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Firms face new digital divide

Bottom-line fixation in danger of dulling creative edges in B.C.'s video game sector

Andrew Petrozzi

In the brave new world of video game development in B.C., balancing bottom-line predictability and creative risk-taking has become an increasingly critical challenge.

It's a financial high wire act with millions of dollars at stake, but with profits for top titles that can match Hollywood blockbusters, it's a balance that needs careful calibration because strict adherence to bottom-line concerns can alienate creative talent.

Developers such as Electronic Arts Canada (EAC) take that balance very seriously, according to company vice-president and COO Ron Movarek.

"What has really surprised me about EAC specifically is it feels like we are 50 little developers inside this larger organization," said

see EA, page 7



Game score: EA Canada's popular NHL 07 is just one title in the developer's catalogue of hit franchise video games; sports titles are money in the bank for local studios

Rock business starting to roll for Lower Mainland company

Polaris Minerals hits paydirt in California's aggregates market

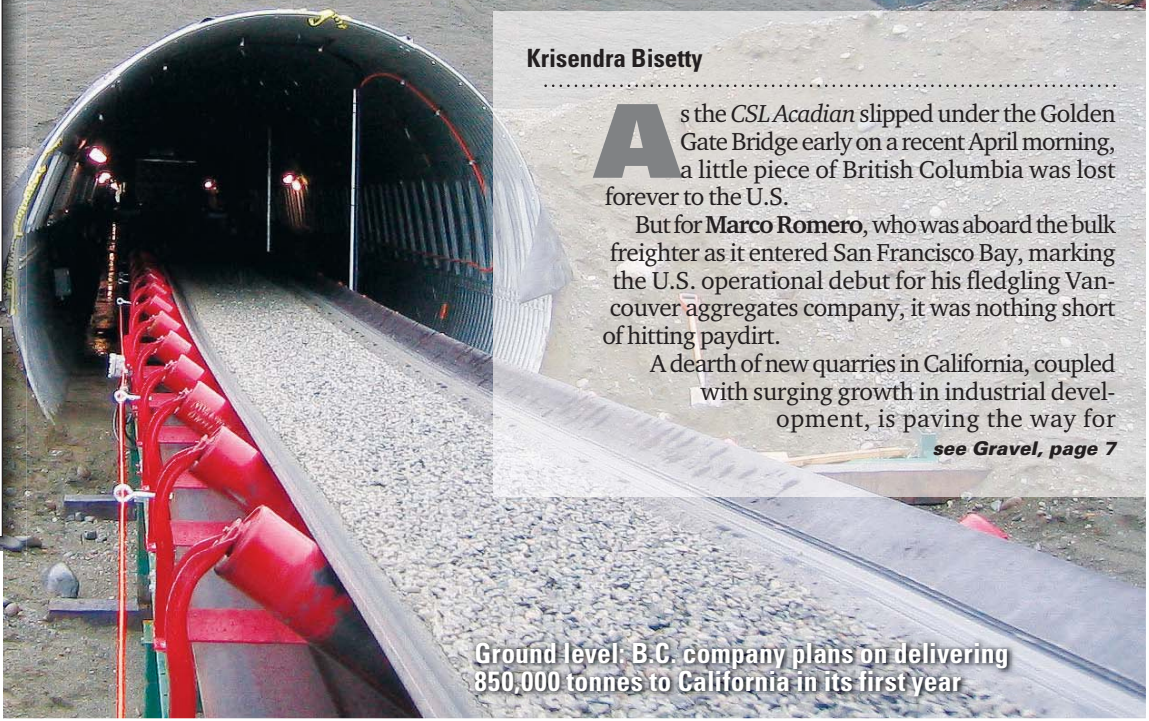
Krisendra Bisetty

As the CSL Acadian slipped under the Golden Gate Bridge early on a recent April morning, a little piece of British Columbia was lost forever to the U.S.

But for Marco Romero, who was aboard the bulk freighter as it entered San Francisco Bay, marking the U.S. operational debut for his fledgling Vancouver aggregates company, it was nothing short of hitting paydirt.

A dearth of new quarries in California, coupled with surging growth in industrial development, is paving the way for

see Gravel, page 7



Ground level: B.C. company plans on delivering 850,000 tonnes to California in its first year

City eases business tax burden

Municipal rates capped at 2006 levels, but residents to shoulder 8% hike

Andrew Petrozzi

Vancouver businesses will be shouldering a lighter tax burden this year after city council voted to cap non-residential property tax rates at 2006 levels. The result will be a slim 0.2% increase for 2007.

Homeowners, however, will face an approximate 8% increase, or about \$125 annually for the average home. That's more than double the increase approved by council in March, as up to 2% of municipal taxes are shifted from business to residential property owners, a move recommended by the city's

see Taxes, page 5

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Flax fortune to be found in Lotusland

Fast-growing Anderssen's Life is capitalizing on latest food trend



DOMINIC SCHAEFER

Tarjei Anderssen: seeking investors keen to buy franchise rights to sell Anderssen Life's popular flax rolls

Glen Korstrom

Vancouverites boast the lowest obesity rate in Canada (7.6%), and many Canadians dub Lotusland residents as "granolas." In this health-conscious city, an entrepreneur is finding success operating both a flax-based food manufacturing company and a bakery that sells exclusively flax-based food.

Perhaps the only surprise is that it took until early 2006 for someone to attempt such a concept and that – at least so far – no competition has arisen to challenge Anderssen's Life founder Tarjei Anderssen.

Anderssen's flax snack manufacturing company, Ocean Deli Ltd., and his retail business, Anderssen's Life, have combined to generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue in the first full year that the two companies were in operation, he said. Sales are growing 15% a month, he added.

Early demand was so strong

that he added a Granville Island kiosk part-way through 2006 to expand sales and spur awareness of his more-than-a-dozen varieties of flax rolls and flax crackers that Anderssen calls flackers.

"I've become totally occupied with this flax concept," said Anderssen, who has started to set his sights on franchising.

He has yet to contact lawyers to draft necessary paperwork but Anderssen's active search for interested investors is in full swing, he said.

Anderssen was once as absorbed by another food that similarly contains a substantial amount of the heart-disease-reducing Omega 3 fatty acids.

That was when he bought salmon for one of the world's largest suppliers of frozen seafood, Japan's Shin Nihon Global.

Passions for both salmon and flax intersected when Anderssen had the Eureka moment to create a salmon flax roll.

Anderssen had produced puff-

pastry coated salmon rolls since he founded Ocean Deli Ltd. in Victoria in 1996. But, it was a chance comment at a party where a guest described his puff pastry rolls as "life coated with death" that stimulated his thinking. Instead of offering salmon covered in fatty white-flour dough, why not offer a healthy grain coating, he thought.

Anderssen's Surrey-based 2,400-square-foot kitchen started churning out a salmon flax roll that he wholesaled to caterers such as Butler Did It Catering and retailers such as Stong's Market on Dunbar Street and Burnaby's Famous Foods on Kingsway Ave.

"Driving back from Stong's, I turned right on West 4th [Avenue] and saw a store that had a 'For Lease' sign in the window. A voice inside me said, 'Stop,'" Anderssen recalled of a fortuitous drive in November 2005.

"I stopped, and to make a long story short, that evening, [business partner] Terry

see *Flax*, page 14



DOMINIC SCHAEFER

Bachelor party planners: Andrea Bak and Jodi Leclair

Bachelor parties play to full house

Men are interested in more than just gentleman's clubs and exotic dancers, say Vancouver entrepreneurs

Andrew Petrozzi

It seems oddly logical that it took two women to understand the need for a party planning service that caters to men and their fascination with bare breasts and poker.

Enter Vancouver's Bachelor Plan, the brainchild of Jodi Leclair and Andrea Bak, niche party planners who started off catering specifically to that most male of events: the bachelor party.

Spurred by the decline of stereotypical macho male preserves – such as increasing numbers of women partying at gentleman's clubs – it was a business opportunity neither Leclair nor Bak

could ignore.

"The two of us had seen a need for it because it seemed women, when it came to planning their stagettes, got their little binders out and have meetings, whereas we saw a lot of men just winging it," said Bak in an interview. "It turns out they were going to the same strip bar they've gone to since they were 19, it was badly organized and the guy didn't have a good time."

The Bachelor Plan, launched in late 2005, started out planning bachelor parties, arranging luxury transportation, accommodation and VIP access to nightclubs in Vancouver and Whistler, but Bak and Leclair quickly realized

see *Poker*, page 14

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Poker: Tournaments take off

Continued from Bachelor, page 13 men were interested in more than just gentleman's clubs and exotic dancers. That was when they decided to offer Texas Hold 'Em poker tournaments that featured topless dealers as well as "sexy sidekicks," a service which provides women to accompany men who are out on the town partying.

But it's been the Bachelor Plan's poker tournaments that have really taken off and become the company's most popular offering. Either dealers can attend a party, or customers can book the Bachelor Party's Gastown digs to host the party.

Annual revenue for 2006 was in the six figures, and both Bak and Leclair quit their full-time jobs – Bak was in radio, while Leclair was a registered massage therapist – and hired an office assistant to handle the increasing volume of the cash-flow financed business. The company currently has more than 20 women it contracts as lingerie waitresses, masseuses and topless dealers, and is looking to hire more, according to Bak.

The company typically plans five to six parties a week, with some weeks lower than others. During peak season, which runs from spring to fall, the company can be involved in six parties in a

single evening.

The company does not post prices on its website so it can clearly explain what options are available and how it works when potential customers contact them.

Bak does not mince words when it comes to explaining what the Bachelor Plan is, and what it is not.

"We make it very clear that we are not running escorts. Our prices reflect that," she said. "As well, all the women sign a contract that they will not offer those types of services behind our back because it will give us a bad reputation. We haven't had a problem

with that."

Corporate and charity events are also booking poker tournaments, according to Bak, but

"We basically do anything that has to do with men and partying, like golf tournaments and boat parties"

– **Andrea Bak,**
co-founder and co-owner,
The Bachelor Plan

tops generally remain on for those functions, with dealers often dressed as pin-up models instead.

"We basically do anything that has to do with men and partying, like golf tournaments and boat parties. A lot of businessmen are entertaining clients and they want a couple of girls in bikinis on the boat and they don't, where else to go instead of spending a lot of money on professional dancers," she said.

The Bachelor Plan's popularity has seen clients in Ontario book its services and pay to fly the women to Toronto. International visitors to Canada have also contracted the company's service. Possible expansion into Calgary and Toronto is in the future, she said. Similar services are also available in Montreal, and in U.S. cities like Las Vegas, New Orleans and New York.

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Flax: Product popularity in B.C.

Continued from Flax, page 13 [O'Kane] and I were in there signing the lease. It went really fast – within hours."

By January, the duo had spent tens of thousands of dollars installing refrigeration equipment and adding other small touches to make the former coffee shop their flax-central.

A brainstorming session with Butler Did It Catering owner and executive chef **Jamie Avantini** resulted in the inspiration to create a Mexican flax roll that includes refried beans, onions, carrots, rutabagas and cabbage.

Avantini's own 40-employee business had just tripled its

"I've become totally occupied with this flax concept"

– **Tarjei Anderssen,**
owner,
Anderssen's Life

office space to 6,300 square feet on West 2nd and he was about to grow revenues 50% from \$2 million in 2005 to approximately \$3 million in 2006.

Flax rolls evolved to be one of Avantini's most popular hors d'œuvres.

"We offered both salmon rolls in puff pastry and in flax. It was pretty much the customers preferring the flax. With the Mexican rolls, it was a matter of coming up with great flavours and having a good source of protein," Avantini said.

Revved up, Anderssen went on what he calls a "creative binge" that resulted in Ocean Deli churning out flax rolls filled with everything from Thai ginger-tuna to curried chick pea to feta cheese and vegetable.

Canada is the world's largest flax exporter, and **Statistics Canada** figures show that the country exported a record 1.082 million tonnes of flax in 2005, which is the last year for which numbers are available.

Local companies such as Surrey's **Northern Lights Flax** export some of that flax to locations such as Japan, according to its website.

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