

June 7, 2017

17-13

For Immediate Release

## **B.C. regions' visit to China opens up possibilities**

*Williams Lake, B.C.* – B.C. delegates recently returned from a China trade mission with new friendships and connections. Covering two major provinces and four cities, the delegation met with local government leaders, Chambers of Commerce, business representatives and school directors to build relationships and explore potential for collaboration.

“The success of our trip can be seen in all the new relationships we formed. We made good connections both on a political level and in the business world,” states CRD Chair Al Richmond. “We identified a lot of promising opportunities, including possibilities to increase cultural, educational and trade exchanges between the two countries.”

The delegates met with several high-level government officials including the Vice Governor of Guangdong Province, He Zhongyou; Shanwei City Mayor, Yang Xu Song; and Executive Vice Chairman of Shenzhen Municipal People's Congress, Luo Li; Suzhou Municipal Party Committee Secretary, Shi Xiang; Deputy Secretary of the Municipal Party Committee and Mayor of Suzhou, Yang Jun; City Hall Chairman, Liu Xiaoyun; Deputy Director of the Municipal People's Congress, Zhang Xu; and the Consulate General of Canada in Guangzhou, among others. These meetings led to meaningful discussions around the current economic development of the cities in China and cooperation opportunities in education, environmental protection technology, timber market, low-altitude aviation, and e-commerce.

Local businesses and associations welcomed the group to the region. The Guangzhou Tianhe Road Chamber of Commerce coordinated a dinner for the delegation in partnership with the Canada-China City & Town Friendship Association (CCCTFA). In Guangzhou, the BC Trade and Investment Office hosted a business luncheon for the delegation with businesses involved or interested in Sino-Canadian trade. They also organized a Wood and Construction Industry Roundtable and connected all the businesses with similar businesses in China. The delegation visited the site of Sino-Canadian-Korean Innovation and Technology and the Canadian business executives in the group had the opportunity to introduce their company's products and cooperation projects. The Jiangsu Chamber of Commerce in Anhui also organized a meeting with the delegates to explore potential business partnerships.

A significant event during the trip was the Canada-China Municipality Economic and Trade Cooperation Communication Summit hosted in Shenzhen on May 19 by the CCCTFA. More than 150 leaders and entrepreneurs from the area gathered with the Canadian delegation to discuss potential cooperation opportunities. During the event, the Sino-Canadian Joint Venture signed a Canadian Theme Town Development Plan. Nearly 40 domestic and foreign media covered the event.

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In Suzhou City, Anhui Province, the group met with school directors at a local university and several middle schools. The university directors are keen to look into educational exchange options with universities in B.C. and the delegation hopes to help facilitate those conversations.

Discussions with tourism leaders focused on possibilities for connections between the regions. The Chinese leaders expressed particular interest in exploring tourism opportunities in the rural areas of B.C. The B.C. delegates plan to connect local tourism associations and Chambers of Commerce with the groups in China to identify the potential for collaboration.

The delegation visited several major enterprises during the trip, including export businesses that have established relationships with Canada such as pet products manufacturers and timber processing enterprises. The group also visited a floor manufacturer, cabinet making company and produce processing plant.

The group received tours of several municipal development projects, including the Shanwei Center Business Circle and Shenzhen – Shanwei Special Development Zone. They visited the District hall of Baoan District, the Intelligent Baoan Control Command Center and the Hongxiang Garden.

To round out their cultural experience, the B.C. delegation also visited the Guangdong Tower and Guangdong Museum, courtesy of the Bureau of Foreign Affairs of Guangzhou Province. In the Anhui Province, accompanied by Suzhou Vice Mayor Wu Baojun, the delegation toured the Kistler Cultural Park, Zhong Kui Cultural Park, Lingbi Agricultural Expo and other local tourist attractions. They even tried Tai Chi, practiced calligraphy and watched a cultural performance.

“The power of these types of trade missions are their reciprocal nature, meaning delegations from China will come tour our region and visit our commercial operations and universities,” says CRD Chair Al Richmond. “These back and forth connections will strengthen the relationships we formed in China and lead to new opportunities that will benefit both of our countries.”

Possibilities are materializing already. A Chinese delegation will visit Port Moody from June 9-13 to identify investment opportunities in the city. Mayor Greg Moore also extended an invitation to Suzhou City Vice Mayor Ma Jie, who is in charge of education, to visit Port Coquitlam with a delegation and open a new chapter of friendship between the two cities.

After the official visit, a few delegates visited Luoyang City, Henan Province, where another interesting tourism opportunity presented itself through a visit to a renal dialysis hospital. The group met a medical researcher who wants to make travel between China and Canada easier for tourists who require regular dialysis treatments. Plans are underway to connect this researcher with medical professionals in B.C. to create a resource that identifies dialysis facilities in China and Canada for tourists.

The B.C. business representatives identified connections and networked throughout the trip as well.

“The trip was a great opportunity for Sitka Log Homes. We were really excited to be a part of it,” comments Brad Johnson, Owner and President of Sitka Log Homes based in 100 Mile House. “It definitely was a success business-wise for our company. We met and built many business relationships that will be ongoing. We are in discussions with them right now.”

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Johnson is optimistic about the future opportunities this trip will bring. “At Sitka, we ship our log homes around the world, but we have yet to ship to China. With all the meetings and successful relationships we formed on this trip, though, I believe we will be building homes in China in the future. The interest is there and it’s a large market place.”

On their last day in China, the delegates planted six Canadian red maple trees with the Mayor of Suzhou and city officers in the Suzhou City landscape park as a symbol of friendship between the two regions.

“Visiting Suzhou was a special opportunity, because we were the first Canadian local government delegation to ever visit the region,” explains Richmond. “We were invited to participate in a tree planting ceremony to commemorate our visit and all the B.C. local government officials were given honorary Suzhou citizenship. These are significant symbols in Chinese culture and we were honoured by such a warm reception.”

Led by Cariboo Regional District Chair Al Richmond, the trade mission delegation included District of Wells Mayor Robin Sharpe, City of Williams Lake Mayor Walt Cobb, District of 100 Mile House Mayor Mitch Campsall, City of Port Moody Mayor Mike Clay, City of Port Coquitlam Mayor and Metro Vancouver Regional District Chair Greg Moore and several municipal staff.

Local Cariboo business representatives were Brad Johnson from Sitka Log Homes, Ken Harper from Trinity Post and Panel and Tom Hoffman from Tolko. Executives from other B.C. businesses also attended, including Meridian RV, Sunwell Farm Technology, Bold Properties and Brew Street Craft and Kitchen.

Members of Vancouver-based Canada China City & Town Friendship Association (CCCTFA) accompanied the delegation to guide the trip and provide translation services. Mr. James Wu and his colleagues from the CCCTFA provided invaluable support through trip coordination, transportation and translation assistance. Further, they partnered with several local groups to host events for the delegation.

The Ministry of International Trade also provided advice and support in mission planning and coordination through their team in B.C. and in China. Their BC Trade and Investment Office in Guangzhou coordinated several receptions for the delegates and arranged business meetings for the Canadian executives.

To see photos from the trip, visit [facebook.com/CaribooRegion](https://facebook.com/CaribooRegion). For more information on Cariboo Regional District activities and initiatives, visit [cariboord.ca](http://cariboord.ca).