

Good News From the Yukon

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Historic Properties Assistance Program, the Yukon government increased its total funding by \$25,000 to \$100,000. The funds will help preserve important historic properties owned privately or by community-based organizations or First Nations. "These treasured resources are more than just personal property; they are a link to the past that all Yukoners and visitors can enjoy," said Tourism and Culture Minister Elaine Taylor.

According to Doug Olynyk, historic sites manager with the Yukon Ministry of Tourism and Culture, when a northern community has only 400 people like Carcross or 1,500 like Watson Lake, every new commercial enterprise or historic property rehabilitation project matters. "Buildings in the Yukon are at the core of their communities," he said.

Caribou Hotel, Carcross

Mr. Olynyk and his staff have been working with the new owners of the Carcross Caribou Hotel, who want to refurbish and update the building.

The owners received \$14,249 from the Yukon Historic Properties Assistance Program to help with the reconstruction of the foundation and basement of the hotel. They are working closely with the heritage office to keep the exterior authentic while redeveloping the hotel's interior.

The Yukon government's Heritage Character Statement for the Caribou Hotel indicates that the "imposing wood 'balloon frame' structure is one of only two historic three-storey frame buildings left in the Yukon," and is considered a significant landmark to the community of Carcross. It is also one of the longest continuously operating hotels in the territory.

"Our government wants to revitalize Carcross as a heritage tourist attraction. The historic White Pass and Yukon Route Railway is extending its passenger services from Skagway, Alaska, to Carcross next year. The railway carried more than 600,000 cruise ship passengers this year alone," said Mr. Olynyk.

The present-day hotel was constructed in 1910, offering accommodation and good food to hunting parties, travellers and tourists. The Caribou Hotel also played a role in housing the construction crews for the Alaska Highway.

According to local historian Murray Lundberg, William A. Anderson sold the original bar, hotel and store on the site to Dawson Charlie for \$9,000 in 1903. Dawson Charlie, one of the original discoverers of Klondike gold, remodelled the hotel and renamed it the Caribou Hotel. Although it burned down in 1909, it was rebuilt a year later. A succession of owners kept the hotel operating until 2004. The current owners plan to reopen it in 2007.

B.C. Yukon Air Hangar, Watson Lake

Threatened with demolition for salvage, the B.C. Yukon Air Hangar at Watson Lake—the last functioning hangar of the Northwest Staging Route in the Yukon and B.C.—may soon have a new life.

While it's currently used for airplane storage and repairs, the owner, René Dionne, hopes to sell the building to Glen Ernst, owner of CAP Aircraft Float Products, who is interested in using the structure to manufacture special airplane floats.

Previously, Mr. Dionne had turned down a \$1.6-million offer because it meant the hangar would be salvaged for its first-growth fir timbers. The timbers were destined for use as wood trim for the lower mainland B.C. housing industry. "We wanted to keep the hangar as it is," he said.

“It was probably built by the American army in 1943 for the Canadian Department of Defence for refuelling on the Northwest Staging Route that was part of the Allied Lend/Lease program,” said Barbara Hogan, historic sites registrar for the Yukon Ministry of Tourism and Culture, who wrote the Heritage Character Statement. “The hangar has been changed very little since that time.”

According to a Whitehorse Star Daily interview, Mr. Ernst chose Watson Lake because “the location, next to Alaska, north of British Columbia, on the Alaska Highway with shipping ports at Skagway for the Asian and Australian markets, is beyond ideal.” Furthermore, “Watson Lake has the infrastructure, the large hangar, paved runways, a lake with a ramp, a ready-and-waiting labour force and the Alaska Highway,” explained Mr. Ernst.

Yukon Heritage Character Statements (www.yukonheritage.com/); Whitehorse Star Daily, Y.T., 10/23/06 (www.whitehorsestar.com/auth.php?r=42172).