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MINING

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ck.**Smithers Interior News**, Page 0009, 23-Nov-2006**Novagold sets up in Smithers**

By Thom Barker

Smithers is quickly becoming mining central.

The latest addition to the town's mining contingent is Vancouver-based Novagold, an environmental award-winning operator with a reputation for leading edge reclamation policies and procedures.

The company is in the latter stages of developing its Galore Creek copper-gold-silver property near Stewart and will open administrative offices in Smithers by late January.

Initially, the office will operate with 12 staff, but manager Al Frank projects the contingent will grow to 30 by the time commercial production starts in 2010.

With an expected mine life of 20 years or more, Frank is putting down roots in Smithers. Last week he was in town looking at homes for his family.

He said the company chose Smithers because of its amenities and mining support services.

"From a family perspective and being central to our needs, Smithers shone a little bit more than the other [communities]," he said.

"I wasn't involved in that decision but I'm sure glad they picked Smithers."

Novagold joins Keltic Mines and Blue Pearl Mining as companies with local headquarters creating speculation that a long-awaited economic boom is just around the corner.

Northwest Community College's mining exploration programs can barely keep up with the demand and students are being scooped up almost before they graduate.

Companies like Hy-Tech Drilling and Britton Brothers Diamond Drilling are forced to import workers from out-of-province to keep up with their demand.

Other promising developments include the opening of Assayers Canada's Telkwa preparation lab in June, where Firesteel Resources is sending its samples from the Telegraph Creek area.

Eagle Peak Resources, another Vancouver exploration company seeking to develop the Big Onion copper property just 16 kilometres east of Smithers in the Babine Mountains, held investment meetings last week in Smithers and Houston. Add to that the imminent end of the permitting process for Northgate Minerals' Kemess North project, extension of Huckleberry Mine's lifespan until 2010, as well as, activity surrounding Huckleberry at New Cantech's Lucky Ship, Terrane Metals' Berg and Gold Reach's Seel properties and there is definitely cause for optimism.

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