

Haircut leads to 2010 opportunity for Haida

Haida Gwaii House, located near BC Place, will promote tourism in the region during the Olympics

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Misty Isles Economic Development Society executive director Travis Glasman, posing inside the Haida Gwaii House showcase room, hopes his region can capitalize on the Olympics by encouraging visitors to experience Haida Gwaii.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, PNG, Vancouver Sun

A hair appointment at a Beatty Street salon eight months ago led to the creation of Haida Gwaii House.

The storefront location near BC Place will promote Haida Gwaii tourism to an estimated 50,000 pedestrians expected to traipse through the area daily during the Olympics.

Misty Isles Economic Development Society executive director Travis Glasman said he knew a long time ago his

region could capitalize on the Games, but his organization couldn't find the right location. Enter the haircut.

Skidegate Band Council member Rose Russ had her hair done at the salon last year and asked the owner what he was going to do during the Olympics. When he said he was leaving town, she pounced on the opportunity to lease the 300-square-foot space for the month of February.

The \$267,000 venture -- funded in part with \$100,000 from Coast Sustainability Trust and Gwaii Trust Society and \$130,000 worth of in-kind support from various suppliers -- will encourage visitors to experience Haida Gwaii any time of year.

Glasman stressed that off-season travel activities include a wide variety of things such as kayak surfing, storm watching and steelhead fishing.

"The selling point is Haida Gwaii. It speaks for itself," he said. "It's just a matter of getting the word out there and letting people know what opportunities exist."

Olympic visitors who walk into Haida Gwaii House will see Haida art, two 40-inch video screens flashing spectacular images of the region and a 60-inch TV showing a video of the tourism options in Haida Gwaii.

About 20 volunteers will work at the venue during the Games and some, dressed in traditional Haida regalia, will position themselves at strategic locations in the downtown core. They're not allowed to distribute promotional material but they can engage in conversations about Haida Gwaii with interested passersby.

Glasman said the venue has entered into cross-promotion agreements with other venues -- including the Bill Reid Gallery and Douglas Reynolds Gallery -- so information about Haida Gwaii will be distributed elsewhere in the city.

He said tourism to Haida Gwaii has been hit hard by the economic downturn and the drop in international visitation has caused many operators to put more emphasis on the B.C. market.

"But the U.S. and Europe are still very important markets and we want to attract more Asian travellers as well," Glasman said. "We've had Chinese film crews visit us recently."

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