

**For Immediate Release
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THE EXPLORATION PLACE MUSEUM AND SCIENCE CENTRE WINS 2008 'EMPLOYEES FIRST' AWARD

VANCOUVER –The Exploration Place Museum and Science Centre, located in Prince George, is this year's recipient of the 'Employees First' award presented by go2 - the BC tourism industry's human resources association.

The 'Employees First' Award is presented each year to a BC tourism employer to recognize exceptional standards of excellence in human resources and people management. The award was presented last night at the ninth annual BC Tourism Awards gala, held in Vancouver as part of the provincial tourism industry conference.

"The museum staff are our most important asset," says Executive Director Tracy Calogheros. "My team is central to the product we are providing, the visitor experience, but the truth is, we can't compete on pay alone and we were losing staff to higher wages every week! Looking ahead to looming labour shortages in all fields we developed an HR strategy aimed solely at retention of staff through creative benefits, work/life balance and communication. This recognition from go2 and Tourism British Columbia is not only gratifying but a real encouragement to keep up our efforts!"

In order to more effectively recruit and retain staff and address work-life issues, The Exploration Place started by conducting a full review of their operation. This resulted in a new management structure that allowed managers to become more engaged in all areas of the operation. A formal human resource program was implemented under the direction of the Operations Manager. Providing work-life balance has been a key to their success and their retention rates are reflecting this. Here are a few examples:

- Job sharing and flexible work hours were introduced to provide flexibility for junior employees to work in multiple departments and gain a variety of work experiences.
- A child care program was developed that allowed all employees to have access to free childcare.
- An informal staff appreciation and recognition program was developed and includes team building events such as staff parties and a slow-pitch team.
- A formal employee review process was created incorporating coaching and goal setting.
- Wages were increased and an RRSP program was offered for full-time staff.

"The Exploration Place winning this award goes to show that you don't need to be a large company with deep pockets to implement innovative HR programs," said Arlene Keis, CEO of go2. "Even as a small, non-profit they have demonstrated the importance of good leadership and discovering what are the barriers to recruitment and retention in their operation and implementing creative ways to overcome them."

All nominees for the 'Employees First' Award had to submit an information package that demonstrated how their company has implemented effective HR/people management practices within their organization. Additionally, nominees had to show how these HR practices have positively impacted employee development, loyalty, morale, and their organization's bottom line. For selection, a panel designated by Tourism British Columbia judged the nominees against the criteria.

About go2

Established by the BC tourism industry in April 2003, go2 is the resource for people in tourism. go2's mission is to assist the tourism industry as they address challenges in attracting employees and retaining its workforce in order to support industry growth. For more information on go2 and human resource development initiatives for BC's tourism industry, visit www.go2hr.ca.

About The Exploration Place Museum and Science Centre

The 23,000 square foot Exploration Place Museum and Science Centre is owned and operated by the Fraser-Fort George Museum Society, a non-profit and registered charity. Construction of the Museum was funded by the National Museums Assistance Program, the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George and the Government of British Columbia. The Society is celebrating its 50th Anniversary in 2008. The newly renovated Exploration Place was opened in 2001 with funding from the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, The Government of Canada, Canfor Corporation, and The Government of British Columbia. For more information, visit: www.theexplorationplace.com.

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