**Cha-ching!**

**Local businesses landing lucrative contracts at massive construction site in Long Harbour**

Only a small percentage of the many contracts for the US$2.8-billion nickel processing plant have so far been awarded by Vale Inco Newfoundland and Labrador.

But the activity is already paying dividends for a wide range of companies, from giants like Pennecon Ltd. of St. John's, which is carrying out much of the early site work, to local convenience stores.

"It's meant a lot to my business," said Andy Power, owner of Andy's North Atlantic service station in Chapel Arm, which - at about nine kilometres away - is the closest gas station to the construction project.

Power's station supplies gasoline and other products to Pennecon, and reports a "significant increase" in business over the same period last year.

His son's company, Auto Tech, is also reporting a surge, Power said.

Power made a major investment in his business a year or so ago to ensure he would be ready and capable of capitalizing on the uptick in the local economy.

So far, it's paying off.

"I could see what was happening," said Power, who, at age 70, shows no signs of slowing down.

From fuel and snacks to waste removal and site security, the list of companies benefiting from the project is long, and will grow substantially as construction activities increase in the spring.

Metal fabrication companies throughout the region are priming for a substantial boost in activity, construction firms are busy submitting tenders on the many contracts up for grabs, and even utility companies have grabbed a share of the business. One area resident said there have been hundreds of new utility poles installed in recent months.

While the nickel plant has been a catalyst for all the activity, an injection of public money has also generated business. It's estimated that $15 million has been spent on highway upgrades in the past year, and millions more on municipal infrastructure in places such as Placentia, Whitbourne and Long Harbour.

"We have stepped up big-time and made major contributions in the past year alone," said Placentia-St. Mary's MHA Felix Collins.

There has been some grumbling about the slow pace of the awarding of contracts, but one St. John's businessman said that's to be expected for such a large project.

Dan King, owner of CGI Development and Capital Crane, said a boom is on the horizon.

"It's really just starting," said King, whose company won the contract to build a new fire hall in the town. His firm is also wrapping up construction on a new subdivision of more than 30 mini-homes in Long Harbour.

King praised Vale Inco for its support of local companies, and for leading by example.

"The purchase of a project sign may seem like a small thing, but that was something they did. They made sure it was bought from a local company in the area," said King.

And as Long Harbour-Mount Arlington Heights grows, businesses in the town hope to grow along with it.

Gen Bruce, owner of Hair Magic, hasn't ruled out the possibility of expanding her business, and perhaps hiring a second hairstylist.

"I'm weighing all my options," she said.

A dozen business owners in the town recently formed an association, with the aim of making sure they benefit from all the activity taking place on their doorstep.

The association is chaired by Cecil King Jr., who runs Magtek Inc., a metal fabrication and machine shop at the entrance to the town. The company has expanded its range of services in recent months, and can attribute practically 100 per cent of its business to activity at the construction site.

"Anyone with ambition can have a chance here to realize an opportunity," said King, who returned to Long Harbour last year following a 21-year career in the air force.

Down the road at Burke's Convenience, owner Cathy Kelly is checking in a customer and chatting about the increased traffic and strange vehicles that can now be seen zig-zagging along the town's winding, rutted roads.

Her business is one of two convenience stores in the town. She compliments the contracting companies for patronizing her business, and is grateful for the increased sales. She's even increased her inventory of products.

And like Bruce, she's re-evaluating her business.

"I've got things in mind, she said.

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Terry Roberts

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1. Give some examples of how people are benefitting from the “spin-offs” of this project.
2. What have the local people done to ensure they maximize the benefits from the project?
3. What negative effects to the local residents can a project like the nickel processing plant have?
4. Given an opportunity, what type of business would you start in Long Harbour?