

We all know that opening your eyes to the possibilities around you can reveal new opportunities. Within communities, Rotary Clubs have often been the first to see these opportunities and point them out to the rest of us.

A case in point is local Rotarian and bike enthusiast, Don Gemmell. In 2008 Gemmell completed a Rhine bike tour and returned to Summerland determined to see if something like that could be repeated in the Okanagan. Could we recreate even a small part of the same conditions that contributed to a very sizable Euro-tourism sector?

Could an unfinished highway roadbed, located right beside the lake between Summerland and Penticton be used to create a bike path that would provide new economic opportunities as well as safety for recreational riders? Gemmell thought it could.

In November of last year, he presented his vision to the rest of the Summerland Rotary Club. They were quick to see the possibilities and bring their considerable support to the table. Through their efforts seed funds were obtained and they committed to take on the Summerland portion of the proposed trail.

Fast forward to spring of 2013. Through the efforts of Don and the Summerland Rotary Club, the idea expanded, more people became aware of the project, key organizations became involved and a committee of interested parties began to meet regularly to move the idea forward.

Along the line, the vision has grown to create a bike path that links every community in the Okanagan region, rivaling the great cycling destinations of the world and providing tremendous economic and recreational benefits.

A new trail group has now been formed to move the vision forward. The Valley Bikeway Development Society will spearhead the creation of a 1.2 km lakeside trail in Summerland. Phase 1 of the new trail would extend from Lakeshore Drive to the Summerland Beach RV Park (formerly Illahie Beach Campground). This section will then become the template for the longer portion in Phase 2. Phase 2 will see the path continuing through Trout Creek to Sun-Oka Beach and along the lakeshore to Penticton. It is hoped that Phase 1 will start this spring.

To date, approximately \$40,000 has been donated to the Society to get the project off to a start. The Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society has contributed \$5,000 and the Summerland Rotary Club has contributed \$15,000. The District of Summerland is covering the cost of all the engineered drawings estimated to be approximately \$20,000.

Additional groups currently involved are the Trans Canada Trail, Tourism Penticton, Economic Development Penticton, Summerland Chamber of Commerce, Okanagan Similkameen Regional District, Penticton Rotary Clubs, as well as interested citizens. Other organizations are contributing and participating through committee work. The Society is chaired by Connie Denesiuk, former President of the BC School Trustees Association.

"We are extremely pleased by the significant leadership and support that the Summerland Rotary Club has given to this exciting project in its early stages", stated Denesiuk. "The foundation has been laid for many more organizations and individuals to come together and see this tremendous tourism, economic, and recreational vision realized in the Okanagan."

Recently the society participated in a strategic planning session led by Summerland Credit Union CEO, Kelly Marshall.

Through this process it was determined that the ultimate goal of the organization is to collaborate in the development of a world class interconnected recreational pathway for the interior of British Columbia.

The Society has moved ahead to identify a number of critical success factors and is now meeting with politicians and organizational representatives throughout the valley to promote the vision. Community meetings and a regional summit are planned for 2014.

In Gemmell's words "imagining your goal in an entirely new way can help you succeed. Sometimes opportunities are like that. The answer is right there and only requires a shared perspective to realize what you can do."

Someday we will be able to cycle on connected paths from Osoyoos to Sicamous, enjoying all that our region has to offer along the way. What an amazing opportunity that will be!