



IMPACT OF THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY ON THE TOWN OF BONNYVILLE

Highway 41 may not be the 401 in Toronto, but on any given day you will see continuous traffic all day of which a large portion are big trucks of every kind. Anyone coming to Bonnyville for the first time will be pleasantly surprised to see a modern urban town with paved roads, most in good condition, a beautiful lakeshore adjacent to the Jessie Lake wetlands and numerous recreational facilities, a performance arts theatre, an expanded senior citizen's drop-in, modern schools, nice, well equipped playgrounds, a unique Parent Child Centre and a streetscaped main street with specialized shops and personalized service making shopping a pleasant experience.

Bonnyville's progress has been influenced by its location – four highways lead into it – by its spirit of solidarity, by its forward looking approach and again, by its location – either next to or very close to some of the richest heavy oil recovery projects in the world.

From the beginning of exploration by Imperial in 1971 to the most recent proposal of CNRL for expansion at Wolf Lake, the entire region has undergone many changes. The traditional rural agricultural economy is still an important sector as is tourism, but the most prominent driving force behind the growth and changes are the heavy oil development and the tremendous positive spin-off it has created.

During the past three decades, the oil and gas industry, beginning with the tentative experimental small pilot projects, has developed into the driving economic force in our region. In 2002, a conservative estimate of 300 million was spent on salaries, materials, and other operating expenses by the resource industry. Today, over 225,000 bbls/day are produced in the area. More is yet to come on stream! In Bonnyville, there are more than 50 contracting firms engaged in the resource service sector alone.



Not surprisingly, our population growth matches stride for stride the activity in the oil patch. Bonnyville had a mere 2,548 residents in 1971. It grew very rapidly to 5,575 by 1986 and then dropped sharply over the next half dozen years as the oil and gas industry drew back. The more recent turnabout was significant as the oil activity resumed so that in the last federal census of 1996 – 2001, the population growth was 11.9%, one of the highest in the province and that rate of growth will probably be eclipsed during the next five-year period.

The impact of this increased level of development resulted in Bonnyville facing the future with optimism. Growth brings with it a variety of demands and challenges. The community needs in the areas of housing, transportation, education, policing services, social agency work are significant and that in turn translates into stresses and financial strains for municipal government. A rising drug problem has pulled the community together to tackle the demon. A need for housing, especially affordable housing is being addressed. The Town of Bonnyville began the development of the Millennium Subdivision to ensure a steady supply of serviced lots for the Town.

The Bonnyville and District Centennial Centre is just one more demonstration of the determination to respond to the growing recreational and educational demands of our population. The oil and gas industry in turn has been very supportive, so that these needed facilities and programs are realized. A recent commitment of one million toward the Centennial Centre by Canadian Natural symbolizes the interdependence of all of our residents including those who work for industry.

The leadership role which industry plays in our community is not limited to financial assistance for worthwhile public projects. The employees of oil companies are an integral part of our community. Their children attend the same schools, play soccer and ball and need to be provided with the same assurance of a promising future. Therefore, there is an ever-increasing commitment to the stewardship of the environment and of our community by industry players.



Although Bonnyville is in many ways an average small town with humble roots in rural Northeast Alberta, upon closer observation, it is rather unique in its achievements and somewhat magical in nature.