

Sudbury can learn tourism lessons from Yukon First Nation

Jan 11, 2016 2:31 PM by: Ella Myers - Northern Ontario Business



Justin Ferbey shared lessons from Yukon's tourism industry in Sudbury recently. Photo by Ella Myers.

The entrepreneurial spirit of Carcross, Yukon should not be underestimated. It was the community's Tlingit people who first struck the gold that sparked the Klondike Gold Rush, after all.

Justin Ferbey is the great-nephew of one of the discoverers, and joined Sudburians on Jan. 7 to share lessons his community has learned about economic development since that 1896 discovery.

Ferbey described how Carcross developed a strategy to tackle the cycle of dependency they faced. Their goal, he said, was “to build a private sector economy in Carcross that [would] create a sustainable flow of job and business opportunities for the community, our citizens and the region.”

From a picturesque, lakeside town, 45 minutes south of Whitehorse that saw tourists briefly as they passed through, Carcross became a leading destination for mountain biking, and reinvigorated the local economy.

As CEO of the community's economic development corporation, Ferbey led the focused plan that capitalised on the inherent tourist attraction of four mountains surrounding the community. The community built biking trails, along with space and opportunity for local retail businesses to service

tourists, and a hotel to house visitors.

The strategy resulted in jobs for youth who built the trails, training for adults who were underemployed to build structures for a central commons area that now houses the retail sector, and opportunities for local artisans to sell their work to tourists.

“Of course we wanted profit, of course we wanted to put that profit back in the community, but really we wanted to set our people up for success,” said Ferbey.

Ferbey was named the Innovator of the Year by the Yukon’s Tourism Industry Association in 2013 for his work.

Laurentian University, the Northern Policy Institute and the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation (GSDC) hosted the public lecture in the evening after a private lunch with members of Sudbury’s tourism industry and First Nations leaders. Attendees said there are lessons to be learned from Carcross.

“It’s especially timely because tourism is an important part of our new economic development strategic plan,” said Meredith Armstrong, the GSDC tourism manager. “This is a great opportunity for us to explore potential partnership with an important part of our culture.”

“What I’m hoping to see is a more productive relationship between Sudbury, its university and our smaller communities and the First Nations communities,” said David Robinson, director of the university’s Institute for Northern Ontario Research and Development.

But, Ferbey emphasized, projects like Carcross’ take time, and effort by the community.

“In all the little developments, every single time, the persistent lessons is, nothing was easy.”

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**Bonnie O'Connor** · Kelowna, British Columbia

What I 'm reading is really not the whole truth . For the record, there was no hotel built by Ferbey and his team nor were the retail spaces built for locals . There is not one first nation person from the community working in the new buildings just people from elsewhere that moved into town. This whole project has also really divided the town up, for/against. Lastly I see there was no mention of all the funding given by the federal and Yukon governments.

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**John Freedman**

Mrs. O'Connor,

It it true at the time some people in Carcross were against our efforts to build economic ventures in our town site. In fact Up Here Business magazine as well as a few other magazines and newspapers (Globe and Mail, Yukon News...etc) wrote articles about our efforts to change our economic circumstances. As a local business owner in Carcross on August 14th 2013 you also emailed me explaining your position on the competition posed by new entrepreneurs in Carcross. Although I have move on from my previous Carcross position my heritage will always lead me back to my traditional territory. However, if you felt I should have done more and contributed further to my community than I did in the decade I worked there I'm happy to learn from my shortcomings. Please email me. Thank you.

Justin

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