

Destination: Richmond
Why there's more to Richmond these days than landing at the airport. p. B1

An artist's voyage p. 16

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REVIEW

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A gift for someone else

11-year-old decides to turn the tables on birthday surprise

by Matthew Hoekstra
Staff Reporter

I was supposed to be a backyard camp-out. Mom and dad kept an eye on the weather forecast for Richmond. It didn't look good. Christie Stewart's 11th birthday party would have to be moved indoors. With a little creative thinking, mom soon had a menagerie of gifts glancing their faces into sleepers, full sleepers. Christie's friends, helping her celebrate a young girl's milestone age of 11, swapped through chocolate pudding and froyo buds looking for a piece of gain. The first to blow a bubble with their backs filled with ice water and marbles. Whoever managed to pull

Christie Stewart decided to shake up the regular birthday routine when she turned 11.

the most marbles out with their feet in 60 seconds would win. That one was cold. Christie felt her feet tingle with members.

The gifts ranged from apples, avoiding gummy, and hand-tooled mystery puppets. A gift-giving deeper followed, of course, recess.

But Christie's 11 guests didn't give her the last-out Friday that offerings or even a DVD copy of Lindsay Lohan's *Queen Bees*. They brought cash.

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Matthew McHear Secondary is among some of the local high schools with a dropping enrollment.

Mark Pardo photo

Could high school closure come from projected drop of 1,100 students by 2016?

by Martin van den Hemel
Staff Reporter

It's been sitting local elementary schools for a number of years, and will strike high schools on a big way starting in 2009.

Fewer and fewer students are willing to attend elementary school downways these days, a number that's been steadily declining since 2002. Numbers are expected to dwindle to a decade-long low in just two years and that could prove to be a major headache for the Richmond School District.

The drop in enrollment has already forced the closure of a number of elementary schools in recent years.

What's being forecast for high schools come 2016 is similar, gloomy. Current projections show Richmond's high school population will drop by 1,100 students between 2009 and 2016. That's the equivalent of an entire high school shutting down.

But Linda McPhail, chair of the Richmond board of education, said that's been absolutely no discussion around closing a high school, "but how to deal with declining enrollment is an issue the school district is looking at."

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Destination: Richmond

Richmond used to be a gateway city, where visitors would land at the airport and then head off elsewhere. But now Richmond is becoming a destination—a place where people come to stay. The city is home to province's largest casino, is an Olympic venue city and has cuisine from all four corners of China in a few square miles.

Destination: Richmond

Richmond: From gateway to destination

by Kristine Thiessen

Contributor

Richmond is no longer a gateway city to bypass once the plane's wheels touch the tarmac. It has developed into a destination city, said Ted Townsend, the city's senior manager of communications.

"Richmond was really kind of a jumping off point to the rest of the region. As the community is growing and evolving, we're seeing Richmond become more of a destination unto itself."

This evolution happened over the past two years, and Tourism Richmond has taken notice. It's their job to put Richmond on the map at the regional, national and international levels with the goal of bringing in more tourism dollars to boost the local economy.

"There's definitely more product and better positioning of Richmond as a city to stay," said Gayle Morris, Tourism Richmond's director of sales.

A recent campaign marketed Asian dining opportunities in the city.

"I think we're pioneering that Asian dining experience, actually," said Morris.

As winter approaches, Tourism Richmond turns its attention to other indoor activities like shopping.

Marketing director Ange Chew pointed out the uniqueness of

Aberdeen Centre. There, she said, you can shop at a store where everything is under two dollars and then buy a Ferrari.

Shopping and eating in Richmond is not all Tourism Richmond has to market. There's Steveston village, whale watching, dike trails, the Richmond night market, River Rock Casino Resort, various temples and annual festivals.

"And then there's sports tourism," said executive director Tracy Lakeman, "from the (Hugh Boyd) turf to soon the Oval."

Tourism Richmond directors talk of products becoming "market ready" and "mature"—attractions ready to handle tourists and willing to adapt to feedback. For instance, the Britannia Heritage Shipyard is updating its displays; the London Heritage Farm decided to add Japanese tea to its British tea repertoire.

This maturing of attractions and hotels (the city will soon have 25 name brand hotels, Morris pointed out) has resulted in a greater awareness of Richmond in other cities, said Chew.

Tourism is up from last summer, said Lakeman, and back to its pre-9/11 levels. In July, Richmond's hotels were 75.5 per cent booked, an increase of 12.5 per cent from July 2006. Tourism Richmond's August 2005 Economic Impact Report estimated that about 3.2 million people visited Richmond that year (for leisure, business meetings or conventions), with more than half staying at a local hotel.



Aberdeen Centre, a place where you spend \$2—or a lot, lot more on a Ferrari.

Chung Chow photo

The increase in tourism is good for Richmond—overnight tourists spend \$210 million annually.

Lakeman said the jump in tourism is partly because the team is being more aggressive. Events like the popular Richmond Night Market were picked up by national, American, and overseas media, such as *The Globe and Mail*, *The Seattle Times* and BBC.

They are also working with city staff to re-brand Richmond. Chew said Richmond is a bit "ying and yang," with both urban and agricultural facets.

Within that image, "obviously the water plays a significant factor, and our cultures and our location," said Lakeman.

In addition to the re-branding challenge, Tourism Richmond and the city will soon work closer together on tourism strategy in general. The provin-



Steveston's village charm attracts many visitors.

Chung Chow photo

cial government gave the city \$181,000 for staff to develop its own community and sport tourism strategy, to be released in early 2008.

"Essentially we're looking at what are the best ways we can

market Richmond to tourists, and how we can work to really build on and complement the work Tourism Richmond is already doing," Townsend said.

And of course, the coming winter Olympics impacts both Tourism Richmond and the city's strategies with the anticipation of more tourists and facilities. For instance, in addition to hosting events at the Richmond Oval, Townsend expects the neighbourhood around the Oval to be developed into a place where you take the visiting in-laws to spend a day.

"This is our opportunity, with holding one of the key sporting events (speed skating), it's our time to shine," said Chew.

"We want to shine in our own right because we have the products and more to come. What Richmond is today isn't going to be in five, 10 years time."

"Richmond was really kind of a jumping off point to the rest of the region. As the community is growing and evolving, we're seeing Richmond become more of a destination unto itself."

— Ted Townsend