

Constructing 20 years of success

Custom builder celebrating a business milestone

By STEVE MACNAULL
The Daily Courier

Through two decades in the building business in Kelowna, Len Suchocki has seen it all. “Oh yes, during that time there’s been several boom-bust cycles and flurries of activity,” said Suchocki, president and founder of Chriscan Construction.

“Of course, during a boom everything’s great. But the down times are a challenge. That’s why planning is essential so you are prepared to ride out the poor times. That and diversification.

“Ten years ago we made the conscious decision to also get into commercial construction so we had more than just the custom home-building business.”

Suchocki is nostalgic about his business because this month marks the 20th anniversary of Chriscan.

“I named the business after our two daughters — Christel and Candice,” Suchocki recalled.

“They were little girls then. Now they are all grown up and Candice actually works in the business doing the marketing and communications. They’ll always get the credit as my inspiration to start the business.”

Twenty years in business also means Chriscan’s consistent attention to quality, innovation and meeting and

exceeding customer expectations has had a multiplier effect.

“Basically we’re in the referral business,” Suchocki said.

“People see homes and businesses we’ve built and want the same builder. Satisfied customers refer us to others.”

1992 was both a good and a bad time to start a home construction business in Kelowna. From 1988-92 the economy was on a tear and the city was growing by leaps and bounds — including lots of demand for high-end custom homes like Chriscan was building.

But soon after 1992, there was a slump and Chriscan would have to endure its first downturn.

“When you are a high-end custom home builder, a boom means you’re building three to five homes a year,” Suchocki said.

“In slower times, it means only one or two homes a year.” The Okanagan Mountain wildfire of 2003 also spurred some contradictory consequences.

While tragic for the loss of massive tracts of forest and 239 homes along Kelowna’s edge, it also solidified a lot of peoples’ desire to live in the city and build their dream homes.

“That fire caused an incredible amount of momentum,” said Suchocki.

“Everyone seemed to want a big custom home after that.” One of them was the multi-million dollar lakefront



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

Chriscan Construction is celebrating 20 years in business under the leadership of president and founder Len Suchocki, above. This lakeshore mansion that Chriscan built won home of the year at the 2005 Thompson Okanagan Housing Awards (Tommies).

mansion Chriscan built for a family in the Mission.

It would go on to win home of the year at the 2005 Thompson Okanagan Housing Awards (Tommies).

The diversification into commercial work included Mission Creek Plaza; offices for ReMax of Western Canada and CEI Architecture and renovations for radio stations Sun-FM, EZ-Rock, AM1150 and The Juice.

As well, there was a spate of specialty work, complete with all its hoses and wires, for numerous dental clinics — from Carrington, Simply Amazing Smiles and Aura to Kelowna Prosthodontics, Kelowna Orthodontic, Jubilee Dental and Mission Creek Orthodontics.

But, after 20 years, Suchocki doesn’t see retirement on the horizon yet.

“I see myself in the business for many years to come,” he said.

“And when it does come time to move on, I see key staff taking over.”



Photo contributed

Fall means getting back to business

The Westbank and District Chamber of Commerce is starting up its Business After Hours events for the fall. **Body Fit Fitness Centre** at 1044 - 2476 Westlake Rd. will play host on Sept. 13 from 5 to 7 p.m. Admission is \$5 for members and \$10 for future member. Please bring exact change.

On Sept. 14, the Westbank chamber is holding a membership drive and member appreciation BBQ from noon to 2 p.m. at their offices at 2372 Dobbin Rd. The **Boyd’s CarBQue** will be there with the board of directors manning the grill.

“We just want to give away burgers and show our appreciation to the Westside community,” said **Karen Beaubier**, chamber liaison officer. “We are donating \$100 through Boyd’s to the SPCA and any additional contributions are welcome.” You can call Beaubier for details at 250-768-3378.

Being bookish

Mosaic Books is the place to be the next few days.

Tonight, they are hosting the **Uptown After Hours BBQ** from 5 to 7 p.m. at their Rutland location in Willow Park mall. Wine is provided by **Spierhead Winery**, burgers and hotdogs by **Rutland Marketplace IGA**, water, tea and coffee by **Vital Waters** and **Starbucks** will be there too with beverage samples. All this for \$8.

On Sept. 8, Mosaic’s Rutland store is having its official opening.

Mosaic Books Kelowna location will play host to 12 authors on Sept. 8 from 1-4 p.m. The event is in conjunction with International Literacy Day and each of the authors is giving away one of their books to **Project Literacy Kelowna Society**.

Author and organizer Marilyn Strong of Strongbiz Communication, will be jopined: **Judy Berg, Laurie Carter, Jane Eamon, Leo Louis Jacques, Teresa May, Dr. Ralph Milton, Stan Sauerwein, Shawnha Sky, Judie Steeves, R.K. Takeda (Bobby T), and Leone Wilson Jones.**

You can meet the authors and get signed copies of their books.



Photo contributed

Change of season

There’s one thing for me that says summer is over and that is the **Business After Hours** put on by **Pushor Mitchell** every September. This one is held on Sept. 20 from 5 to 7 p.m. on the third floor at 1665 Ellis St.

There’ll be hors d’oeuvres, refreshments and an opportunity to network with the business community and catch up with everyone on how their summers went. Tickets are \$10 for members and \$20 for future members. Exact change is appreciated.

Change in the air

Be prepared for a few changes in downtown Kelowna as the revitalization of Bernard Avenue has begun. It is said the \$11-million investment will help rejuvenate downtown, enhance residents’ and visitors’ experiences, and replace aging utilities and roadway. Once it’s done, the street will have wider sidewalks, new street furniture, and more trees and plants.

Keeping track

Tracey Andrews just celebrated five years in business as **Paper Trails Bookkeeping**.

“The desire to be independent overrode the desire to work for someone else,” she said about being her own boss. “A big part of being an entrepreneur is being able to manage my own schedule around my life instead of the other way around.”

Andrews’ clients are small- to medium-sized businesses that are in a position where they can’t or don’t want to do their own books, but are not ready for a full-time bookkeeper.

“I pick up and deliver paperwork from their location. It is convenient for everyone that way. I get to work from home and they don’t have to give me office space.” Andrews using **Simply Accounting** software and provides weekly, monthly and quarterly services to her clients from West Kelowna to Lake Country.

“The last five years have been great. The diversity of my clients is amazing; from



DARCY
NYBO
Shop Talk

retail to legal to construction and I get to learn about their businesses.”

Andrews can be reached by emailing papertrails@shaw.ca or by calling 778-477-1970.

Learning by note

The **Wentworth Music Education Centre** in Kelowna, now in its eighth year of operation, has been in the news quite a bit lately, and they are back in it again, making music and performing.

Under the direction of **Noel Wentworth**, vice-president of education at Wentworth Music, and associate instructor, **Kerry Rottacker**, six students and parents from the WMEC in Kelowna took the trip of a lifetime to perform and tour Australia.

The student rock band called, **The Hits** — Wentworth Music’s Elite Student Band, consisting of **Katia Wells-Green, Riley Russell, Adam Pendleton, Riley Bentham, Chelsey Ivarson** and **Tyler Sarris**, performed shows, worked alongside local professional coaches and took in the sights.

“It truly was an amazing experience to see the country while playing music like this,” Wentworth said. “We have so many stories and made some great new friends as we continued to develop our international network.”

The students also sat in on a Sony Music showcase at the Sydney Hard Rock Cafe where they heard other acts shooting for their chance at a record deal.

Got news about your business? Send it to darcy@alwayswrite.ca. Darcy Nybo is an award-winning writer, freelance journalist, book and online editor.