

THE SIDE EFFECTS

Hundreds of thousands of visitors. Hundreds of millions of dollars. It's all coming to Vancouver and Whistler during February, and you don't have to be a financial wizard to understand the Olympics could offer a once-in-a-lifetime boost. Five business people outlined their hopes and fears to **Patrick Brethour**. Photos by **John Lehmann**

THE FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT OWNER

Moe Summers For four years he's been anticipating this moment, and counts on a friendly personality to set his place apart



Moe Summers, right, is tossing a few surprises into his Olympic menu

The roar of the crowd celebrating the handover of the Olympic torch to Vancouver had yet to fade from Canada Place when Moe Summers began to think of how the Winter Games could heat up his food business.

Summers remembers watching the 2006 handover ceremony on the big screen outside Canada Place and thinking that his Pita Express food counter – right at the waterfront, across the street from the Convention Centre and in the heart of Vancouver's Olympic district – was now set to churn out profits. "That's it, we should be retiring," he recalls thinking.

Four years on, he's not quite as certain there is an Olympic bonanza waiting for him and Pita Express.

He has certainly been helped by the flood of construction workers as the nearby new Convention Centre took shape. But second thoughts about an Olympic bounty started to creep in when he learned the extent of the security preparations for the Games.

His business, part of the Waterfront Centre food court that usually serves hungry workers in nearby office towers, will be inside the Olympic security perimeter in downtown Vancouver.

VANOC is encouraging such firms to ask their employees to stay out of the downtown core of the city during the Games. That

means Summers's normal walk-in clientele is likely to disappear during the Olympics. The security cordon also complicates his delivery schedule. During the Games, shipments will only be allowed between midnight and 6 a.m.

And then there is the competition. All those thousands of hungry journalists at the broadcast and press centres across the road will have immediate access to a well-stocked food court just outside their work areas – including McDonald's, the toughest of restaurant rivals. "That's why we need to wait and see," Summers said.

Still, he has his reasons for some optimism. He's long used to competing with the big names

of the fast-food business. McDonald's, Tim Hortons and Starbucks all have outlets just a few feet from his storefront. In fact, his is the only independent operation in the food court.

He is tweaking his menu to attract customers hailing from outside North America, adding seafood and fish dishes, including grilled B.C. salmon, to his regular fare of souvlaki, pitas and other Greek standards.

And he claims a secret weapon that no fast-food chain can hope to match: a constant stream of good-natured sales banter aimed at making hungry potential customers pause, just for a crucial second, as they decide where to buy their lunch. He's honed that banter with the thousands of

cruise-ship visitors who hit the seaside area during prime tourist season. "Always I say, 'Welcome to Canada,'" Summers said. "Personality attracts people."

So, he hopes, will a full breakfast starting at 5:30 a.m. every day of the Games. Perhaps the ham-and-cheese omelettes can help him find those Olympic riches after all, despite the challenges of a tight security cordon and big-name competition.

"Five-star breakfast. It's a really good breakfast," he said, testing a pitch that is certain to get a great deal of use next month.

THE HIGH-END REAL ESTATE SELLER

Christa Frosch and Nicholas Soldan Harriss Looking to attract super-wealthy visitors wanting to buy a slice of the province



If you're rich Christa Frosch has something for you.

Like the vineyard properties she hopes to sell, Christa Frosch's real estate sales pitches at Whistler during the Olympics will have to mature before they bear fruit.

The Olympics give Frosch and her colleagues at Sotheby's International Realty an enviable *entrée* into the elite strata of buyers able to contemplate laying down millions for acres of vineyard in the Okanagan, and then spending millions more on building a luxury residence.

An *entrée*, yes. A signed deal in hand – well, not likely during the Games themselves. Frosch said it can take up to a year to consummate a high-end real estate deal, meaning the Winter Games will be long over before she and the other realtors at Sotheby's will be able to determine whether their Olympic marketing effort has been a success or just an exquisitely designed waste of time.

The marketing ambitions of Sotheby's in Whistler are extensive, taking direct aim at the well-heeled clients who will be visiting the mountain resort town during the Games and who might be interested in buying up a bit of B.C. wine country.

Up for sale are private resi-

dences costing up to \$9-million, mountain and waterfront properties, and vineyards, including one listed for \$3-million – tasting room included.

One big advantage that Sotheby's has is location, an asset never to be underestimated in real estate. The company's offices in Whistler are in the retail space of the Fairmont Chateau Whistler, the host mountain resort for the Olympic Games – and the temporary home of potential customers who match the wealthy profile of a buyer of high-end real estate. So Sotheby's can comfortably engage in tightly targeted and cost-effective marketing – in other words, leaving promotional packages in all of the rooms of the Fairmont Chateau Whistler.

To woo that clientele, Sotheby's is putting on a luxury-laden party every afternoon, with invitations sent out to a number of Whistler hotels, but focused on the Fairmont. Wines from the Okanagan will be featured, as will the culinary stylings of a roster of B.C. chefs. To drive home that lifestyle appeal, Sotheby's is planning to team up with two other high-end brands: Birks, which will have a jewellery display, and BMW, which will promote three of its new vehicles. "It'll be a nice com-

bination of wine, cars, jewellery and real estate," says Frosch.

But there will be room for Canadian-themed fun, too. Nicholas Soldan Harriss, based in the Whistler office, said he will be using the lure of the Feb. 21 Canada-U.S. hockey game to bring potential clients in to view properties in the town. After an hour's presentation, they can watch the hotly anticipated game on widescreen TVs while being treated to a most Canadian menu: oysters, salmon, poutine, beaver's tail pastries – and that ultimate Canuck winter treat, maple syrup poured on snow.

It's all aimed at leaving potential customers with fun, and lasting, memories that could eventually turn into purchases. "You've got this captive audience. You've really got to make the most of it."

The budget for that one night alone will run into the thousands, but Harriss said the expense is more than justified – and there are some economies to be had, he joked. "The snow is free."