

Help sought for laid-off workers

As laid-off Tolko Industries workers demonstrated in front of the company's downtown Vernon corporate headquarters this week, the company is asking the federal government for help.

Regional manager Jim Baskerville said the government set aside \$400 million in May to assist millworkers laid off because the pine beetle had devastated the lumber industry. Six months later, there is no avenue for the laid-off workers from the Kelowna plywood plant to collect that money, he said.

"We have gone to the federal government on behalf of our employees," Baskerville said.

"Clearly this is a situation that would merit some funding." About 30 workers picketed the Tolko headquarters, demanding the severance they said the company owed them.

Chris Savoie, an 11-year veteran of the plywood plant, said he will have to start working in Alberta now that he has been laid off. He said the company owes him about \$15,000.

Baskerville said the union negotiated itself out of the severance agreement in favour of better wages and benefits. He said the company offered \$1.2 million, as a voluntary gesture to help the workers get back on their feet.

Okanagan-Shuswap MP Colin Mayes said he has talked to Natural Resources Minister Gary Lunn to get some help for the unemployed workers. Mayes said Tolko has asked the government to match the company's \$1.5-million offer to the workers.

Canadian Press

'Questioning authority'

From CI

and perhaps a difference in political philosophy in B.C.

"People who believe that the government should look after us, and that would be people who support the NDP, are going to feel very differently about giving than the people who feel it's their responsibility to make society what it is as individuals."

The major trend in giving all across the country, said Ricker, is matched in British Columbia by those who want to direct exactly where their money is going.

"This is the biggest change I've seen in the past 10 years in philanthropy," said Ricker. "And it's very much a baby boom phenomenon."

She added that in previous generations, people trusted institutions more and were happy to hand over their money to them.

"Baby boomers have grown up questioning authority, defying it and wanting to do things themselves and being very hands-on."

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Rooster logo upsets Quebec company

LAVAL, Que. — Quebec-based chicken restaurant chain Groupe St-Hubert Inc. has announced a legal action seeking to stop a numbered company doing business in the Vancouver area under the name Montreal BBQ from using a logo depicting the head of a rooster.

St-Hubert, which has 96 restaurants in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick, alleges infringement of its copyright and trademarks.

The company, in business since 1951, "insists on advising the population that it is in no way related to the business of 0753882 B.C. Ltd. nor to the Montreal BBQ restaurant located on Hastings Street in Vancouver."

Groupe St-Hubert, which characterizes itself as "the favourite restaurant chain of Quebecers," added Tuesday that it is not currently offering franchises in British Columbia.

Canadian Press

Developer to build 600 units on North Shore waterfront



MALCOLM PARRY
VANCOUVER SUN
TRADE TALK

BUSINESS LUNCH: Michael de Cotiis often has the \$19 curry in the Hastings-at-Thurlow Marriott Pinnacle hotel he developed. Today, he opts for the same-price halibut poached in olive oil. So does his 19-year sales-and-marketing agent, **Grace Kwok**, who would normally choose the \$14 soup-and-sandwich offering, which today is lentil-and-spinach with bratwurst on a hoagy.

Through driving rain, they can barely see across Burrard Inlet to a de Cotiis development the city of North Vancouver approved recently. That's the foot-of-Lonsdale Pier project, where Kwok will begin selling 600 residential units in March. Prices aren't finalized, but the 400 units of the across-the-street Premier development Kwok sold two years ago for \$450,000-\$555,000 would likely fetch \$200,000 more today.

The Pier site, moreover, is on the waterfront. When completed before 2010, the \$200-million, four-building project will incorporate a national museum complex and a 100-room hotel with a huge-for-the-North Shore 5,000-square-foot ballroom and other convention-related amenities.

An operator hasn't been named, but West Vancouver resident de Cotiis said Marriott "is very much in the top running."

Meanwhile, de Cotiis quietly bought the 440-room Renaissance (across Hastings Street from the Pinnacle) for \$30 million this summer. The deal committed him to a \$20-million refurbishment of its public and guest rooms.

By July, de Cotiis should be starting the first two 150-floor buildings of a \$150-million, 300-unit scheme on False Creek South, with two more to come. He recently completed a \$200-million, 800-unit, two-tower project on Toronto's Bay Street, and is beginning a 51-floor, 500-unit building nearby.

Kwok says she merely "consults" on de Cotiis's Toronto and San Diego projects. Still, she, husband **Stephen** and 38 employees have sold all of his high-rise schemes, totalling 4,000 units, since 1987. Her debut was a seven-floor concrete building in the West End, where 44 units fetched \$120,000 each.

A former CMHC director and Simon Fraser University governor, Kwok adapted Asia-style pre-selling here in 1984. That was during the cash famine of a market downturn that stripped many developers of the bank financing they'd relied on. By 1987, when de Cotiis signed on, an unprecedented two decades of optimism and appreciation were about to begin.

BRUCE LANGEREIS, the Delta Land Development president, is actually closing a hotel — a venerable one at that.

It's the 79-year-old Georgia Hotel at Georgia and Howe streets, where Langereis, 47, and five-month bride **Diana** will front a \$150-ticket wingding New Year's Eve, then padlock the joint. When it re-opens in 2010, \$300 million will have been spent, a 48-floor commercial-residential tower designed by **Jim Hancock** and **Hilda Heyvaerts** will stand alongside, and the hotel should have been so thoroughly renovated "it will be the one where royalty stays again," Langereis said.

By royalty, the Britannia secondary graduate and former waterfront heavy-duty mechanic meant the entertainers who long stayed there. Big-business guests, too, such as members of the Singapore-based Hii family that edged



Delta Group president Bruce Langereis and wife Diana will host the Hotel Georgia's New Year's Eve party, then close for a \$275-million redevelopment.



Michael de Cotiis bought and will refinish the Renaissance Hotel for \$50 million.



Grace Kwok's Anson Realty firm has handled Michael de Cotiis's developments since 1987.



Siblings Mark and Inessa Tsemek produce 125 Russian-themed baked goods.

locals **Rob Macdonald** and **Peter Wall** to pay \$62.8 million for the Georgia recently.

The Hiiis knew what they were getting, having sold the building to **Caleb Chan** in a barrage of 1980s ownership changes precipitated by **Nelson Skalbania** and often involving then Macaulay Nicolls Maitland whiz realtor **Andrea Eng**.

Langereis is an old MNM (now Colliers International) hand himself. After quitting his big-wrench activities to take the B.C. Institute of Technology's marketing-management course, he joined the realty firm — aiding Eng, **Avtar Bains** and the like — and eventually sold the old Oakridge police-station site to Delta Group chair and Delta Overseas Investments Pte. Ltd.



Tony Hii

managing director **Tony Hii Yik Nan**, aka Tony Hii.

When cousin **Yuguan Hii** returned to Singapore while developing the Conservatory project on the Oakridge site, Langereis said he protested: "You can't leave. You've got a \$60-million project going on."

He says that's when Tony Hii, who has since succeeded father **Yii Chiong Hii** as chair, said: "Why don't you join us?"

A former Canadian free-style ski champ and climber who routinely scrambles up the Squamish Chief's vertical main face, Langereis jumped to Delta's presidency in January 1997. He's since become a private pilot and "may" do some aerobatic flying, although not in the float-equipped Cessna 185 he plans to acquire.

Delta has offices in former 24 Hours of Le Mans racing driver **Mark Galvin's** building at 1199 West Hastings Street, and has developed the \$100-million-range Carina, Calisto and Cielo projects nearby. Recently, it acquired 1180 West Hastings Street, where, with

the Japan-based Okabe Group it will build a 220-room hotel to be occupied by Okabe-owned Coast Hotels. That would empty the chain's Denman Street property, which Delta and Okabe hope to rezone for conversion to condominiums, with appropriate public-amenity benefits.

In the blue-sky realm, Langereis said Delta owns the only freehold parcel — 215 hectares — in the Soo Valley east and north of Whistler, and hopes to develop a 2,500-home townsite there. Market housing completed before the 2010 Winter Olympics would be offered to games organizers' use "for free," he said.

Name? "Bruceville," Langereis said. Laughing, he added: The first nations involved will tell me what it should be called. It's *their* traditional territory."

MARK TSEMEK, the Red Square bakery firm founder, was supposed to be a doctor when he was born in Novosibirsk, Siberia in 1960. But his coal miner father, **Simon**, and mother **Anna** moved him and nine-years-younger sister **Inessa** to Lithuania and, in 1979, to Vancouver.

Instead of medicine, he studied civil engineering at UBC and building technology at BCIT, and started building houses. Inessa did business management at BCIT.

Neither wanted to work for anyone else, so they raked up \$500,000 from family and the Community Savings credit union, bought an 8,000-square-foot South Burnaby warehouse that is likely worth \$2 million now, rented out half of it, mail-ordered a piroshki-making machine from Russia, and began making those baked stuffed rolls.

Very badly at first. But, getting the hang of it in three months, "I put on a suit, went to Costco and" — he claps his hands sharply — "the deal was done."

Other large and small outlets followed — 350 of them between here and Toronto. Inessa opened Red Square's Babushka's Kitchen satellite in a 180-square-foot booth on Granville Island, and for years sold up to \$1,000 worth of goods a day. Back at the plant, Tsemek says his sales pitch never changed: "You must convince buyers that their customers want something that hasn't been made, created, produced or whatever, and that, without you, their stores will never have it."

What those outlets get from Red Square today are 25 different cookies, 20 breads, 20 kinds of dumplings and a range of crackers, cabbage rolls, sausages and other products to a total of 125. Its eight employees produce 15,000 cookies, six days a week, at an average price of 80 cents. They account for 70 per cent of the firm's outfit.

Most contain flax, which Tsemek says is high in boon-to-the-body Omega 3 fatty acids, fibre and protein.

That wasn't the original plan. But when Anna had a stroke she would survive, her first words to her son

were: "Mark, I want you to lose weight." "I knew zero about the subject," Mark says. "But here was somebody whose life was hanging by a thread, who had given me life. So I learned."

Today, he's in his gym-equipped office at 2:30 a.m. After 60 minutes at level 12 on the Stairmaster, 30 minutes of weights and an hour in a TV-equipped sauna, he has the books updated and the day's orders corrected before the bakers arrive at 6:30. He says his weight fell from 240 to 183 pounds in seven months, that his cholesterol and triglyceride counts are very low, and that he's as energetic as the B.C. Lions players and cycle-racer **Gina Grain** who train on his Power Flax products.

He's also develop a cement-block-sized house-building product of polyurethane resin poured into boxes made of inedible flax stalks.

But those medical-school dreams have long faded. "The doctors come to me now," he said, "to buy my products and stay well."

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