

# Float plane service connects Valley, Vancouver

Colleen Dane

Record Staff

It was a picturesque and enthusiastic arrival to the Comox Valley for the first West Coast Air scheduled float plane Tuesday morning from Vancouver.

Around 75 Comox Valley politicians, business people and community representatives were on hand to cheer the arrival of the new service, which started its three flights a day with sunshine and calm waters.

"I'm so excited to be able to provide downtown service from Vancouver to this beautiful Comox Valley," said West Coast Air president Rick Baxter after disembarking the flight. "Everybody's ... so excited about this — it's been in the works for a while."

The arrival came after a breakfast at the Edgewater Bistro, and a few welcoming comments before the group moved down to the dock for the grand entrance.

"It's a great service that we've got coming in here — we're all very pleased with it," said Mike Hawitt, owner of the Comox Bay Marina, where the float planes will arrive.

"I think this is a service that's almost going to rival WestJet," said Mayor Jim Brass of Comox, talking about the way it will open up the Valley for business in the Lower Mainland.

"It's a tremendous opportunity to sell the Town of Comox and really put this little place in the Comox Valley on the map," said John Watson, Comox Valley Economic Development Officer.

Getting off the inaugural flight from Vancouver to Comox were Baxter and three architects meeting in the Valley about a local development.

On the dock with the welcoming crowd was also Blake MacDonald, waiting to get on for a trip to Vancouver.

"The convenience of harbour-to-harbour is fantastic," he said, adding that he expects to use the plane once every few weeks for the regular trips he makes back and forth.

"I've been asking them for awhile — I've been one of those people that's been bugging them," he said.

West Coast Air will leave the Comox Marina at 8:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. every day. Fares are \$149 plus tax, each way.

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THE FIRST REGULARLY SCHEDULED float plane flight by West Coast Air from Vancouver arrives with fanfare at the Comox Marina. PHOTO BY COLLEEN DANE

# Surprise shortfall disappoints North Island College

Lindsay Chung

Record Staff

Nanaimo's Malaspina University-College is facing large cuts due to a funding shortage, although North Island College has found itself in a similar, but less dire situation.

Because North Island College is not as large as Malaspina — which is facing a \$3.5-million deficit — the size of the shortfall at NIC is not as big, said college president Lou Dryden.

For the 2008-09 budget, which started Tuesday,

the college, which includes 10 campuses and centres, has a shortfall of slightly more than \$1 million, along with a structural deficit of \$600,000, he said.

"It's really disappointing to find ourselves in this situation."

When the college put together its 2007-08 budget, which ended March 31, it included a \$600,000 structural deficit, but the college knew it could pay for that because it received one-time funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education, said Dryden.

They thought they would



LOU DRYDEN

receive that money to put into the base budget for 2008-09 or at the very least receive one-time funding from the ministry, but they didn't, he said.

NIC has found itself with a budget shortfall because funding for all of the province's public institutions was reduced by 2.6 per cent across the system, which means a \$540,000 net loss for NIC, said Dryden.

Staff usually takes a budget to the college's board of governors in March each year, but the college was told about the funding reduction March 12 and

did not have enough time to balance the budget by the March 26 board meeting.

"The board indicated they want us to balance the budget, and we need additional time to do that," said Dryden.

"April 23 (the next board meeting), we will be taking a budget to the board that will be a balanced budget."

The college's senior management team is looking at areas where the budget can be cut or where the college can make more money, said Dryden, adding they can't increase tuition, which is

capped at two per cent.

"It's going to be difficult. We're going to have to make difficult decisions going forward. We will do it in a careful way in areas that have the least impact on students."

They have not had a chance to identify any areas where the cuts could come, as they are still dealing with the shock of the funding reduction, said Dryden.

"It came as a complete surprise, and we're disappointed. We'll do our best to minimize the impact on students."

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