



**Central Okanagan Business Leaders Will “Walk to Talk” During Canada’s First Business Walks on October 4th**

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*What do Central Okanagan computer stores, law offices, restaurants, retailers and financial services have in common?* They represent the types of businesses that will be visited by business leaders in Central Okanagan communities during Canada’s first Business Walks on October 4<sup>th</sup> 2012. The program adds a new component to Small Business Month as representatives of organizations that serve the business community take the time to connect face to face with business operators in an informal, casual way and determine how conditions can be improved

The program is powered by the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (COEDC) and is a partnership between the COEDC, Westbank First Nation, local municipalities, Improvement Areas, Chambers of Commerce and the Economic Development Association of BC. Business walks have proven highly effective in strengthening local economies by retaining businesses in a community and creating an environment where they can grow.

The October 4 walks will take place in Peachland, West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, Kelowna and Lake Country. More than 70 volunteer business leaders “walkers” will call on 300 businesses and have brief conversations around three key questions: *“How is business,” “What do you like about doing business in your area?” and “How can business be improved?”* Companies with specific needs will be followed up and provided one-on-one assistance.

The information gathered during business walks can be used in a number of ways. For organizations such as the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission, business walks track the pulse of the business community and is one tool used to identify needed programs and services to the community. Civic leaders can better connect with businesses in their communities through the face-to-face conversation that is initiated, and identify and remove barriers to doing business in their areas. Member-driven organizations such as Business Improvement Associations and Chambers of Commerce can tailor their services to the expressed needs of the businesses they serve.

Corie Griffiths, Business Development Officer for the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission and Business Walks Project Manager, says, "Recognizing the economic impact small business have on the Central Okanagan economy, business retention and enhancement has been the mainstay of COEDC programming. This is an excellent way for service providers throughout the Region to come together to improve the services we provide to our local businesses and ensure a sustainable economic climate that promotes growth in the Region."

Dale Wheeldon, President and CEO for the Economic Development Association of BC, says, "COEDC's commitment to engaging with the business community in the region is to be commended and is considered as a best practice in Business Retention and Expansion efforts in BC. Using EDABC's BC BusinessCounts tool the Business Walks program, the first of its kind in BC, will further strengthen the knowledge that COEDC has on the business community. Once again COEDC is showing its strong leadership in economic development."

**For questions or more information please contact:**

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