

## **British Columbia Chapter: Meetings Bring a Phenomenal Economic Boost**

According to a 2008 update to the Canadian Economic Impact Study (CEIS), the meetings industry adds \$71 billion a year to the Canadian economy. **Vito Curalli**, past president of Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Canada and managing director of sales in Canada for Hilton Sales Worldwide, presented the report to the British Columbia Chapter of MPI during National Meetings Industry Day April 15.

The report updates the groundbreaking economic study commissioned by MPI Canada in 2006. That report uncovered data that separated “measurable facts from word of mouth,” Curalli said. Canada was the first country to undertake such an initiative, and it set the benchmark for other regions that are only just beginning their research. The first U.S. study is due out in about a year.

The CEIS created measuring standards and studied the direct, indirect, and induced effects of the industry. A meeting was defined as “a gathering of at least 10 people for at least four hours in a contracted venue for a particular purpose.” Sports and entertainment events were excluded.

CEIS research found that 673,000 meetings per year in Canada created more than 550,000 full-time jobs per year and served an average of 70 million participants. The \$71 billion in overall economic output generated by these meetings produced \$14 billion in tax revenue for all levels of government.

“It’s phenomenal. This is a number to pass on if you are speaking to a government official,” said Curalli. “This was one of the worst recessions in our history, and Canada came out of it in under a year. It’s industries like ours that make that possible.”

Most of the 2008 figures did not show significant growth over data from 2006, which Curalli said is not surprising given that the study was conducted at the beginning of the economic downturn. “We are still booking more meetings in this country,” he said. “2010 is expected to be much stronger as companies start feeling comfortable sending people to meetings again.”

The study also looked at job creation, local versus international business, and tertiary impacts in the community. Curalli recommended that all participants read the 30-page executive summary, which is available at [mpiweb.org/ceis](http://mpiweb.org/ceis).

**Louisa Davis**, MPI member and senior project manager at Prime Strategies, presented Curalli with a \$5,000 donation to the MPI Foundation on behalf of the B.C. Chapter. Per capita, the B.C. Chapter is the largest contributor to the foundation worldwide. Curalli said \$1.7 million has been raised to date within Canada, and funds raised in Canada go toward supporting Canadian initiatives, such as creating the next generation of professionals by helping students through school.

**Ken Cretney**, general manager of the Vancouver Convention Centre, said this year’s event theme of prosperity was a perfect choice given the exciting momentum that is starting to build

after two years in a challenging economic climate. Cretney described the large crowds of participants from several conferences that were at that moment filling both the east centre and the newly constructed west centre; also, more business is scheduled between April and the end of June than was booked in all of 2009, excluding the period during the Olympic Games. “*That is prosperity,*” he said. “People were blown away by Vancouver during the Olympics. We couldn’t be in a better position.”

**Ryan Soderberg**, director of sales and marketing for Sheraton, presented the National Meetings Industry Day Influence Award to the Vancouver Airport Authority for its outstanding planning, execution, and wrap-up during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. The award recognizes groups and individuals in the community who have made a difference to the meetings industry as a whole. The airport authority’s careful planning ensured an excellent experience for the thousands of travellers during their first and last points of contact with Vancouver during the Games. **Paul Levy**, vice-president of planning for the Vancouver Airport Authority, accepted the award on behalf of his organization.

### “The Win Is Within”

Focusing on the journey and not the outcome will bring greater prosperity than you thought was possible, said **Jason Dorland** in his keynote speech. Perspective, process, and performance are the keys to enabling success.

Dorland is a former Olympic athlete who spent his youth investing everything he had in the goal of winning a gold medal in rowing at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. His high school coach taught him that first place was always the only acceptable finish. Society was embracing the viewpoint of Vince Lombardi, a famous and vocal football coach, who said that “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” Dorland’s team trained hard, fuelled themselves with anger against their competitors, and became the fastest rowers in North America. But their medals were never a reason to celebrate; they were only a source of relief that they could go back to their coach and “not be losers.”

A devastating loss planted the seeds for his eventual realization that true success is more than just winning. His team travelled to Seoul as the defending Olympic champions, but, in a shocking outcome, they came in last in the gold medal 2,000-metre round. “You set a goal and work toward it for years. The dream becomes an obsession. Then your moment arrives and you fail,” he said. “How do you think that feels? It is brutal. I wouldn’t wish that pain on anyone.”

The loss filled Dorland with feelings of disillusionment, frustration, disgust and—most of all—rage. “There was no sportsmanship. I heard the Germans celebrating my gold medal and I could have thrown my oar at them.” The anger and shame intensified when he came home to find his team’s failure displayed on the front page of *The Globe and Mail*. “Every day I thought about Seoul, then every night I would dream about the race and be miserable the rest of the day.”

Dorland decided the only cure was to win at the next Olympics. He threw himself into training, driven by thoughts of revenge. He got stronger and faster, but he began mistreating his friends, and, at the age of 25, he was becoming bitter. “One morning I woke up exhausted. Could I train

for four more years driven by hatred? No. I couldn't last four more days." He called his coach and quit the team. After an emotional night, he woke up feeling lighter than he had in years.

But Dorland's journey toward understanding prosperity was not over. He began teaching rowing at a high school, and he instilled in his students the same win-or-nothing attitude that he had been taught. His team did well, reaffirming his belief that hating your competitors and driving yourself is the only path to success. Things changed when he started dating Robyn Meagher, a competitive runner. On their first date, he asked her about her strategy for the upcoming Commonwealth Games. Her answer shocked and disgusted him: she said she planned to "do her best."

"It ruined the date for me," he said. "I thought her perspective was wrong." But he watched her at the games and saw how her process kicked in and earned her a silver medal. "It challenged everything I knew about how competitors went out to race." Over more conversations and races, Meagher showed him how training and competition both are parts of her overall life journey. Losses and setbacks did not devastate her; she saw them as opportunities to learn. Often, her focus on the race and not the finish led her to a better outcome than she had hoped for.

Seeing the same destructive anger in his student athletes that he had felt as a young man reinforced the lesson. He changed his coaching methods and saw that year's team reach a world record time despite what seemed like impossible odds. His students also gained friendships, emotional growth, and memories that would last them a lifetime. "By choosing to engage in the process, my life has become more fun, more fulfilling, and 100 times more prosperous," Dorland said. "The win is within. There's only one place to find it, and you're the only one who can."