

by Tom Wakefield, WD Communications, Vancouver

High-Tech Company Flourishes in Rural British Columbia

The term “high-tech” isn’t often associated with a small community of less than 10,000 people.

Nestled in the Southern Interior of British Columbia, Nelson has traditionally relied on the forestry industry to fuel its economy.

But times change. Communities evolve. And there’s an interesting evolution taking place in Nelson.

“There’s a fairly large underground technology community here,” says Dr. Morgan Dehnel, founder and president of Dehnel Particle Accelerator Components & Engineering Inc, or “D-Pace” for short.

“We’re still trying to find out who everyone is. Every time you go into a coffee shop you meet someone new in the technology field.”

D-Pace is one of the companies putting Nelson on the high-tech map, and helping the community become a Canadian leader in particle transport systems research.

Starting in the mid-1990s as a consulting firm for the particle accelerator industry, D-Pace switched gears in 2002 to focus on the commercialization and design of particle accelerator components. It licensed eight products from Canada’s Tri-University Meson Facility (TRIUMF) located at the University of British Columbia. This world-class subatomic physics research laboratory is home to the world’s biggest cyclotron, which is used to accelerate 1000 trillion particles each second.



Morgan Dehnel, founder and president of Dehnel Particle Accelerator Components & Engineering Inc, beside one of the magnets he designed and implemented at TRIUMF.

Today, D-Pace is a world leader in designing industrial charge particle transport systems for ion implantation, radiation processing, and radioisotope production sectors.

Not sure what that means?

“It means that a customer wants a particle beam to get to target,” says Dr. Dehnel. “We design how it gets there, right from the beginning to the end.”

The technology is used in such areas as nuclear medicine, killing germs (sterilization) and in the production of computer chips.

In May, Dr. Dehnel made a presentation to Nelson City Council. He acknowledged council’s support in helping him acquire a \$150,000 repayable grant through Western Economic Diversification Canada’s (WD) Softwood Industry Community Economic Adjustment Initiative.

The funding provided for marketing and business plans, technology transfer, and prototype development that have led to increased sales globally.

“We’re swamped,” says Dr. Dehnel. The company has six employees and just moved into a new office.

But there was another reason why he decided to address city council.

“The presentation alerted people to what’s going on in Nelson. It’s not the sort of business that was here in the past,” says Dr. Dehnel.

“With all the arts and outdoor activities available, Nelson’s a cool place to be. This helps us and other technology-related companies attract people to work here.”

For more information on how Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) supports small business, visit www.wd.gc.ca. ■