



Star photo by VINCE FEDOROFF

TALKING BUSINESS – Northwestel Inc.'s Stan Thompson, Yukon Energy's Andrew Hall, Erik Hougen of the Hougen Group of Companies and Northern Vision Development's Rich Thompson (left to right) were part of one of several panel discussions during the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce's Business Connect conference over the last two days.

'We don't want it to end now': chamber on event

By **STEPHANIE WADDELL**
Star Reporter

Rick Karp, the president of the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, is deeming the Whitehorse Business Connect two-day conference as a success, even if it's left him with a lot of work to do.

"We don't want it to end now," he said in an interview this morning.

The event wrapped up Thursday afternoon at the Coast High Country Inn, following two days of presentations, three major speeches and a trade show featuring 34 booths.

Karp noted he has already received a few calls from some businesses looking for follow-up on discussions about human resources and other topics that were explored.

He estimated over the course of the two days, hundreds of people made their way through the doors as part of the 140 registered delegates to take in the entire conference, or just come for one of the three

keynote addresses.

Those talks featured Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi, Whitehorse Mayor Dan Curtis as well as city staffers and Premier Darrell Pasloski.

Many other people visited part of the trade show.

"There was always a hum," Karp said.

Having the trade show and conference presentations — ranging from business security to accounting to tax filing — inside the convention centre meant many people would stay during the breaks taking in the trade show before heading back to the presentations.

While much was discussed during the conference, Karp noted the major message that rang "loud and clear" is the need to not only encourage residents to "buy local," but also explain why it's important to shop locally.

As both Karp explained this morning and a panel noted at the conference Thursday, dollars end up being

recirculated within the community by shopping in Whitehorse rather than online.

It is local business that not only sponsors the sports teams in town, but also provide jobs to local residents.

As Erik Hougen, of the Hougen Group of Companies, said during the panel, it's amazing how easy it is to hit "purchase" on an Internet shopping site — and it's also amazing how devastating that can be to a local business.

He noted what he'd like to see is local shoppers give local businesses the opportunity to be competitive.

While Hougen doesn't expect anyone to pay more for a product just because his company is based here, he would like to see shoppers compare prices and, where they are comparable, shop local.

As he noted, shopping online means the money completely exits the territory, rather than going to local wages that get spent in the territory or to support local teams and

so on.

Hougen also said he would have rather seen the city spend its capital dollars allocated for its building consolidation project (\$55 million over three years) on other initiatives for the community.

It could have done so, he believes, by having the private sector build the new structures it needs, then have a long-term lease with the private sector.

"There are other ways of doing it," Hougen said of funding the building consolidation project.

He noted the territory needs good sustainable mining, tourism and support for small businesses.

Northern Vision Development CEO Rich Thompson also said enterprises need to have a long-term view in business growth.

Noting the recent economic downturn, he said there will be good and bad years. It's important to use the current downturn to prepare for the economy to turn around.

He said he has no doubt the Yukon will be the place to be for the next 50 years.

Thompson went on to note the need for "educated dialogue" from all sides to help inform government decisions and get the best outcomes.

He also noted the need for respectful government-to-government dialogues, citing the benefits of the long-term view taken by First Nations.

Thursday's panel also featured officials with Northwestel Inc. and Yukon Energy setting out their plans over the next five to 10 years to improve telecommunications and expand energy infrastructure.

It was one of several panel discussions held over the course of the two-day conference.

Given the success, Karp said he expects the chamber will plan another similar event down the road.

He noted though that the conference would not have happened without the help of several sponsors.

See related stories below, p. 6.

Premier delivers upbeat address to business delegates

By **STEPHANIE WADDELL**
Star Reporter

It's not the government's role to "be the economy," but rather to make investments that help the private sector grow, Premier Darrell Pasloski told the business community during a lun-

cheon Thursday.

Pasloski spoke during the lunch at the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce Business Connect two-day conference.

Throughout his speech, he stressed the commonly heard government tagline of the territory being the best place "to play, work and raise

a family."

He also noted that at the highest level, the Yukon government's vision for the future is simple: for the territory to prosper and be a net contributor to the country.

Pasloski said his government believes this can best be achieved by "unleashing the power" of the private sector.

While there has been a recent downturn in the economy, Pasloski took a more long-term view.

"We are in far better shape than we were a decade ago," he said.

He noted First Nations have emerged as key players and will continue having a major role in the economy of the territory.

By 2025, he said, he anticipates First Nations' role in resource extraction will become even more pivotal.

The vision he has for First Nations, he said, is one he has for all Yukoners. "I believe we share that vision for the business community," he said.

While Pasloski highlighted initiatives underway to address municipal infrastructure, improve economic development and work with Alaska on

telecommunication and energy initiatives, he focused largely on mining.

"Mining is the cornerstone of our economy," he said. It's resource extraction that helps contribute to retail and other businesses in town, he pointed out.

The premier stated his belief there will be more clarity and a streamlining of regulations in the near future.

The Yukon will continue to have a strong presence at major mining events in its efforts to strengthen investor confidence.

Pasloski went on to say the tourism, as well as the arts and culture sectors, will only continue to grow.

He pointed to Tourism and Culture Minister Elaine Taylor's and a Yukon delegation's recent journey to Japan to expand ties with Japanese tour operators.

At the same time, the territory's new marketing program, Yukon Now, is focused on the domestic market, while efforts at the local level continue with a number of groups which work to bring annual events to the territory as well as First Nation tourism officials.

"We see investments at strategic levels as key," he said.

Pasloski made it clear the government does not want to interfere with private sector competition in its efforts to improve the economy.

The government is also committed to the technology sector.

A healthy economy is only possible with a skilled labour force, Pasloski said.

He praised the Yukon Research Centre as a top research facility in the North and noted the transition Yukon College is making toward university status with a number of degree programs available.

"Imagine the potential," he said. By 2025, Pasloski said, the Yukon will be better connected to the world.

Improvements to the territory's hydro infrastructure will literally "power the Yukon's future."

He summed up his presentation by once again stating the territory to be the best place to live, work, play and raise a family.

He also stated he envisions a future where the territory is self-sufficient, modern and innovative.

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