

Valley forges economic links with Jamaica

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■ 3-day visit by Jamaican minister produces agreements on education and trade

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Atired but happy Derrick Kellier flew out of Kelowna Wednesday afternoon after a whirlwind three-day mission to connect the Okanagan with Jamaica.

The Jamaican minister of labour and social security led a nine-member delegation that cemented a relationship between his government, Okanagan College, the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission and local business community.

Among the accomplishments:

■ 150 skilled workers are expected to come to the Okanagan this year. Job fairs and interviews by employers have already been conducted on the island.

■ Thirty Jamaican students are expected to enrol in Okanagan College's business, technical and engineering programs in September, more in February 2008.

■ A new Jamaican liaison office and consular services, operating under the Jamaican high commission-



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

Derrick Kellier, Jamaica's minister of labour and social security, speaks at The Grand Hotel on Tuesday. Kellier was in town to announce a new Jamaican liaison office and consular services that will be established in Kelowna, operating under the Jamaican high commissioner to Canada.

er to Canada, will be established in Kelowna as quickly as possible.

■ College professors with expertise in small- and medium-size businesses will work with the Jamaican ministry to develop a micro-credit

program to help unemployed and underemployed people get financing to start small businesses.

■ The college and Jamaican ministry of industry, technology, energy and commerce will work with other agencies, such as the Canadian International Development Agency, to explore the potential of establishing a furniture manufacturing company in Jamaica.

"We believe that, by and large, the support we have gotten from the leadership of the college and the economic development commission has put us on a fast track in achieving the goals that we have set," Kellier told The Daily Courier Wednesday in an interview.

"I think we have cemented the foundation for a lasting future. There is a buzz in the air. I think we have accomplished 100 per cent of what we came to do."

"This is a classic case of how you build a business relationship," added Robert Fine, EDC commissioner.

"The speed in which this has worked has been remarkable.

"It's funny, people have the perception that things are laid-back and slow in Jamaica. I've never seen an initiative with a foreign country that has become a reality so quickly."