

37.26 S&P/TSX COMP.  
Closed at 9162.36

4.46 TSX VENTURE  
Closed at 1799.61

37.03 DOW JONES  
Closed at 10498.59

26.14 NASDAQ  
Closed at 2046.09

## ECONOMY

# JobWave reaches milestone

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Within a span of a few months, Stephen Venn went from depressed, unemployed and homeless to a solid job, his own place and an ear-to-ear grin.

Wednesday morning he was even sharing a stage and back-patting with Premier Gordon Campbell.

The Duncan resident had his 15 min-

utes of fame as the 30,000th British Columbian to shed social assistance and enter the workforce through the JobWave program, a public-private partnership between Victoria-based human resources company WCG International and the provincial government.

While Campbell used the milestone and a throng of media to trumpet economic growth and B.C.'s increasing job growth, Venn made the most of

his moment in the spotlight.

"I was in a rut. I'm out of it now. And I'm proud of myself," said a smiling Venn, stealing an unscripted chance at the podium between politicians and business people.

He had been living a contented life in Vancouver, working at a mall and doing homecare work when his nine-year relationship fell apart and a spiral of depression began. He lived with friends and

family, couldn't find work and didn't care if he did.

A JobWave outlet in Duncan, contracted by WCG International, got Venn back on track. He started pulling his personal life together — talking with a counsellor about his breakup, buying clothes for job interviews, setting up a \$10 haircut. Then JobWave took a look at his skills.

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## Jobs: Feeling good

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He eventually got a job at Vancouver Island Recycling, separating recycled goods from garbage, for \$8 an hour.

"It's not much but it's a start," Venn said in an interview. "I've got a job and my own place. I'm not living with Mom anymore and I feel good about myself. When I came to Duncan I was very lonely. I had a backpack and wallet. I was lost and I didn't know where to turn. This JobWave ... it really works. It gets you back on your feet again. It's nice not to be on assistance anymore."

WCG International, founded by former IBM executive and longtime Victoria businessman Ian Ferguson, is one of four agencies in B.C. contracted by the Ministry of Human Resources to get people off public assistance and leading productive lives. The company said no other comparable program in Canada has achieved more than 30,000 placements.

By partnering with 43 chambers of commerce and other community organizations and small businesses provincially, WCG prepares and then places workers into a wide range of jobs from service and retail to construction.

There is no subsidy for employers. In its deal with the province, WCG gets paid for a placement only when the worker has been employed for 19 consecutive months. The company's cut is a portion of the savings the government gains from

having that person off the public purse.

Ferguson said Wednesday that WCG's 30,000 placements through JobWave and Triumph Vocational Services — a branch of the program which deals with special needs and handicapped workers — has saved the government about \$120 million.

WCG received more than 250,000 calls last year at its call centre on Fort Street from people looking for work. Among those was Judith Tousignant, a 51-year-old mother of two laid off last year from the Ministry of Health after 18 years. Her department was privatized. She has an 18-year-old daughter and a nine-year-old son who is diabetic, and is finding it difficult to find a good-paying job to support her family without updated skills, and because of her age.

At Job Wave on Fort Street, she gets access to a counsellor for job and personal advice and access to a computer to hunt for jobs and brush up her resume.

Brendan O'Neill said he suffers from depression and has been looking for work since October. He appreciates the human contact with job counsellors, who regularly meet with him to explore possible jobs and talk about how he's feeling, and with the comfortable atmosphere at the new job-search headquarters located at 838 Fort St., near the call centre.

"It's a chance to explore options in a non-stressful environment," said O'Neill. "Here they are helping you find a career, not just a job."