

THE DAILY SPECIAL

Comox Valley knew how to go green

Preparing for the Olympics gave the Vancouver Island community a number of economic spinoffs

BY BRUCE CONSTANTINEAU
VANCOUVER SUN

John Watson doesn't pretend central Vancouver Island is the centre of the universe.

In fact, the executive director of the Comox Valley Economic Development calls the area "a small rural community on an island that very few people in the world even know about."

So why will more than 300 international Olympic athletes hone their snowboard, cross-country, freestyle ski and biathlon skills at Mount Washington Resort in the weeks immediately preceding the 2010 Games?

Watson attributes the substantial Olympic spinoff to years of hard work by Comox Valley boosters keen to attract as much attention as possible.

"It's obvious every community won't benefit equally, if at all, from the Games," he said. "We learned a lot depends on what you do in advance — it won't just come to you."

Comox Valley officials jumped on the Olympic bandwagon as soon as Vancouver won the bid in July 2003.

Mount Washington director of business operations Don Sharpe said the successful bid prompted area sporting enthusiasts to create the Vancouver Island Mountain Sports Society, which provides funding for potential Vancouver Island Olympians like snowboard cross specialist Carle Brenneman.

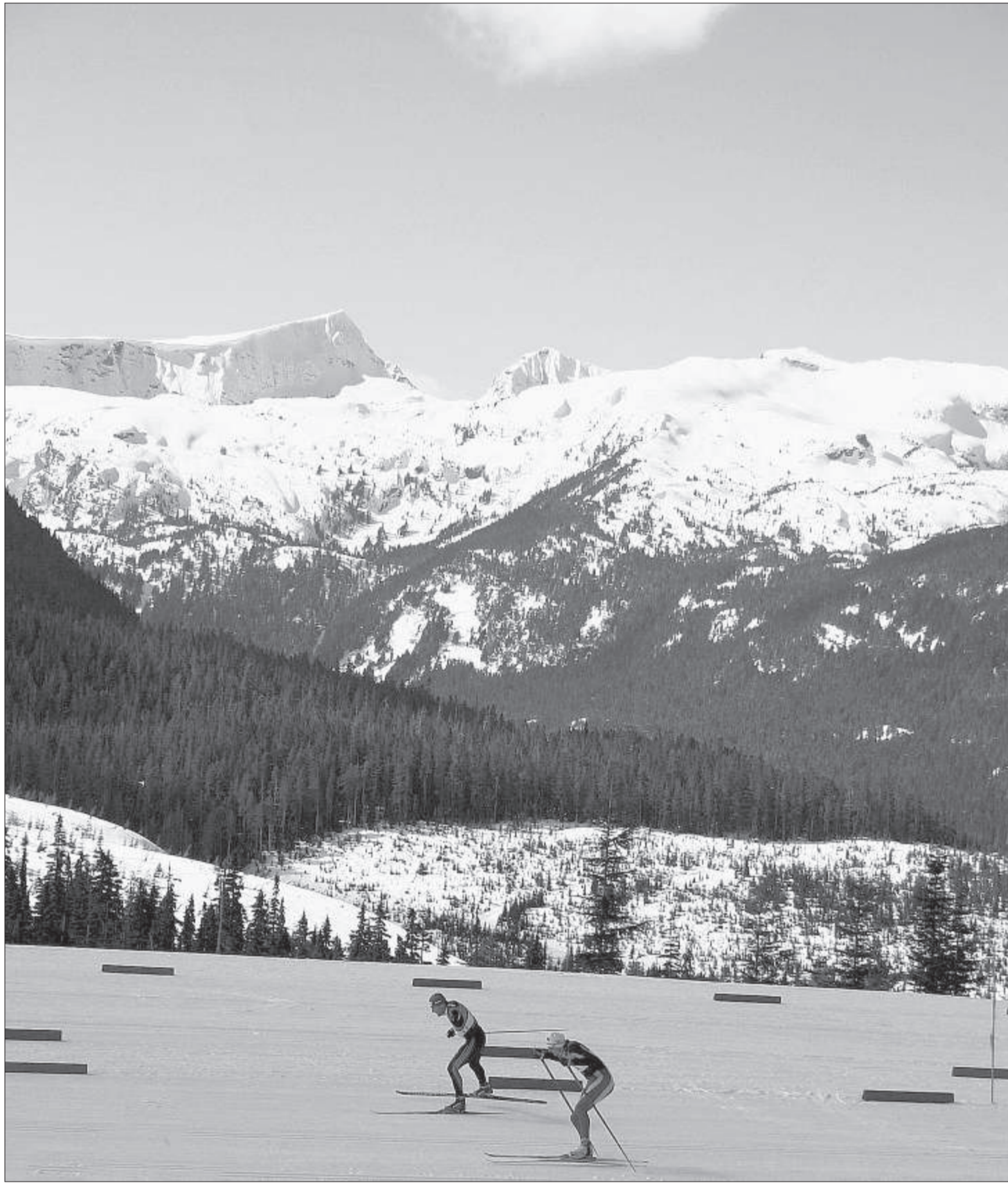
Mount Washington officials quickly decided to capitalize on the fact the mountain has very similar snow conditions to Whistler and would make an ideal training centre for Olympic teams.

That idea was promoted aggressively at several World Cup events in the past four years and by Comox Valley delegations at the Turin and Beijing Games.

"We started with guerrilla marketing at World Cup events — putting our brochures and flyers into the mailboxes of all the different countries," Sharpe said. "Then we refined our approach and had sport-specific people talk to the international coaches, who ultimately decide where the teams will train."

He said valuable connections were made with international sport federations and national Olympic committees at the Turin Games in 2006, but discussions died down so Comox Valley sent another delegation to the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing.

"We were still worried, but after the Beijing Games ended, all the teams realized they had to start looking at their 2010 preparations," Sharpe said. "All of a sudden the phones started ringing and the e-mails started coming in and voila, here we are."



More than 300 Olympic athletes will be honing their snowboard, cross-country, freestyle ski and biathlon skills at Mount Washington in the weeks leading up to the 2010 Games.

Beginning in late January, athletes and support staff from Canada, the U.S., France, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Russia, Australia and Switzerland will invade Mount Washington to get ready for the massive test facing them when they compete in Whistler.

The contingent will include five national biathlon teams, seven snowboard teams, four ski-cross squads, two freestyle ski teams, three cross-country teams and one nordic combined squad.

Sharpe said the teams like Mount Washington's facilities and the fact the mountain's elevation, snow type, average

snowfall and temperature are all very similar to Whistler's Callaghan Valley.

"Why wouldn't you train in similar conditions instead of going to the Interior where it can be -20 [degrees]?" he asked. "We're never -20."

Sharpe said Mount Washington clearly had to improve its facilities to attract world-class Olympic athletes; about \$1 million in improvements — funded by private and public donations — have been completed in recent years.

Those improvements include creation of a stadium area for cross-country skiing, new lighting, new World Cup-quality

trails and a kilometre of disabled-access boardwalk into Strathcona Provincial Park.

The VIMSS has also raised most of the funds needed for a \$2.2-million, 8,000-square-foot mountain sports centre on Mount Washington that will provide athlete accommodation, training facilities and coaching offices after the Olympics — possibly by late 2010. The federal government recently announced \$795,000 in funding for the project.

"All of that came about because of the Olympics," Sharpe said. "I don't think there would have been any impetus to do any of it without the excitement gen-

erated by 2010."

Mount Washington hosted International Paralympic Committee World Cup events in 2007 and 2009 and the resort expects to attract Paralympians before their Games in March 2010. Swedish cross-country and biathlon Paralympians are expected to train on the mountain next year.

Sharpe believes the resort is in line for a paralympics world championship event in the future because it "blew their socks off" when hosting the World Cup competitions. He said the resort will also consider going after World Cup events for able-bodied athletes, possibly a

Economics of the Olympics

First in a four-part series looking at the economic impact of the 2010 Winter Olympics on communities throughout British Columbia:

TODAY: Comox Valley
Aug. 14: Prince George
Aug. 21: Kamloops
Aug. 28: Kimberley

cross-country competition in 2012.

"It shows we have the confidence now to host these more complicated events," Sharpe said. "If you get them and do a great job, you'll continue to host them year after year and become a regular part of the circuit. The economic spinoffs would be huge."

Former Canadian Olympic swimmer Susan Kelsey, who chairs the Comox Valley Spirit of B.C. Community Committee, said Mount Washington will be a major Games beneficiary, but the entire region should also enjoy Olympic-related gains.

She said the Comox Valley will have a significant presence at the 2010 Commerce Centre in Vancouver before the Olympics, taking part in a special Vancouver Island day and other promotional activities.

"The whole world is coming to Vancouver and we'll be there promoting the Comox Valley," Kelsey said. "We want to attract people here before, during and after the Games."

Watson said there are no obvious examples of local companies winning major 2010 Olympic contracts, but notes a Comox Valley bottled water company — Natural Glacial Waters — is still reaping benefits from supplying water to Beijing's Olympic swimming venue in 2008.

"It's doubling its production now and working with other companies and farms in the area to export more products to Asia — like berries and shellfish," he said.

Comox Valley will host a lot of international media while Olympic teams train in the area before the Games. The widespread publicity already generated by attracting those teams has convinced local officials to take a stronger position in the annual London Ski Show — the biggest winter sports trade show in Europe.

"We probably wouldn't have even considered going there before, but now there's a tangible reason to be there," Watson said. "We can talk about the German team that's coming and what the Swedes are doing. That's a pretty significant story hook."

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GAMES PINS

First Deep Snow pins awarded to Olympic sleuths

Readers will receive recognition from The Vancouver Sun for sharing memories, news tips and confidential information

BY JEFF LEE
VANCOUVER SUN

An unexpected encounter with Canadian Olympian Kristi Richards, the early discovery of Air Canada's new 2010 Olympic jet and a sheaf of Olympic meeting minutes have all led to the first 2010 Deep Snow pins to be awarded to loyal readers.

On Thursday, *The Vancouver Sun* announced a participation program in which we will trade pins for readers' favourite Olympic memories, news tips and confidential information. A green circle for memories, blue square for tips and black diamond for true "Deep Throat" material.

Among the first in the Olympic memories department was this note from Meg Kettlitz of West Vancouver, whose family had gone to the 2006 Turin Games:

"We were attending the pairs figure skating competition when we saw someone wearing the 'red and white' athlete's uniform coming up our way. This

young woman and her family ended up sitting right behind us. How exciting to be sitting so close to a Canadian Olympian. Of course, we struck up a conversation with her and found out she was Kristi Richards, a moguls specialist. Kristi gave my daughter an autograph on her personalized card. My daughter (at the time five years old) was thrilled. Of course we never thought we would see Kristi again. But a few years ago, RBC hosted a meet and greet event which we attended. Kristi was there and she remembered meeting us in Torino. Kristi has been a great inspiration for my daughter and we are certainly going to be at Cypress cheering her on in Feb 2010."

A blue Deep Snow is going out to Shawn de Jong of Balgonie, Sask., who was the first to alert us to a photo of the new Air Canada Olympic-liveried jet a week before the Olympic sponsor was to unveil the aircraft.

And a black diamond Deep Snow is going out to someone



IAN SMITH/VANCOUVER SUN

Three pins have been launched by the Vancouver Sun celebrating the 2010 Olympics. The pins will come in three styles: Green circle for memories, blue square for tips and a black diamond for secret developments.

we won't identify who forwarded some minutes of meetings involving the Vancouver Organizing Committee, some governments and some businesses.

We're eager to hand out more pins, so keep the stories, tips and documents coming. E-mail us at deep-snow2010@gmail.com or mail

them to: Deep Snow Pins, The Vancouver Sun, #1 - 200 Granville St., Vancouver, B.C. V6C 3N3



READ JEFF LEE'S OLYMPIC BLOG AT WWW.VANCOUVERSUN.COM