

## VANCOUVER 2010

THE WORLD CAME TO B.C. » DID THEY BRING THEIR WALLET?



# FIVE BUSINESS PLANS, FIVE OUTCOMES

ONE

## Moe Summers

Owner, The Pita Express at Waterfront Centre

### HOPES (AND CHALLENGES)

#### GOING INTO THE GAMES

Faced with stiff competition from big-name restaurants such as McDonald's and Starbucks, Pita Express hoped to lure Olympic visitors by offering friendly service and huge helpings – and relying on word of mouth.

### OUTCOME

For up to 18 hours a day over the past two weeks, Moe Summers has been preparing and serving food to hordes of hungry people in the heart of Vancouver's Olympic district.

And while he isn't the only person pulling long shifts during the Games to make bigger bucks, Mr. Summers is one of the few who would actually like to do it all over again – soon. "The Olympics is great, it's so much fun. I hope we will have it again," said the owner of Pita Express, a Greek-style fast-food restaurant in Vancouver's Waterfront Centre.

In the 11 years at his location across the street from the Vancouver Convention Centre, Mr. Summers said the Olympics is by far the most profitable of any event that has come to the city.

"It was way busier than I thought. I've never seen it like

that before."

The mild weather helped, as did the food counter's proximity to the Olympic torch on the city's waterfront. There's also the thousands of media representatives working in the International Broadcast Centre up the street that have wandered in for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Mr. Summers said sales are about double that of his highest revenue-generating period in the past.

Among his bestsellers were the gyro sandwiches, chicken and lamb wrap and the vegetarian platter, all of which he helped make every day starting at around 3 a.m., serving up his last portion around 9 p.m.

He is one of four regular staff, and he brought on four part-timers to help handle the crowds during the Games.

At the front counter where his dishes are displayed alongside a variety of drinks and desserts, each customer receives a hearty welcome and leaves with a heaping plate of food.

"I come here every day. His food is my favourite," said a regular on a rainy day last week, trying to balance a plate loaded down with bread, salad and fish

spilling over the sides.

Another customer, dressed in a black jacket with a Vancouver 2010 logo on the sleeve, cut in front of the line while talking into her cell phone. She holds up a half-eaten chicken sandwich and, with the phone resting under her chin, asks for it to be put in a takeout box.

Mr. Summers smiles and fills the rest of the container with salad.

"He gave me even more food!" she shouted into her cell phone. "I am coming here again tomorrow."

It's the kind of customer reaction Mr. Summers wants and needs.

Lots of food and friendly service are one way he has tried to set himself apart from the steep competition within the food court from McDonald's, also an Olympic sponsor, as well as Tim Hortons, Subway and Starbucks, among others.

Mr. Summers said there's even a possibility of one day expanding his Pita Express restaurant into a franchise.

For now, he's looking forward to sleeping in – starting this week.

» Brenda Bouw



TWO



Please Mum VP Steve Lee expects sales to meet expectations. JOHN LEHMANN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Steve Lee Vice-president of corporate development at children's clothing retailer Please Mum

### HOPES (AND CHALLENGES) BEFORE THE GAMES

When Please Mum signed its licensing arrangement with VANOC three years ago to sell Olympic-themed clothing, it expected sales to build up across the country to a big finish at the end of the Games. It turned out to be more of slog than expected. A few weeks ahead of the event, sales in B.C. were still outpacing the rest of the country.

### OUTCOME

Parents visiting the Vancouver area from other parts of the country might want to consider stocking up on Olympic attire for their kids before getting on the plane back home.

Please Mum stores that carried the officially licensed line of children's Olympic T-shirts, hats and hoodies in cities across Ontario and Alberta are out of stock after having to send everything they had to Vancouver, where items have been flying off the shelves throughout the Games.

While that's bad news for people outside of the Lower Mainland, it's good news for Please Mum, whose goal is to sell out of the product not long after the Olympics end.

"There's going to be life after the Olympics for a little bit, but like anything else we'd like to sell out of it as soon as possible," said Steve Lee, the Vancouver-based retailer's vice-president of corporate development, adding that with the Games almost finished, he expects to meet sales expectations.

He said the stores in British Columbia have been "flying through the product," forcing the national retailer to pull stock from other cities. Olympic merchandise in the Georgetown, Ont., and Calgary stores went to Vancouver, while the West Edmonton Mall location sent its pieces to Whistler.

The St. John's location reported some product was still available in certain sizes a few days before the Games wrapped. Meantime, the Please Mum location in Whitehorse started to sell its Olympic merchandise at half price about midway through the Games.

The Lower Mainland stores have not surprisingly experienced the hottest sales, especially during the Olympics itself when tens of thousands of people visited the region.

Please Mum's Olympic attire wasn't available through its online store.

The company, founded in Vancouver in 1986, signed its licensing arrangement with VANOC three years ago, which allowed it to sell official Games pieces in exchange for a royalty payment.

Among the most popular Olympic items were those with the Games mascots and aboriginal artwork.

Some of the Please Mum line was also sold in the Hudson's Bay Co.'s wildly successful Olympic Superstore in downtown Vancouver. HBC is the official outfitter of Canada's Olympic team, and maker of the red and black Canada clothing line that has become ubiquitous among visitors and Vancouverites during the Games. The Olympic Superstore store saw huge lineups during the event, and was even forced to open for 24 hours on some days to keep up with demand. That was an added bonus for Please Mum, Mr. Lee said.

While Please Mum has its own line of Canadian-themed clothing that comes out each year ahead of Canada Day, Mr. Lee said they're not worried Canadians will be tapped out of patriotic buying fever when the day rolls around again this year.

» Brenda Bouw

THREE



Prime locations helped two of Mitch Berger and Rob Ward's restaurants. JOHN LEHMAN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Rob Ward and Mitch Berger Points West Restaurant Group

### HOPES (AND FEARS) GOING INTO THE GAMES

Two of their restaurants had prime locations during the Games. The Players Chophouse in Vancouver was so central that it was rented out for the duration of the event by a Games sponsor. The location in Whistler at the foot of the village was a hot hangout for tourists and athletes alike. However, going into the Games, business wasn't as strong at locations further away from the Olympics sites.

### THE OUTCOME

Rob Ward's restaurants have hosted some of the hottest Olympic celebrities over the past two weeks, from Wayne Gretzky the night before he lit the torch to athletes fresh off the podium, and with live performances by musicians like Sarah McLachlan and Barenaked Ladies.

Of the four eateries within his Points West Restaurant Group, the Players Chophouse locations in each Vancouver and Whistler, B.C., saw the biggest revenue bang, due in part to their prime locales.

However, Mr. Ward, whose business partner is NFL punter Mitch Berger of the Denver Bron-

cos, believes his diversified business strategy also helped boost profits.

The Vancouver Players Chophouse restaurant, located next to BC Place, home to the opening and closing ceremonies, was booked exclusively for the entire Olympics by Bell, a Games sponsor.

That meant guaranteed revenue during the event, and given the excess crowds over the past two weeks, likely a little extra on top.

The restaurant was open to the public at times during the first part of the Games, but Mr. Ward said Bell eventually took over all of its open hours. "They were in the spirit," he said.

The Players Chophouse in Whistler was open to the public for much of the Games, with the exception of a few exclusive corporate parties. While Mr. Ward said revenues at both Players Chophouse locations met his expectations during the Games, his other two restaurants in Olympic host locations didn't fare as well.

The Prime Tapas Bar in Whistler didn't see the traffic Mr. Ward had hoped for, which he blames on a last-minute change to the location of security fencing that made the restaurant more difficult to ac-

cess. He plans to follow up with the Olympic organizing committee on the issue.

"We'll certainly have a conversation with them," Mr. Ward said when asked if he plans to seek compensation. "We have a pretty compelling argument there."

The location did serve as the venue for private parties held by both the Italian Ski Federation and Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton.

The Olympic effect also didn't impact his fourth restaurant, Saltaire, which has been in the well-heeled West Vancouver neighbourhood for the past decade. Other restaurants outside the downtown core agreed the Games did little to boost their business. However, Mr. Ward said he can understand why crowds didn't venture far. "The mood in the downtown core was infectious," he said.

When the Prime Tapas Bar lease is up in April, Mr. Ward plans to move the restaurant concept to downtown Vancouver. The Players Chophouse Whistler location, which opened 15 months ago, will remain long after the Games and Mr. Ward is confident the ski town will experience a post-Olympic economic lift.

» Brenda Bouw

A month ago, The Globe and Mail took a look at five very different businesses with one very big thing in common: They were each looking to reap profits from the Vancouver Olympics, and the two-week economic boon it was supposed to bring to the city. Today, we revisit those five firms – and find out whether they had a gold-calibre performance.



Moe Summers, owner of the Pita Express in the food court across from the main press centre in Vancouver, has had steady business. PETER POWER/ THE GLOBE AND MAIL

**FOUR**



Potential buyers have been calling Christa Frosch from around the world. LYLE STAFFORD FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

**Christa Frosch**  
Sotheby's International Realty

**HOPES (AND FEARS)**  
**GOING INTO THE GAMES**  
The Olympics gave Sotheby's an enviable entrée into the elite strata of real estate buyers able to contemplate laying down millions for recreational properties. But an entrée is different than a deal in hand. The company hoped to reach interested buyers through events and the expansion of its office at a luxury hotel in Whistler.

**OUTCOME**  
With the snow-covered mountains as a backdrop, their proximity to the ocean and several hundred thousand smiling tourists, it's not hard to see why so many potential property buyers are walking through the doors of Sotheby's International Realty lately asking about purchasing a home in British Columbia.

Sotheby's said it has landed at least three foreign buyers during the Games who are interested in higher-end properties around the province, ranging in price between \$2-million and \$6-million.

Calls are also coming in from around the world from people who have seen B.C. only through international television coverage of the Olympics, said Sotheby's

Christa Frosch. "They've been calling from places like Austria, Germany and England, saying they've seen all these wonderful clips on TV. They can't believe how beautiful it is."

On the ground in Whistler, where Sotheby's spruced up its office in the luxurious Fairmont Chateau Whistler to show off its listings during the Games, Ms. Frosch said hundreds of people have come by to take a look at what's available.

While Vancouver is already the highest-priced housing market in Canada (said to be largely driven by the number of buyers from Asia in recent years), prices are relatively affordable compared with other international cities. A property in Vancouver might be worth roughly \$800 a square foot – that figure more than doubles in such place as London, New York or Hong Kong.

The resort village of Whistler has more space for development, which means more selection – especially compared with recreational listings in ski resorts in Europe, where properties were snapped up years ago and are often passed down through generations rather than sold.

Included on Ms. Frosch's new client list is a Russian businessman who was visiting Canada for the first time and wants to buy a six-bedroom property in Whistler. His price range is from \$5-million to \$6-million.

Another visitor from Hong Kong, who has been to Canada a few times, is eyeing an apartment in Vancouver priced around \$2-million. Her plan is to spend up to four months a year in the city with her family.

Sotheby's is also heavily marketing some of its Okanagan vineyard properties at its Whistler site, which has already captured the attention of one Vancouver-area couple.

The couple will be taking tours of properties in the Southern Interior in the coming weeks, with a price range of about \$2-million to \$3-million.

"We expect to have sales with these buyers," Ms. Frosch said. "There's enough product that we will find them something suitable."

She also expects to see a pop in property sales in the province immediately after the Games, in particular this spring – and possibly for the next several years.

» Brenda Bouw

**FIVE**



John Palis says he's surprised by the good behaviour he's been seeing. JOHN LEHMANN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

**John Palis**  
Managing administrator of Yellow Cab Co. Ltd.

**HOPES (AND FEARS)**  
**GOING INTO THE GAMES**  
Yellow Cab, the city's largest taxi fleet, added 25 cars to its fleet for a total of 275. Mr. Palis expected "bursts" of daytime demand and thousands of extra trips. But competition from the new Canada Line whisking travellers from the airport to downtown in 25 minutes was expected to eat into profits.

**OUTCOME**  
Forgive the Vancouver cab driver who can't immediately tell you what day of the week it is. For many, it has felt like a Friday or Saturday for the past two weeks.

Make that a Friday or Saturday when the Vancouver Canucks are playing at home.

Not surprisingly, the taxi business has been booming during the Olympics, as tens of thousands of visitors try to get around quickly and without the option – or desire) to cram onto public transit. "Every night is extremely busy," Mr. Palis said.

While the Olympics doesn't rival the business cabbies saw during the five-month Expo '86 event, and posed challenges like competition from free transit options and out-of-city taxi firms,

Mr. Palis said the event has nonetheless put extra cash in drivers' pockets. Friday and Saturday nights are traditionally the busiest in the cab business, and the Olympics were no exception. Mr. Palis said revenue was 20 per cent higher than normal during the Games. The real difference came on weeknights, from Sunday to Thursday, when business shot up a whopping 70 to 75 per cent.

While night business was strong during the Games, days didn't see the same spike. Mr. Palis said that's largely because regular customers weren't going to meetings and regular daytime appointments during the Games, and many of the Olympic events happened in the evening.

"What surprises me more than anything else is how well-behaved everyone has been, and the demeanour, given the size of the crowds," Mr. Palis said. Public drunkenness was a problem during the Games, causing the city to close liquor stores on certain nights to try to prevent the problems from escalating.

"Despite the size of everything, there seems to be more common courtesy than in normal times," he said. "Either we have so many

visitors that are better behaved, or the clampdown worked."

The boost also came at a good time, considering winter is the slowest season in the business, and since the new Canada Line transit system has been cutting into taxi profits since it opened last summer.

Yellow Cab and the city's other four taxi companies also saw competition from cabbies in the suburbs who were given temporary permits to pick up passengers for two months until March 23.

"It has eaten away at whatever gravy drivers may have seen during the daytime," Mr. Palis said.

When the permit period is over and the crowds go home, including those from the Paralympics next month, he said the industry's biggest competitor will again be the Canada Line.

Vancouver's transit authority has been pleasantly surprised by the number of people who left their cars at home during the Games.

Olympic ticket holders were also able to ride transit for free on the day of their event. "We'll see if they want to stick to riding the Canada Line when they have to start paying for it," Mr. Palis said.

» Brenda Bouw