

# Okanagan College welcomes Jamaican pupils

The Okanagan is getting ready to welcome dozens of Jamaicans who will arrive this fall to study and work, mainly in Kelowna.

Officials from Okanagan College, the Central Okanagan Regional District, and that Caribbean island nation have developed agreements in the past couple of months to have Jamaicans travel to B.C.'s southern interior for work and post-secondary training.

Okanagan business representatives and economic officials hope the arrangement will help meet the need for skilled labour in the area, and they say the College will ensure they are trained and accredited.

The initiative by the College's business school, international education department and trades

and apprenticeship department and supported by the Regional District began early this year.

College and Regional District representatives, along with some Okanagan employers, met with Jamaica's Prime Minister and two ministers this spring in Jamaica.

"This has developed faster and further than we first conceived," Okanagan College President Jim Hamilton says.

EDC Chair Ross Langford says they quickly realized there are many skilled workers in Jamaica interested in coming to Canada for employment.

Jamaican Labour Minister Derrick Kellier says, "We will do all that we can to expedite the linkages between our nation and the Okanagan for the benefit of students and our skilled workers."

Kellier says new services are being introduced in the Okañagan to support the expected arrival of skilled workers and College students this fall.

A new Jamaican liaison office and consular services, operating under the Jamaican High Commissioner to Canada, will be established in Kelowna, Kellier said last month.

Skilled Jamaican workers have already been interviewed by Okanagan employers, with some expected to arrive this fall. Jamaican students have applied to Okanagan College and should start arriving in September.

Kellier also announced a new consultancy project for Okanagan College, focused on starting a credit program for Jamaica. Professors with expertise in small- and medium-sized business will work with of-

ficials from Kellier's ministry on a program to help unemployed and underemployed people get the financing necessary to start small businesses.

Officials will look at the potential of establishing a furniture manufacturing company in Jamaica to meet the needs of the growing hotel sector, Kellier says. "We believe the ingredients are there, with some assistance, to develop an industry in furniture manufacturing. Okanagan College can play a critical role in helping us develop business plans and look at meeting the training needs of such an enterprise."

"Part of our role is to contribute to the region's social, cultural and economic development," Okanagan College Board of Governors Chair Janet Shaw says.