK: ÉCONOMUSÉE MODEL HELPS TOURISTS EXPERIENCE THE BEST OF BC

COURTENAY – The Island Coastal Economic Trust is investing \$75,000 into the second-phase of the *Économusée: BC Artisans at Work* project, led by the Société de développement économique de la C.-B. (SDE).

With some of the world’s most-stunning landscapes and vistas, the Vancouver Island and Sunshine Coast area is a magnet for tourists. But the tourists of today are not simply looking for photo opportunities and passive entertainment; they’re seeking interactive experiences, and immersion in the culture and environment of their holiday locations.

The Économusée Network model has been successfully implemented in Europe, Quebec and Eastern Canada. The network helps small artisanal businesses transform their workshops into an interactive experience by supporting them with site development, interpretation of their craft as well as by providing marketing and outreach support.

“ICET supported phase one of the Économusée project with funding for the development of two pilot locations in Nanaimo and the Cowichan Valley,” said SDE Executive Director, Donald Cyr. “The success of those pilots at Merridale Ciderworks and Hazelwood Herb Farm demonstrated that this model has benefits to the small business owners, as well as the broader regional and provincial tourism economy, through increased visitor attraction, tourism spending and the resulting economic activity that comes with it.”

The Government of BC has actively pursued bringing the Économusée model to B.C. and has provided funding in partnership with the Inter-Governmental Relations Francophone Affairs Program.

“The business model has proven successful in other jurisdictions and in our pilot projects,” said Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism Naomi Yamamoto. “By engaging visitors with stories of how artisanal wares like pottery, glassware or herbs are produced and having them interact with the artisans in an exhibit setting, they’re often motivated to buy the products. Visiting the exhibit creates a memorable experience for them while supporting entrepreneurs in B.C.”

Phase two of the Économusée project will see the addition of seven new sites throughout the region, creating the critical mass necessary for a self-sustaining network.

“As an additional tourism amenity, sites like these are great assets for smaller communities, encourage longer stays, more local spending, and deeper connection to a region which helps encourage return visits,” said Nicole Vaugeois, Regional Innovation Chair in Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development at Vancouver Island University. “The experiences tourists have at these craft and artisanal companies help build the ‘brand’ of Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast around the world.”

An impact study of the 2 pilot projects conducted by Vancouver Island University indicates that the overall economic impact in 2012 of both new project sites was \$2.6 million.

“Our focus is on strengthening the economy of the region, and business growth and additional jobs are always welcome,” said ICET Chair Mayor Phil Kent. “We also know that with such a strong tourism economy, continuing to add new assets - and reinventing the perceptions of small communities in our region - helps bring new visitors to the Island and Sunshine Coast.”

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

The Island Coastal Economic Trust is a \$50 million endowment established in 2006 by the Government of British Columbia to help diversify the economies of central and northern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast.

ICET is guided by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials and MLAs and five appointees. This exceptional team of leaders collaborates to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community-centred decision-making process, ICET has approved \$47.6 million for over 125 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects on the Island and Sunshine Coast since implementing its grant programs in 2007. ICET investments have leveraged more than \$268 million in incremental funding into the region.

A full overview of ICET can be found at www.islandcoastaltrust.ca.

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For further information:

Line Robert, CEO
Island Coastal Economic Trust
Tel. 250-871-7797, ext. 227
line.robert@islandcoastaltrust.ca

Mayor Phil Kent, ICET Chair
City of Duncan
Tel. 250-709-0186
mayor@duncan.ca

Donald Cyr, Executive Director
Société de développement économique de la Colombie-Britannique (SDE)
Tel. 604-732-3534
dcyr@sdecb.com