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Brentwood makeover rolls along

Hotel ownership group continues careful expansion program

ANDREW A. DUFFY
Times Colonist

Six years after the Brentwood Bay Lodge and Spa opened its doors near the Brentwood Bay ferry terminal, the hotel has settled into a successful routine, but doesn't intend to rest on its laurels.

As the finishing touches are put on the hotel's high-end Ocean Villas development right beside the lodge, the ownership group behind Brentwood Bay is now turning its attention to the small commercial strip along Verdier Avenue leading to the ferry.

With an eye to adding amenities to the resort as well as increasing residential density and kicking off a revitalization of the village itself, Brentwood Bay will break ground in the fall on a six-townhome development geared to young families.

"We're really bullish on this area," said Lodge and Spa managing director Dan Behune.

"And I believe this seaside village is one of best kept secrets in all of Vancouver Island."

The plan is to redevelop what now serves as the lodge pub's parking lot — an empty lot across the street from the hotel that came with the original deal to develop the resort — into the Garden Villas.

"We think it's important to have the town redeveloped," said Behune, noting the villas could be just the start as some other buildings along the strip are likely nearing the end of their lives.

"This development means another 24 people living in the neighbourhood and it gets the ball rolling for the rest of the seaside village."

The 1,800-square-foot villas will offer two bedrooms plus den or office/studio, underground parking and ocean views for a price that is likely to hover around \$600,000 — construction costs have yet to be determined.



ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

The high-end Ocean Villas development beside Brentwood Bay Lodge and Spa is nearing completion.

Behune said that because the group is financing the project itself and is confident in both the project and the market, they will not do a pre-sale program — the same rules that applied to the luxury Ocean Villas' development.

Zoning is in place for the development, which will also include 2,500 square feet of commercial space to be split between a fitness studio on the ground floor and the hotel's administration and sales offices on the second floor.

Pub parking will remain much the same. A raised lot behind the development will offer 28 spaces.

Behune said they will be submitting development permits within the next two weeks, work on drawings over the summer and break ground in the fall with a completion date of spring 2011.

"Our vision was always to do a revitalization of the street and get it going," said Behune, who noted a move like this is made easier by being embraced by the local community and stabilized revenues and profits at the hotel.

"Now we want to increase the economy of scale in the community and get more people living around here and make the

place a world class residential destination."

Behune is hopeful the six-condo Ocean Villas development on the other side of the hotel is a step in that direction.

The units, which range in price from \$899,000 to \$1.4 million, are scheduled to be completed by the end of May.

The condos, which are also about 1,800 square feet, have been on the market for two weeks and one has already been snapped up by a couple from Calgary.

Behune admits they took a risk on the condos by self-financing and not entering into pre-sale agreements.

But again he said their belief in the area and the appeal of the oceanfront lifestyle convinced them it would work.

"We put our money where our mouths are," he said, noting they do have the safety net of being able to roll the units into the hotel's accommodation offerings as zoning permits owners to rent the units out daily, weekly or monthly.

"The landscape here is changing, that's why we are so bullish on the village; this could be a pretty cool residential area." aduffy@tc.canwest.com

Fish farms could heal themselves

UVic is part of a group studying new aquaculture techniques

RANDY SHORE
Canwest News Service

VANCOUVER — A new generation of fish farming technology could help restore damaged marine environments, according to a biologist working on a five-year nationwide aquaculture project.

Marine biologists in New Brunswick and here in B.C. are employing mussels, oysters, sea cucumbers, urchins and seaweed to dramatically increase the amount of food created by salmon farms, and they believe they can extract excess carbon and nitrogen pollution from the sea in the process.

Taking the aquaculture industry onto land could be a missed opportunity to do the Earth some good and help mitigate the impacts of global warming, according to Thierry Chopin, a marine biologist at the University of New Brunswick.

Nitrogen from agricultural sources contributes to oxygen depletion in the world's oceans, resulting in huge dead zones in which nothing can grow.

Fixing and storing carbon is believed to be key to fighting global warming.

"We have to think of extractive species as having a cleansing function in the ecosystem," Chopin explained. "Everybody is talking about carbon trading and carbon credits, but we could also have nutrient credits. If your extractive species [seaweeds and

shellfish] accumulate nitrogen or carbon, when you harvest them you remove that from the coastal system."

"Shellfish shells are made of calcium carbonate, so there is quite a lot of carbon right there," said Chopin, the scientific director of the Canadian Multi-trophic Aquaculture Network, a collaboration among 26 scientists at eight universities and six federal laboratories.

Five functioning farm sites employing species from different levels in the food chain are already running in the Bay of Fundy and one is operating on the northwest coast of Vancouver Island.

Chopin believes that what scientists call a multi-trophic system could even help control sea lice that infest farmed salmon and may spread to wild salmon stocks.

Mussels are effective water filters, collecting tiny organisms and even viruses.

In Chopin's lab, mussels proved effective at reducing the virus ISA, which causes infectious salmon anemia. Placed around salmon cages, mussels could form a sanitary barrier against ISA, he said.

"There is no reason to think that mussels could not also consume sea lice at an early stage in their life cycle," Chopin said.

He will test his theory in the next stages of the \$5-million project.



HANDOUT

Kelp and seaweed is used as a biofilter.

Moving the aquaculture industry onto land — the goal of some environmental organizations including the Suzuki Foundation — would merely shift the environmental problems rather than eliminate them, Chopin said.

Contained aquaculture produces considerable waste that must be stored, treated, dumped or trucked away to landfills, plus you have to pump water, which adds a significant energy overhead and expands the carbon footprint of the operation.

"You think you are addressing one problem, but you are creating another."

University of Victoria associate professor Steve Cross and Chopin use shellfish such as oysters, clams and mussels to create a seabed perimeter around salmon farm cages.

The shellfish comb the

water for free-floating small particles of fecal matter excreted by the fish. Bottom-feeding sea cucumbers and urchins are placed under the fin-fish cages to collect larger particles that fall to the sea floor, while rafts of kelp and other seaweeds placed around and downstream of the cages collect excess nitrogen released by the fish and shellfish in feces.

The goal is to create a fish farm that functions like a complete ecosystem and that converts the industry's highest cost — feed — into food products, not just salmon, but shellfish and edible seaweeds.

Cross is implementing a sustainable ecological aquaculture system of his own design on a commercial scale at his aquaculture firm Kyuquot SEAfoods.

He is raising sablefish in an integrated system with scallops, oysters, blue mus-

sels and cockles, sea cucumbers and two different types of urchin and two species of kelp.

"I'm licensed for 11 species, only one of which has to be fed," said Cross, who has worked as a consultant in aquaculture for more than 25 years.

Cross is UVic's team leader on the aquaculture project.

By extracting more value from the feed used in aquaculture and creating markets for the extra shellfish and seaweeds they grow, producers can keep the price of farmed salmon lower and mitigate the industry's impact on the environment, making it an attractive choice for consumers, said the project's economist, Duncan Knowler of Simon Fraser University.

Salmon extract about 65 per cent of the nutrients and energy from their feed.

In conventional aquaculture, the balance is waste.

"What is the point of having waste accumulate at the bottom of a tank or the sea when you can use it?" Chopin asked.

Multi-crop sustainable aquaculture has been practised in various forms for thousands of years, Knowler noted.

In India, rice fields that are flooded for part of the year are used to grow fin fish, shrimp and crabs, then drained to make way for rice crops, which use the naturally occurring waste as fertilizer.

Well-integrated complementary systems can be sustainable in the long term, he said.

Pension options go on the road

Canwest News Service

OTTAWA — Canadians are being asked to tell the federal government what they think of such proposals for fattening their retirement income as a mandatory enrichment of the Canada Pension Plan and a voluntary pension scheme to supplement the public system.

Finance Minister James Flaherty laid out those and other options yesterday as he announced details of the federal government's plans to consult the public over the next several weeks on whether and how to change policies affecting people's retirement income.

Flaherty said the challenges facing the complex retirement system don't lend themselves to "one-size fits all solutions" and a rush to judgment.

"There will be no back of the envelope quick changes to this," Flaherty told a news conference. "The first rule is to do no harm."

Canadians will have a chance to provide their opinions online or at town-hall meetings to be held in Charlottetown, Quebec and Richmond. Roundtables involving experts and invited parties will be held in St. John's, N.L., Winnipeg and London, Ont.

Opposition MPs slammed Flaherty's consultation process as a delaying tactic.

"For heavens sake, it's time for action, and this House of Commons should be taking action now," NDP Leader Jack Layton told reporters.

Flaherty and his provincial counterparts, several of whom have also launched public consultations, have said they want to narrow the options for reform during their next meeting in May.

Ontario financier found dead as investors fear money is gone

Canwest News Service

TORONTO — The same month Robert Mander, a self-styled investment guru, bought an elegant \$3-million mansion in Oakville with a floor-to-ceiling limestone fireplace in the living room and in-ground pool, he

finished work on an extravagant \$85,000 backyard play-castle for his young son at another of his homes, a rural enclave on the outskirts of Hamilton.

On Monday of last week, however, he was served notice of a lawsuit by a suspicious investor, suggesting his

financial investment empire was a massive fraud.

Two days later, while the matter was being heard in the Toronto court, an associate of Mander's informed the assembled lawyers that the financier was dead, killed by his own hand earlier that day.

Hamilton police confirm

they were called to Mander's rural estate and found a man, the victim of a sudden death that was ruled "not suspicious," said Sgt. Terri-Lynn Collings, although the identity of the man was not released.

While the death adds a layer of shock to the unfold-

ing calamity, it does nothing to solve the mystery of the tens of millions of dollars credulous investors heaped upon him over the last two years.

An independent receiver has been appointed to probe Mander's assets and report back to the court.