

# MONEY



## Troubled Skeena

Efforts to restart the former Skeena pulp mill have stalled now that its feeder Terrace sawmill has suspended operations **PAGE A35**

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# City growing 'on eight cylinders'

**RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION:** June permits worth \$433 million, just short of record

BY JIM JAMIESON  
BUSINESS REPORTER

Led by Vancouver, B.C.'s residential builders continued to post strong gains in the value of construction permits last month, Statistics Canada said yesterday.

The Vancouver area recorded a seasonally adjusted increase of 27 per cent in residential permits to \$433 million in June, the second-highest local level on record, StatsCan said.

Year to date in the Vancouver area, spending on residential and non-residential permits rose 11.5 per cent to \$3 billion.

The value of residential permits across B.C. climbed 8.7 per cent in June to \$641.1 million.

Avtar Johl, whose Platinum Group builds condominiums in Surrey and Langley, said the pace of the industry continues to be red hot.

"Everything is going on eight cylinders right now," Johl said. "Demand is very strong and we're seeing a lot of people moving from other provinces and other countries. That seems to be buoying the market."

But Johl said he wonders how rising prices will affect the market.

"One thing that does concern me is the affordability index compared to the rest of Canada," he said. "But that goes back to the lifestyle here."

Johl said there are also issues regarding the increased development charges from municipalities that are passed along to buyers.

Overall, B.C. recorded \$922.5 million in building permits for June.

That's down 4.9 per cent from May but up 13 per cent at \$5.48 billion so far in 2006.

On the non-residential side, the Vancouver area slid 0.4 per cent in June to \$172 million.

Keith Sashaw, president of the Vancouver Regional Construction Association, said there



Avtar Johl (left) of Platinum Group and construction manager Pat Burke stand outside Nature's Landing in Langley. JASON PAYNE — THE PROVINCE

is a lot of volatility month to month in the non-residential sector figures.

"If you get a \$300-million hospital coming on stream that's obviously going to skew the month-to-month figures," he said. "When you take a look at the Lower Mainland southwest region, we're at a 10.2 per cent increase in year-to-date figures."

"We're expecting the trend to continue. B.C. Hydro just announced \$3-billion worth of

power projects and more of the Olympic projects will be coming on stream in the next few months."

Peter Simpson, CEO of the Greater Vancouver Home Builders Association, said a big concern is administrative bottlenecks at municipal permitting departments due to high volumes of applications.

"When our builders apply for a permit and are told it will be ready and it's not, they run

the risk of losing their trades," he said. "There is some strain there, but I think [the municipalities] are adjusting."

Nationally, for residential and non-residential permits combined, towns and cities issued builders \$5.3-billion worth of permits in June, down 1.4 per cent from May.

The national value of residential building permits fell by 1.3 per cent in June.

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## BlackBerry owners will be able to watch TV news, sports on e-mail device

As if "CrackBerrys" weren't already addictive enough.

Now BlackBerry owners will be able to watch TV on the handheld e-mail device.

CanWest MediaWorks and Rogers Wireless announced yesterday the

launch of the first media player to deliver content for Research In Motion's BlackBerry.

The service, known as bbTV, will offer Rogers Wireless customers access to near-TV quality synchronized audio and video files of Can-

West MediaWorks content, including reports from Global News, Global National and the *Financial Post*.

The service will also provide daily sports information and commentary from Rogers Sportsnet, Canada's No. 1 regional sports service.

CanWest has partnered with Rogers Wireless to provide the bbTV media player free of charge to Rogers Wireless' BlackBerry customers through a new video rate plan for \$5 per month.

All content downloaded on bbTV

will begin and end with five-second ads, generating advertising sales for CanWest. General Motors, Royal Bank of Canada, Tylenol and Labatt have signed on as bbTV's first advertising partners.

— *CanWest News Service*