

Meeting and
event planners
throughout
the Northwest
are preparing
to capitalize
on the Winter
Olympics.

ing for the GOLD

by Annika S. Hipple

THE 2010 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES are approaching rapidly, and that means big opportunities for more than just Vancouver and Whistler. For 16 days in February the world's attention will be focused on the Pacific Northwest, and communities and businesses throughout the region are doing their best to get in on the action.

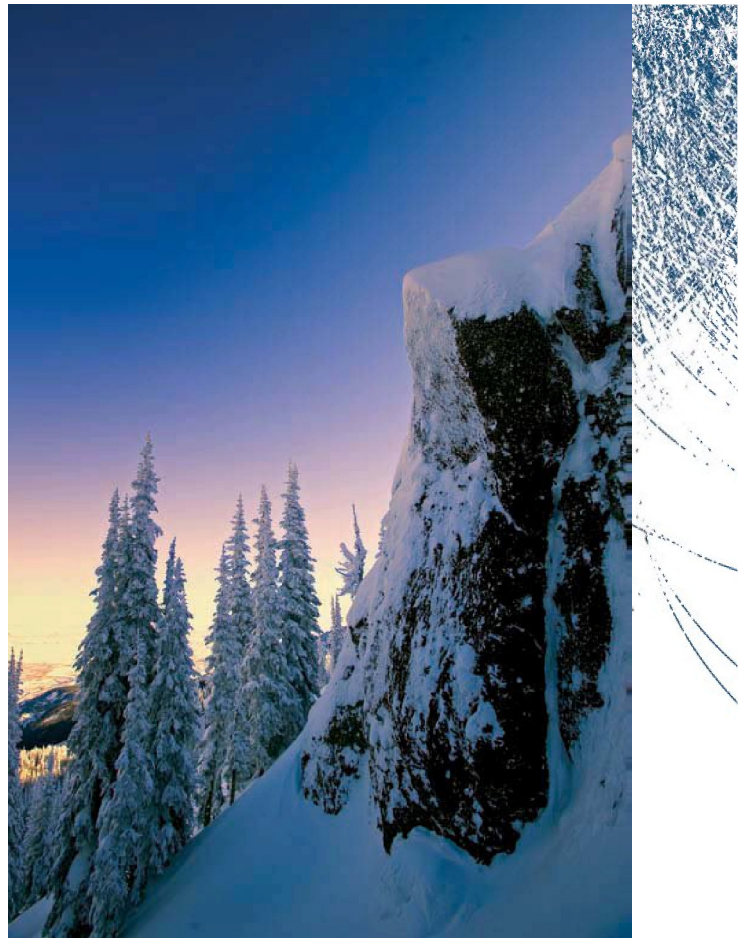
The BC Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Secretariat's Tourism 2010 Commerce Centre offers a wealth of resources to help businesses in a variety of industries capitalize on the Olympics.

Beyond the Vancouver area, the hospitality and events industries are particularly poised to take advantage of the games. Kristin Jacobsen, public relations and special events manager for Washington State Tourism, explains, "With all the attention, not just from people who are coming but also from

people watching on TV or online, we're really working on getting the word out that if you want to come to the Pacific Northwest and really experience it, no trip is complete without coming to Washington."

Tourism Vancouver Island has created a task force to identify a strategy for capitalizing on the international media attention. During the Olympics, efforts will focus on unaccredited media who will not have access to the athletic events and will therefore be seeking regional destination stories.

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Ski resorts and areas such as Mt. Baker (left) or the Mission Ridge Ski and Snowboard Resort (right) are using the Olympics to draw skiers who normally would head for Whistler. The Tulalip Resort near Everett (opposite) is hoping many athletes will use it to acclimatize to the Northwest prior to the start of the games.

While the games are under way, Vancouver Island and Washington state will also appeal to residents of the Vancouver-Whistler region looking for somewhere else to be. “We’re trying to reach out to those who live in the Vancouver area who will be trying to get the heck out of Dodge,” says Eric Granstrom, director of marketing for the Wenatchee Valley Sports Council and a founding member of Escape, Explore, Enjoy North Central Washington (E3NCW).

“A lot of the ski areas are looking at trying to capture the Seattle skiers who normally ski at Whistler, because they won’t be able to go there. Also those that would be coming south of the border for the same reason,” says Karen Stebbins, marketing administrator for Ski Washington, the Idaho Ski Areas Association, and Ski the Northwest Rockies.

in Bellingham, expects to attract sports fans from throughout the U.S. and Europe. The hotel is offering various packages that include lodging and transportation to and from the games.

Further south along the Interstate 5 corridor, the Tulalip Resort has been preparing for the Olympics for more than two years. “We believe that we’re poised to really be the hub from SeaTac to Vancouver,” says Brett Magnan, the resort’s executive vice president. “We’re hoping to have people fly into SeaTac and make Tulalip their Olympic headquarters.” The resort is looking into developing relationships with charter bus companies to provide hassle-free cross-border transportation.

Tulalip executives have completed Tourism BC’s SuperHost certification class to prepare for the Olympics and aid in marketing efforts. As a Native American-owned property, the Tulalip Resort has also been working with First Host Nations in British Columbia to provide support and co-sponsorship of events. “This is the first Olympics in which the host country selected its indigenous people to be 50-percent co-hosts,” says Magnan. “It’s a great honor for the native peoples of the entire Northwest.”

Two organizations that have been instrumental in creating partnerships and promoting the region are the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) and SnoGold, a Snohomish County initiative. PNWER has established programs to provide winter

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—ERIC GRANSTROM, Wenatchee Vally Sports Council

Northwestern Washington is also well positioned to serve Olympic visitors who are unable to find affordable lodging in Vancouver. Michael Herzog, owner and managing director of Hotel Bellwether

PHOTO BY: (RIGHT) AARON BLACK-SCHMIDT.



PHOTO COURTESY OF: TULALIP RESORT.

sports teams with training facilities and logistical support in the leadup to the Olympics and other international sporting events. "SnoGold started the marketing effort on an individual regional basis but PNWER led the attack as far as promoting facilities," says Granstrom.

Largely as a result of these efforts, Everett, Wash., was selected to host Skate America, the most important annual international figure skating competition in the U.S., in October 2008. Many Skate America athletes stayed at Tulalip, and several national teams have expressed interest in returning to acclimatize in the month before the Games.

Similarly, Dave Petryk, president and CEO of Tourism Vancouver Island, says Mount Washington and the Comox Valley have been successful in attracting various teams for training and acclimatization. In addition, several members of the U.S. Ski Team will be using Washington's Mission Ridge Ski and Snowboard Resort as a pre-Olympics training site, according to Granstrom. E3NCW is also focusing on getting north-central Washington on the radar for future Olympics-related events. "We're working on establishing a relationship with the U.S. Olympic Committee for future endeavors beyond Vancouver," says Granstrom.

Washington will also host the Olympic-qualifying U.S. National Figure Skating Championships in Spokane Jan. 14-24. The city estimates that the event will bring in nearly \$26 million to the region. "We want Spokane and the whole Spokane region to feel


like they were a specific part of the games, that they paid a specific role in the outcome of the games," says Barb Beddor, executive director of the event.

Spokane previously hosted the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in 2007, breaking all attendance records. "We would never have had the chance to host the Championships in an Olympic year without the success we had in 2007," says Beddor. "A successful event in 2010 will garner future events for Spokane as well."

In fact, it's after the Games that most communities expect to see the greatest benefits. "We're trying to reach out to those spectators, media representatives, teams, and anyone else who will have their attention focused on Vancouver to bring them back to the region," says Granstrom.

Petryk agrees, "Where we really feel there is an opportunity for Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast is post-games. With all the media attention focused on the area we will be trying to capitalize on that during the five to seven years after the Games."

"Usually ski areas will see increased traffic the year after the Olympics, not the year of the Olympics," Stebbins adds. "There's a lot of historical data on this. As people are passing through they see areas that they'd like to visit, and then they come back."

Throughout the Pacific Northwest, communities and businesses are hoping that the Olympics will be a showcase for the region that continues to pay dividends for the meetings and events industry for a long time to come. 

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