



Date: September 20, 2017

New First Nations Court in Merritt to improve delivery of justice

VANCOUVER, B.C. – Provincial Court Chief Judge Thomas J. Crabtree announced today that British Columbia’s fifth First Nations Court, the “Nicola Valley Indigenous Court”, will open in Merritt in October 2017.

First Nations Courts currently operate in four B.C. communities - New Westminster, Duncan, Kamloops and North Vancouver. First Nations in the Nicola Valley invited the Provincial Court to work with them to develop a court that could help address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people involved in the criminal justice system.

As a result of their initiative, the Court was involved in a process of consultation and planning with First Nations, B.C.’s Ministry of Attorney General, the community of Merritt, B.C. Community Corrections, lawyers, the Legal Services Society, the Law Foundation, police, and support service groups.

Today’s announcement is a significant step in the ongoing process of community involvement in the creation of innovative solutions to improve the delivery of justice. The Court will start to sit once a month commencing in October 2017 at the circuit court location in Merritt, B.C.

The opening ceremony for the Court will take place at the Shulus Arbour* on the Lower Nicola Indian Band Reserve on October 10, 2017 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. followed by a meal at the Merritt Civic Centre. The event is open to the public.

A First Nations Court is a sentencing court. It provides an Indigenous perspective, based on a holistic and restorative approach, to sentencing Indigenous persons who have acknowledged responsibility for their criminal offence(s). Local Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers who have completed a program of orientation give advice on a healing plan. The healing plan may then be incorporated as part of a fit sentence for the Indigenous person who has pled guilty.

For more information, please contact the Legal Officer, Office of the Chief Judge, at info@provincialcourt.bc.ca.

*The Shulus Arbour is located approximately seven kilometres northwest of Merritt on Highway 8 (the highway to Spences Bridge). The Arbour is located behind the Shulus Community Arena at 2164 Neale Road.