

“OFF THE BEATEN PATH: FUN & UNIQUE CAMPBELL RIVER ACTIVITIES”

Ideally situated between the ocean, mountains, rivers, and forests, Campbell River is a diverse region, with a variety of activities available year-round. Hiking, golf, beach fires, restaurants, ski slopes and fishing are just a few of the options open to us within minutes of our homes! It is a pretty special place. And there are plenty of opportunities to be a tourist in your own backyard, with many local businesses offering unique ways to get to know Campbell River.

In this issue of In the Spotlight, we meet three entrepreneurs facilitating fun activities that are definitely 'off the beaten path.' All three have a similar goal: to showcase just how great our community is."

MEET RAFAEL HUBBARD - HEADCASE VR

Rafael and his wife, Sam, are an entrepreneurial force in Campbell River, running several businesses under Hubbard Management Ltd. One of their most successful ventures is the popular Industry Salon, run by Sam and employing several talented local hairstylists and estheticians. This award-winning business has been thriving since it opened its doors in 2013, and Rafael says that all of it is due to his wife.

“Sam is the most personable woman you will ever meet, and she loves this town,” he brags with a smile. “She is so community-minded and it really comes through in the business for her clients.”

After the success of Industry, Rafael and Sam decided that they wanted to try something different. They wanted to bring something to Campbell River that was unique and unexpected. After careful planning, they landed on their next big idea: a virtual reality arcade.



“We wanted our arcade to be different. We wanted it to feel like an Apple store!”

A New Way to Play

“We like to play around with traditional business models, shake them up a bit,” says Rafael. “That’s what we’ve done with Industry and it has been really positive.” A typical salon rents chair space to their stylists, and everybody essentially competes with one another for clients. At Industry, the professionals encourage clients to try other stylists, working with one another’s strengths to ensure that the customer receives a high-quality customer experience every time they visit.

Rafael says they aimed for something similar with Headcase VR, testing out a new approach. Most virtual reality arcades in existence right now go for the same type of aesthetic, he explains, employing an underground atmosphere with black lights, graffiti and untreated interiors. “We wanted our arcade to be different. We wanted it to feel like an Apple store!” So they aimed to create a Silicon Valley-esque space, with bright lights, white walls and an open floor plan. Rafael says that this was important in order to be inclusive to everybody, including families with children.

Designing the space was the first step in moving away from the perception of ‘gamer’ culture for Headcase VR. “When people think of the stereotypical ‘gamer’, they picture somebody alone, in a basement, playing games for hours on a screen. That’s not what we wanted to do,” Rafael explains. “Sam and I actually aren’t huge gamers, so it was easier for us to envision something more social.”

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The open space includes monitors and comfortable couches grouped together, so visitors can relax and watch their friends and family experience the virtual reality. The goal was to emphasize the sport of virtual reality and combine that with a love of playing video games.

“It really is the social aspect we are after,” says Rafael. “We want to mainstream the gaming experience and make it more like a sport.”



This has led to Headcase VR working to build their own VR team, which will compete with other arcades both regionally and globally. “We’ve secured sponsorships from local businesses, we’ve got shirts that will have logos on them, and we want to start challenging other teams in the near future! All of the elements that make sports teams so wonderful--teamwork, sportsmanship, practices, community, going for a beer or a bite after a game--that’s what we want to bring to VR.”

Crafting Experiences for Everybody

A recent story involving Headcase VR was [picked up by CBC news](#) and garnered national attention. A customer came in with his kids and wanted to try out a game. However, all of the games available required the use of hand controls and Darren Johansen is a quadriplegic.

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Headcase VR employee Trent Koecher did not like having to tell Darren that there was nothing he could do for him. So, on his own time after work, Trent researched and worked on some available software. The next day, he called Darren and asked him to come back. Darren was able to experience a full-throttle roller coaster ride through virtual reality, something he will likely never be able to do again in real life. Johansen was quoted as saying that he was “blown away” by how real that ride felt to him.

“To me, that story says it all,” says Rafael. “This technology can be so inclusive, it can have so many benefits to so many parts of our community!” He notes that one of the best parts of being at Headcase VR is watching people experience new things and new environments. “Darren is still a regular visitor and I couldn’t be happier.”

Headcase VR features a variety of games, ranging from hunting games to spacewalks, haunted houses to team combat. Rafael is always looking

to expand and refine their selection based on customer desires, saying that their ultimate goal is for people to explore something new and have fun.

That very reason is why the Headcase VR team is excited to be hosting a Spring Break Training Camp from March 26-30. This all-day camp features mental and physical learning for kids through incredible VR games. You can register them for a single day or two, or for the whole week. Visit the [Facebook](#) page for more information and to register.



Moving into the future, Rafael says they look forward to fine-tuning their branding and expanding into other communities. They also have a side-project in ideation, involving the use of virtual reality during pilot training. “We want to be on the leading edge of this technology,” he says with enthusiasm. “It’s so new! We feel like experimenters or explorers, working out the glitches and really helping to expand it in a big way.”

In the end, Rafael is excited to be operating this business in Campbell River, saying that Campbell River is all about connection with one another. “We want to amplify that community feeling, through the use of games and technology in a positive and social way. That’s what this business really does.”

MEET ANDY COWAN - NORTH ISLAND BATTLEFIELD

Andy Cowan moved from Leicester, England to Vancouver Island with his family almost 12 years ago. "I was working myself to death in Britain," he explains. Andy owned and operated six Domino's Pizza restaurants in the busy city and had started to suffer burnout. "We definitely moved here for the lifestyle change."

While researching immigration to Canada, and trying to decide what type of career he wanted to pursue, Andy thought of a popular activity he had noticed in Australia: outdoor laser tag. "I thought, oh, here we go. I'll try that." In a previous career, Andy spent over 10 years serving actively in the British Army and wanted to do something outside again. Mobile, outdoor laser tag was a perfect fit.



Andy has been operating [North Island Battlefield](#) in Campbell River since his arrival, and says he couldn't enjoy it more. Laughing, he states that his military background "could be the reason why he (sometimes) gets 'shouty' during laser tag games." "It's not my fault, I was trained for it!"

The choice to move to the area was due to several factors, including mild weather, relatives and the attractiveness of a small town. "I didn't want to live in a large city," says Andy. "Campbell River was a really good sized place for us."

High-Tech Fun

The equipment used to create an outdoor laser tag game is customizable to suit almost any size group, location and game style. Fun fact: the 'laser' shot from the equipment is not actually a laser at all. It is infrared light, working like a TV remote (though much more powerful!) with an outdoor range of up to 150 metres. In addition, the taggers can be programmed with a range of capabilities and sound effects for playing a variety of games.

The style of play is custom to each event and has a wide variety of options. Players' equipment is programmed according to the game, and special 'battle boxes' can include things like extra 'lives.' Games like Capture the Flag, Terminator, Hunger Games and King of the Hill are popular.

"As a mobile operation, I come to you," Andy points out on his website. "The best locations to play have enough cover to hide behind, but aren't overgrown enough to make movement difficult." Andy also notes that if you don't have a place in mind to hold the event, he has several locations that he makes use of on a regular basis. Finally, the equipment has recently been upgraded to reduce 'bounce' off walls and furniture, allowing greater opportunities for indoor games!

Other services offered by North Island Battlefield include Mobile Mini-Golf and Soft Archery, both activities that can be set up and played year-round. Both games are great for all ages



and offer a wide variety of set-up options. "Somebody could set up an 18-hole golf game in their office building, or we could host soft archery practice for kids at a school fair," explains Andy. "These are really versatile set-ups that can go pretty much anywhere."

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Work-Life Balance

Andy could be called a serial entrepreneur--he recently opened a second business, [Fandom Fun](#), taking on printing jobs during North Island Battlefield's off-season--but he quickly dismisses this title.

“I don’t really work too hard,” he chuckles. “Yes, I am busy, but it is nothing compared to what I was dealing with in Britain. I really aim to maintain a good work-life balance.” Andy is a one-man show, operating North Island Battlefield all over the island. He has worked in Cobble Hill, Port McNeil, and pretty much everywhere in between. “I could arguably be a bigger business than I am at the moment, but I am happy where I am.”

North Island Battlefield usually starts its busy season by Easter Long Weekend and stays roaring right through to the end of June. It slows down during the hot summer months and then picks up quickly in September until the weather starts to turn. Andy says that this schedule suits him, and maintains that he isn’t burning himself out during the busy months; “Doing laser tag isn’t work, really. It’s fun!”

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When asked where he sees his business going in the future, Andy once again laughs. “I’ll probably keep doing what I’m doing until I drop dead! It’s just a lot of fun to see the players--mostly kids, but also adults. They’re just big kids. It’s great to see them out and enjoying it. And I can hardly remember a single person, in almost 12 years, who played and said that they didn’t have a good time.”



MEET LAUREL CRONK - ISLAND JOY RIDES

Laurel Cronk, a former teacher, says that she would likely still be teaching today if a friend hadn't handed her a book to read over seven years ago. "It sounds hokey," she laughs, "but a book literally did change my life."

That book was "Career Renegade" by Jonathan Fields, and the first chapter asks the reader to perform a simple task: write down 10 things that make you come alive.

"So that's what I did," Laurel says. "One night, in bed, I wrote down ten things on a scrap piece of paper. I came up with things like food, wine, bringing people together, nature, biking hiking--all of these are really important to me." She showed the list to her husband and friends, and the gears started to turn. She began to think that she could turn these values into a company. "Some of my friends thought I was crazy!" Laurel admits. But the idea stuck.

Fast-forward to today and her bike-tour company, [Island Joy Rides](#), is about to enter its eighth season of operations. "I really can't believe how much we've grown," says Laurel with a smile. "It's been wonderful."

A Unique Way To Explore

Island Joy Rides currently has 32 bikes and 2 trailers to offer their customers, and has created a variety of extraordinary tour options to choose from. All tours take place in Campbell River or the Comox Valley, with options to explore Quadra, Denman and Hornby Island. Ranging from a few hours to a few days and accommodating all levels of ability, these curated expeditions include a variety of activities involving other local businesses.

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“Tours like our Chef on a Bike day-trip are very popular, with locals and tourists alike!” Laurel explains. These tours bring in local chefs, such as Chef Ronald from Locals restaurant in Courtenay, to lead the group on an ingredient adventure. Participants explore the farmer’s market with Chef Ronald, learning about locally-grown food from the people who produce it. They also meet with a professional forager who shows you the food that grows right under your feet! After the market, the tour rides to a nearby vineyard, distillery or craft brewery for refreshing tastings and a look behind-the-scenes of production. To cap off the day, guests enjoy a feast at Locals prepared with the ingredients found earlier in the day.

“We really could not do it without partners like these,” says Laurel. “Island Joy Rides is proud to act as a link to bring together all of this greatness that exists here! It’s been very well received. I don’t think we’ve approached anybody that hasn’t wanted to get involved.” Island Joy Rides also partners up with hotels, spas and other adventure tour groups. “Our current focus is expansion of our multi-adventure tours! We are really excited to continue diversifying in that area.”

New this year, the multi-adventure ‘MOVEme Campbell River’ tour combines several incredible activities into one trip and is perfect for a special

getaway. Partners such as 49 North Helicopters and Campbell River Whale Watching come together with Island Joy Rides to build spectacular, multi-adventure tours. “The basic concept is to peddle, paddle, hike, fly, float and feast over the course of 5 days, to really experience the magic of Campbell River,” explains Laurel. “I’m so excited about this one! We take care of everything and people can just relax and explore.”

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A Community Affair

For Laurel, what makes Island Joy Rides truly special is how the company works to bring together different parts of the community. Her tour guides, for example, are locals with a passion for sharing our region with others and for helping to create a memorable experience for everyone.

“Our team is incredible. You really have to find that special someone or the tours just don’t work,” says Laurel. She explains that for this reason, the team has grown very organically over the years, which is just the way she likes it.

Through its partnerships, Island Joy Rides also highlights members of the business community in a unique way, showcasing hospitality and tourism as a prime offering of Campbell River. When asked, Laurel says that her vision for the future of her company involves expanding those partnerships to include a wider range of activities and businesses.

“It would be great to incorporate something like golf or fishing. I can envision all kinds of different ways to link more experiences together!” she says with enthusiasm. And, when it comes to Campbell River itself, Laurel says she wouldn’t want to live or work anywhere else. “It all goes back to having this amazing opportunity to share the nature, the people, the adventure, the food--all of the raw beauty that exists here. I just love it.”

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While the busy season typically kicks off in May at Island Joy Rides, bookings are already filling up. Laurel says that she hasn’t advertised very much to locals, focusing instead on tourists visiting the area. But that doesn’t mean local residents aren’t joining the ride!

“It’s so much fun to show locals a place that they’ve never been to, right in their own backyard! And it’s a fabulous way to celebrate a birthday, an anniversary or any other special occasion.” She’s noticed that day-tours, especially in the Chef on a Bike series, are reserved faster and faster every year. Her advice? Don’t wait to book your spot. “From here on out it gets busier and busier, and it’s just really enjoyable.”

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE



Open for Business Winner

Did you hear that Campbell River won Small Business BC's Open for Business Award at their recent gala in Vancouver? The award recognized our Modern Entrepreneur and CRAdvantage initiatives. As a city with more than 25,000 people, we competed against a number of municipalities, including our co-finalists Prince George and Penticton, in the Large Community category.

The Open for Business Awards celebrate communities that have created a business friendly culture, allowing small business to flourish. Business retention and expansion is one of our five areas of focus in economic development, so it's an honour that the city's efforts have been recognized in this area.

Smart Cities Challenge

Campbell River's Economic Development team is excited to announce that the City of Campbell River is entering the Canada-wide Smart Cities Challenge! This is an opportunity to strengthen our community and create real opportunity for our local residents.

What Is The Smart Cities Challenge?

This federal initiative is put forth by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Communities, and aims to empower Canadian communities, big and small, to address local issues using 'smart city' solutions. This means looking at specific challenges we face as a community and developing responses that utilize connected technology and data to come up with solutions and create opportunity.

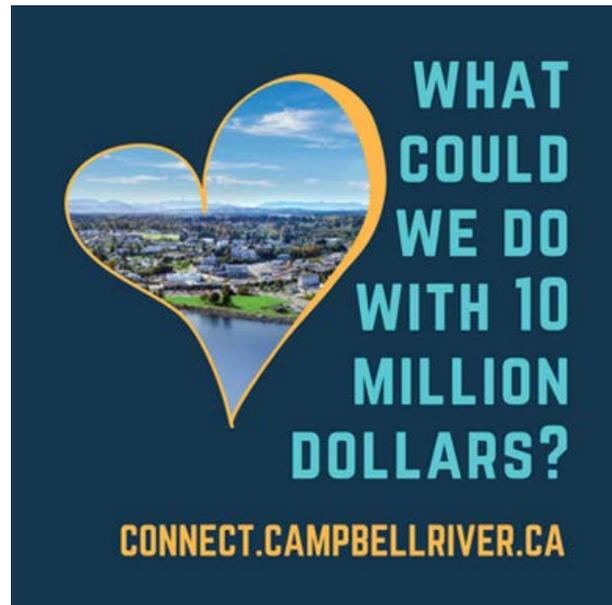


The Challenge poses this question: how can your community identify issues and achieve meaningful outcomes using technology and data?

Campbell River is hoping to answer that question in 2018, and win one of several prizes to help implement our innovative ideas. The Challenge is open to municipalities, regional governments and Indigenous communities across Canada, so the competition will be fierce! There are four significant prizes to be given to the winning communities:

- 1 prize of \$5 million
- 2 prizes of \$10 million
- 1 grand prize of \$50 million

Campbell River is competing for the \$10 million.



What Are Our Goals?

Campbell River wants to be one of Canada's Smart Cities and we are already well on our way! At the end of 2017, we introduced CRAdvantage,

bringing high-speed internet access to our downtown core. We are the first community on Vancouver Island to implement this city-owned network, and it has already brought international attention and awards to Campbell River.

How can we build on that momentum? What perceived ‘unsolvable’ problems can we tackle and overcome by working together while using Cradvantage and other technologies and data? The possibilities seem endless.

How Can People Get Involved?

Engaging with Campbell River community members is the first and most important step in building our Smart Cities application. We need your ideas! This is your chance to shape Campbell River’s future.



- How can we use technology to solve pressing issues facing our community?
- What opportunities could we take advantage of while using CRadvantage?
- What resources do we need to implement those solutions?
- How can we use technology and data to help Campbell River residents?

The focus of our engagement is to create a clear Challenge Statement, which will guide our Smart Cities initiative throughout the process.

Let’s work together to develop our unique **Challenge Statement**, one that considers the questions listed above and fits into the following format.

Challenge Statement:

“Our community will _____ by doing _____.”

Here are some ways to learn more about the Challenge, share your thoughts and vote on your favourite ideas:

- Social media platforms like [Facebook](#)
- Our [Smart Cities Challenge online forum](#)
- Face-to-face conversations out and about in the community – watch for our Street Team

So please join us, online or face-to-face, and help Campbell River reach new heights with the Smart Cities Challenge. We can’t do it without you!



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