

APRIL 28, 2010 News : Report from the Legislature - Rural North Region

Community Spirit Program continues to build strong communities

In its second year, the Community Spirit Program will help 1,741 Alberta-based non-profit and charitable organizations by building on Albertans' private donations. Organizations across the province will put the extra dollars to work in the delivery of all types of community programs and services.

The Community Spirit Program donation grant received 1,812 applications in 2009, a 14-per-cent increase over 2008. Of these, 1,741 were approved and will share \$19 million. The remaining \$1 million of the 2009 budget was used for program operating costs, including an education and awareness campaign and community information sessions.

The program's goal is to help increase individual private donations to Alberta's non-profit and charitable organizations. Organizations apply for a proportional grant based on the value of individual donations received. The program is donor-driven, meaning it recognizes and encourages Albertans to make cash donations.

The approved 2009 applicants' donations will be leveraged by having the first \$10,000 of their eligible cash donations matched at a level of 90 per cent. Individual cash donations that bring the total from \$10,001 to \$25,000 are matched at a rate of 40 per cent; and donations that bring the total over \$25,000 are matched at a rate of 15.97 per cent. When an organization raises donations totalling \$88,000 (or more), it receives the maximum grant amount of \$25,000.

Approval letters have been sent to the successful applicants with cheques to follow in May. For more information on the program, including a list of 2009 grant recipients and grant amounts, visit

<http://www.communityspiritprogram.ca/>.

Alberta Cabinet ministers travel the province this spring to hear from Albertans

Members of Premier Ed Stelmach's Cabinet will visit communities across Alberta this spring to hear directly from Albertans.

"It's vitally important to get outside the Legislature walls, meet with people face-to-face in their communities, hear from them, and learn more about their issues," said Premier Stelmach. "It is also important to get additional feedback on my government's plan to prepare Alberta to lead Canada out of the global recession."

Groups of Cabinet ministers will travel to dozens of communities in all regions of the province over more than a dozen separate dates in April, May and June. They will be meeting with local elected officials and business and community groups.

"An important part of our job is listening to Albertans. We've made a commitment to communicate better and these Cabinet visits to communities across Alberta are one way we are fulfilling that promise," said Premier Stelmach.

Young Albertans gain valuable experience as Junior Forest Rangers

About 60 young Albertans will have a chance to learn and gain work experience in forestry-related disciplines through Alberta's Junior Forest Ranger and Aboriginal Junior Forest Ranger programs this year.

Program activities include tree planting and thinning, mountain pine beetle surveys and trail maintenance work.

This year's program is being run with funding allocated to Alberta by the Community Development Trust Fund, a federal program that supports resource communities, including those reliant on forestry.

About 80 per cent of the program is devoted to work experience and 20 per cent to education and skills development. Areas of training for Junior Forest Rangers include first aid, cultural awareness and safe chainsaw operation.

In addition to the other components of the Junior Forest Ranger Program, young people in the Aboriginal Junior Forest Ranger program explore cultural values and traditions and experience medicine harvesting and traditional tree harvesting.

Alberta youth aged 16 to 18 can apply online to participate in the program at <http://www.srd.alberta.ca/>.

Alberta renews commitment to Canada's largest Habitat for Humanity partnership

Sixty-eight hard-working Alberta families will soon achieve their dream of home ownership, as the Alberta government and Habitat for Humanity have joined forces once again to increase the supply of affordable housing across the province.

The province is investing \$6 million to help Habitat for Humanity build affordable housing in Calgary, Edmonton, Brooks, Camrose, Lethbridge, Olds, Red Deer, Lloydminster and the South Peace area.

The Habitat for Humanity program reduces barriers to home ownership and helps make affordable housing attainable for low- to moderate-income Albertans. All Habitat homes are built by volunteers. In order to qualify for the home, Habitat families must be able to carry a mortgage and contribute 500 hours of "sweat equity" while building the structure.

The Government of Alberta is the largest single contributor to Habitat for Humanity in Canada. Over the past two years, the province has contributed \$12 million to Habitat for Humanity, including this year's \$6 million investment. Provincial support was awarded following a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process designed to leverage government funding with private-sector and not-for-profit dollars. Habitat for Humanity is contributing \$12.5 million to the 68 houses, the majority of which will come from private donations.

In 2009/2010, the province provided \$90.3 million through the Affordable Housing RFP process for the development of 1,075 new affordable units in rural and urban Alberta. Budget 2010 includes \$234 million in capital grants for affordable housing and renewal of existing social housing.

Non-profit organizations, private businesses and municipalities are eligible to apply for funds through the RFP process, which accepts proposals in the spring. Proponents may receive up to 65 per cent of capital costs for their proposed development. For more information on affordable housing support, visit <http://www.housing.alberta.ca/>.