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Katzie cabins opening for tourists

A project expected to boost the Katzie Indian Band's economic development portfolio, is igniting the enthusiasm of band members.

Katzie will soon finish work on seven cabins at their Pitt Lake reserve, which they intend to market as vacation properties. The seven rental units are the First Nation's first foray into the tourism business.

"The treaty office did a study four years ago asking the membership what we could do to make Katzie economically viable," explains Mike Leon, band councillor in charge of economic development. "Number one was fishing, then forestry and tourism was number three.

"If we can sustain ourselves, I think it will make it easier when we do step into a treaty. At least this way we've started something already that may start generating revenue for Katzie, may start building capacity for our nation, so that when we do sign a treaty one day at least we will be somewhat ready."

Band members are currently taking Tourism BC's SuperHost workshops for customer service training. Future plans include canoe and forest tours and an on-site interpretation centre offering workshops to the general public.

Leon said, "It (tourism) was an open door and we just wanted to step through and risk it." But getting to this point hasn't been easy for the band.

The band's decision in early 2000 not to renew the leases of cabin owners was met with considerable anger. Some cabin owners even torched their summer homes when their leases expired in 2003. Their actions attracted national media attention.

Since then relationships have begun to heal. Forest company J.S. Jones has donated excavator time, an operator, and barge to assist the band in cleaning up the debris left when the leases expired.

"They've been a huge, huge help," says Leon.

The A-frame cabins are located near the shores of Pitt Lake on forested property that is only accessible by boat.