Northern economy talks a draw

This week almost 100 MLAs, state legislators, diplomats and business leaders are gathering in Yellowknife for the winter meeting of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER). “I thought it was important to come to this meeting,” said Alaska state congressional representative Bob Herron, who is chair of PNWER’s Arctic Caucus. “Though I was surprised, it’s not that cold here.”

The non-profit group consists of members from 10 states, provinces and territories in Canada and the United States. “We may not share the same political views at all but...”

Please see Conference, page B5
Conference brings Northerners together

A&W BACK TO BUSINESS

Owner Todd Stewart stands in his newly renovated A&W restaurant on 50 Avenue. Stewart said he knew of the impending renovation for about a year. The company’s head office decided its latest rebrand would break away from the classic orange and brown motif to include other colours. All A&W restaurants across the country, he said, would undergo the same change.

Stewart said it took contractor Miramichi Builders eight days to finish the project which included new counters, paint, wall panels, cabinets and furniture. The shift followed the restaurant’s kitchen renovation which was completed last year. The owner did not disclose how much either cost except to describe it as “substantial.” Stewart has been the owner of the A&W Yellowknife location for the past six years and his business partner is Randy Caines.

“We can all benefit from each other and the messages and experiences each other has,” he added. Herron told Yellowknife it was important for him to attend not just because the group’s immediate past president is Ramsay but because the territory has similar challenges to Alaska related to resource development. Although the NWT has an unbelievable future with its diamond mines, it has a lot of resources that are stranded. (It’s) tough to find investors and to get those resources to market,” he said during a dinner held at the Museum Cafe on Monday.

Herron, who resides in Anchorage with its population of 300,950, explained it’s not that simple to leave even if they wanted to.” Herron said while Alaska’s population was 735,000 people, there were still parallels in terms of its workforce. In the region he resides in, the Yukon Kukokwim Delta, he told Yellowknife there are 33 villages, a population of 17,775 people and almost 90 per cent of them are Alaska Native. “I live in a community that’s about 9056,” he said, adding he’s spent his entire adult life there, and that his children and grandchildren are Alaska Native as well.

Herron said he understands the challenges that are going on in the Northwest Territories from both its economy and its workforce. “Alaska has been a boom-bust territory since 1867,” he said. “We do get a lot of people who come up from the lower 48.”

In Alaska, “southerners” are called “outsiders” but Herron said the focus now in his territory is to grow its own educated population, rather than continue to see a flow of temporary residents who only stay for one to five years.

“My kids have jobs, my grandkids are going to school there, I’ve bought and sold businesses, I have my snow machine, my boat, my cabin,” he said. “You can’t just... leave.”

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YELLOWKNIFER, Wednesday, November 18, 2015 85