

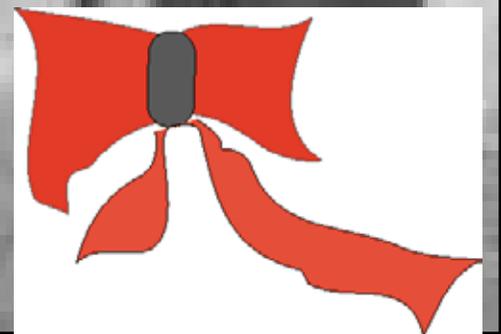
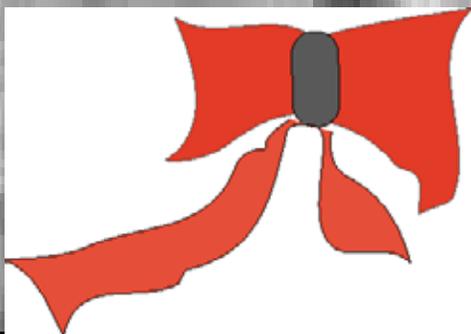
Issue 152 December 22nd 1997

Discovery Islander

Community News and Events from the Discovery Islands



Merry Christmas



Discovery Islander

#152 December 22nd, 1997

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Submissions may be left at **Quadra Foods or Heriot Bay Store.**

Opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the writers and are not necessarily the views of the publishers.

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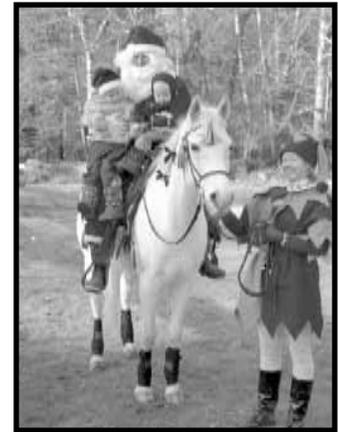
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*Santa Claus pays a pre-Christmas visit to the Quadra island Therapeutic Riding Centre.
Photo: Tanya Storr*

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Editorial

With the mild temperatures, clear blue skies and warm sunshine last week I have had trouble realizing that the holiday season, and therefore winter, is here! Last week, while hiking around on Chinese Mountains, I spotted a Nootka Rose in bloom. It was just one small bloom on the bush but it hit home that it was the middle of December and we were getting warm sun on our faces. Don't get me wrong. I am not complaining! This mild weather has been much appreciated, but it has been hard to feel that sense of urgency about preparations for the festive season. And, with the arrival of the winter solstice and our respective holidays ultimately comes the end of 1997.

For each of us the completion of the year and the beginning of a new one means something unique. One thing we do share though is that we have experienced change of some kind. Some of us change our jobs, relationships, the place we live or people we live with, get a pet, have new thoughts and ideas, perhaps find a new hobby, experience a new life or the passing of a loved one. So, here's to the changes the coming year might bring to us all, and have a happy holiday season.

Sheahan

Deadline For Next Issue 5pm December 31st
Only Items Received Before The Deadline
can be guaranteed space in the upcoming issue.
 Drop off at the Heriot Bay Store or Quadra Foods or fax to 285-2236
 Lengthy items preferred on disk, Saved As "Word for Mac" or by email.
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Island Tides

For Q-Cove Dec.23-Dec.31

Day	Pacific Stand Time	Ht/ft.	Ht/m
MO	0410	8.3	
2.5			
22	1120	14.1	
4.3			
	1915	7.5	
2.3			
TU	0035	10.7	
3.3			
23	0500	9.3	
2.8			
	1200	14.0	
4.3			
	1955	6.6	
2.0			
WE	0155	11.3	
3.4			
24	0555	10.2	
3.1			
	1235	13.8	
4.2			
	2035	5.6	
1.7			
TH	0300	12.0	
3.7			
25	0650	10.8	
3.3			
	1305	13.7	
4.2			
	2115	4.6	
1.4			
FR	0345	12.6	
3.8			
26	0740	11.2	
3.4			
	1335	13.6	
4.1			
	2150	3.7	
1.1			
SA	0425	13.2	
4.0			
27	0830	11.5	
3.5			
	1410	13.6	

pielou

Premier G. Clarke
Government of British Columbia
Victoria, B.C.

Island Forum

Dear Sir;

I am writing to protest the recent fare increase on the Quadra Island /Campbell River ferry. To be added to the previous numerous and substantial increases we have had over past few years this latest fare hike is usurious and unfair. I feel a little history is in order to understand how we have gotten to this point.

I have chosen to live on Quadra and when I did so the service was run by the Dept. of Highways. The service was provided by two very seaworthy vessels, "Tachek" and "Quadra Queen". They provided room for 35 cars and ran every half hour. The return fare for a car and driver was \$2.50. Shortly thereafter the service was taken over by B.C. Ferry Corp. and some big changes were in store us.

Demolition of a very serviceable dock at Campbell River paved the way for the creation of a huge new parking lot to handle all the cars that would now have to wait for the new hourly service. Total price for the new dock was 7.5 million dollars. This was supposedly to be recouped by a long term saving of wages from cutting back on the crew. Then came the unseaworthy new bigger ferry that was so under-powered for the extremely hazardous waters that it was almost swept away by the current and wind on more than one occasion. So we got a different ferry with more power. Too bad it didn't fit the brand new dock. Large wedges of wood were screwed to the deck with wire mesh on them for traction to attempt to make the ramp usable. Considerable damage was frequent for over-length vehicle and semis. Not too long after that we got another

ferry that sort of fits the ramp and usually has enough power. In my opinion our present ferry is nowhere near as seaworthy as the vessels previously mentioned.

All these changes were done with no user input and I quite wrongly assumed that the totally incompetent decision makers at B.C.Ferries could screw up to their hearts content so long as the government was willing to bank roll these blunders. But no, it is not to be, now it seems, we, the users are now to pay. Well, quite frankly sir, I can't buy that. If the mandate of B.C. Ferry Corp. was to take over these smaller runs for efficiency or cost effective management then surely any fool can see this has not been the case. And now the B.C. Ferry Corp. has by its own mistakes amassed a unbelievable 500 million dollar debt. To put this upon the backs of the very long suffering users of these runs is the last straw.

This government has to see the practical side that the ferries have to answer to the same rate hike guide lines as B.C. Hydro or B.C. Tel or many other service providers. People and businesses make long term commitments and plans based on a stability of transportation cost. Whole communities are literally being held to ransom here. The worst of it is that we are not being asked to to pay for a safe passage but to help pay down some totally pointless expenditures that we had no say in.

Robert, Heather, Sam and Braden Simpson

The Honourable Dan Miller, Deputy
Premier,
Parliament Buildings,

Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4

Dear Mr. Miller,

In the last three and a half years, the ferry fares for commuter passengers and cars to Quadra Island have increased 137% and 84%, respectively. The latest increase has caused ridership to fall such that peak hour sailing that used to be full now are often less than half occupied. While you and the Premier seem to be under the impression that the Gulf Islands are the playgrounds of the rich, I can assure you that most of us are average British Columbians who must live from paycheque to paycheque.

The province subsidizes most every aspect of public transportation: Lower Mainland buse; \$237 million, Victoria buses; \$29 million, interior ferries; \$17 million etc. etc. Meanwhile, you have slashed the BC Ferries subsidy from \$50 million to \$4.7 million in just a few short years. This, while saddling us with expensive white elephants such as "Fast Cats" and and a new vehicle dock in Bella Bella (which incidentally has only a couple of kms. of road but **is in your riding!**)

Therefore, I must ask you, **What the heck were you thinking when you came up with this policy of "user pay" for every ferry route!** It is clear that many of the smaller routes cannot survive under this policy. You must rescind this unfair and inequitable policy (and rate increases!) at once and begin to pay something more than lip service to the stakeholder process. Otherwise, you can expect the **"minor route"**

ferry users to show your government that **"minority"** (as in minority government) is the proper use of this word.

Yours truly,
David Alger
(disgruntled former NDP supporter)

P.S. Oh by the way, we did notice that you found \$270 million to save 500 or so jobs at the Skeena Cellulose Mill (another coincidence, you worked there before entering politics!)

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2. Fax it to 285-2236
3. E-mail to: alpine@island.net
4. Mail to Box 482, Heriot Bay, V0P1H0
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Island Forum

Increase in B.C. Ferry Fares

December 12, 1997
To: Glen Clark,
The Premier's Office,
Legislature Building,
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Mr. Clark:

I am a Quadra Islander and I am one of Glen Robertson's constituents who has been adversely affected by recent Ferry fare hikes put in place by the Ferry Corporation. I believe that this notion being promoted by the NDP government of making 'users pay' through the nose to use our ferries arises as a result of ignorance and bias. I'd like to explain to you some of the reasons why this approach is misguided and political suicide.

First of all, I think all of the decision makers have failed to appreciate the fundamental difference between a commuter ferry service such as Quadra and the larger ferries that are used more occasionally by individuals. Our trip to Campbell River is a short one. The crossing, even in heavy seas, takes not more than 15 minutes. While

don't know the actual mileage my guess would be that it is not more than one nautical mile across. The route is probably shorter than some bridges. We are, in essence, an extension of the larger Campbell River community. Many of us work on Vancouver Island and have to cross on an almost daily basis. But even for those who don't work there, all of us have to go to Campbell River regularly to conduct any sort of business. This means that if we have to go to the hospital, or see a medical specialist, or get dental work done, or go to our children's highschool, or talk to our lawyer or our accountant, or shop for almost anything other than groceries, we must get on the ferry. Think about that for every time you left your driveway to get on a public highway you had to pay \$11 you'd soon notice the impact on your family's standard of living. In fact, for ordinary working people it is making it impossible to live.

Do you really believe that the people who live on islands are any different than people who live in other parts of the province? Perhaps you should know that a great many of the people who live on small islands in our coastal communities are **commercial fishers**. Yep, these are the same people who you so desperately wanted to help you when you thought you could make political points by bashing Ottawa. Corky Evans, our Fisheries Minister, came to speak at our Thunderbird Hall in Campbell River (the Quadra fishers had to take the ferry to hear him speak). I have him on tape bemoaning the fact that as a provincial

politician he could do so little to help out the poor fishers. Well, here is the NDP double whammy. Not only has our livelihood been all but extinguished over the last three years, but now we can pay more than anyone can afford, other than the truly rich, to simply commute to and from our local community services.

If you as a government could legitimately say that you aren't going to subsidize the highways or transportation system anywhere in the province then there might be some justification for what you are doing to Islanders. But you and I both know that this is not the case and the subsidies given to other areas of the province to maintain the highways system in a useable state are so numerous that I won't bother listing them, other than to suggest that I think there should no longer be public snow removal from any of the highways in Dan Miller's riding. Too expensive. Let all the users of the various roads get together and pay for it themselves when snow removal is needed.

I'd also like to suggest that if you are going to insist on a total user pay system then there should also be immediate steps taken to start reinvesting on Quadra Island the Quadra property tax money that currently goes to the local governments in Campbell River and Courtenay. We can have our own local government offices complete with municipal workers. A hospital and a highschool can be built to service the local community. With all the jobs created by these public works we will undoubtedly soon

attract many businesses and retailers. Pretty soon none of us will have any reason to go across to Vancouver Island and we'll only have to make the trip occasionally. The truth is Islanders are subsidizing government by using government services in the larger Vancouver Island communities next door rather than insisting on having them in their own community.

Another way in which the users of the ferries subsidize government is that we are being asked to pay for social programs put in place by the province. Students don't pay when they cross to go to school but the Ministry of Education doesn't reimburse the Ferry Corporation for their fares. Ditto for the old age pensioners who get reduced rates. And double ditto for the MLAs who get to ride the ferries for free. Why isn't the government reimbursing the Corporation for all the reduced and free fares it is requiring the Corporation to offer?

We're told it will be user pay but we're not supposed to have any say in how the Ferry Corporation bottom line is arrived at. Our small ferry routes are no more in need of the massive administrative costs incurred by the Corp. than are the small ferry routes in the province's interior. The truth is we are asked to pay more than what our ferry service is worth because of spendthrift decisions by Ferry management and the provincial government.

Another large segment of our island population is made up of single working moms. They come to places like Quadra because they want to raise their kids in a liveable community and they can actually afford to buy or rent a home in places such

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Island Forum

as these. I am fully in agreement with people being well compensated for their labour but I wonder why it is that the poorer working women and children of the Islands are being screwed yet again while vast sums are being thrown into ship building programs intended to benefit much better paid traditional male union workers. If you're going to help out the unions don't do it at the expense of the more disenfranchised members of our society.

What in fact are you trying to accomplish by raising ferry rates to such absurd levels? Is the NDP government trying to make the Islands exclusive enclaves of the rich? They're not yet, but with this kind of social programming they're soon going to be.

On the news and a television talk show this week I heard a reporter and a caller regurgitate the same old tired lines about "fantasy islands" and "lifestyle choices". Why is it that when anyone talks about the need for services in communities in the north, or Vancouver or virtually anywhere other than the Islands, nobody uses the excuse that the service shouldn't be provided because it's a lifestyle choice to live there? The only reality check that is needed is on the part of the people who want to pretend that we in our Island communities either don't exist or don't count. In case no one in government has noticed it's worth noting that none of our islands are fantasies. They do in fact exist. As a society let's start dealing with the reality that B.C. is a place where a huge portion of our geography is contiguous to the Pacific Ocean, a rather large body of water. We probably have as many islands in this jurisdiction as almost any other state or country on the planet. Luckily, for both the Ferry Corporation and the government most of these islands are not inhabited. But, whether you like it or not, as a seagoing society it makes sense that there will be communities on some of these islands. Let's start dealing with the reality that if this province is going to continue to be economically strong then it's important to be able to move people and goods in an economical way to and from our existing communities. Act rationally, admit you've made a mistake and roll back the fares.

Yours truly, *Ruth Sauder*

cc. Dan Miller, Corky Evans, Sue Hammell

Letter from Glenn Robertson and Evelyn Gillespie

The Honourable Dan Miller
Minister of Employment & Investment
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Dear Minister,

Over the past few weeks we have received many calls, letters and representations from our constituents expressing their anger at the recent B.C. Ferries tariff increases. Many of them have participated in demonstrations at our offices, terminals and the Legislature in Victoria.

As we have been saying for some time in numerous meetings with you much of their anger and frustration is based on two elements of the tariff increase; the lack of meaningful input from Island stakeholders in the tariff decision, and the impact of the increases on residents who regularly commute to and from their island homes to work, school or to access other services on Vancouver Island.

We are writing today to again express our concern that these tariff increase are having a detrimental effect on the islanders in our communities. The stability of our Island communities are at stake and many individuals, families, and businesses have approached both of us to express their deep concern at their continued ability to live and work on their Island homes due to the significant impact of the increases. Our constituents need to be assured that there will be long-term stability and certainty in regards to tariffs that they are required to pay.

You have indicated many times that the government is currently reviewing the adequacy of the financial support provided to the Ferry Corporation. We think that we speak on behalf of our Island colleagues in saying that we would like to impress upon you the need to review the tariff increases. We also ask you to consider offering some sort of relief to our constituents who are island commuters while the review of financial support continues. We feel this must be looked at immediately.

Your truly,

Glenn Robertson, MLA North Island
Evelyn Gillespie, MLA Comox Valley

New Library Charges

The Quadra Island branch of the Vancouver Island Regional Library has recently

entered the modern era by coming on line. Along with this new change comes a new charge structure to help generate income for budget shortfalls. Quadra

Islanders will now pay fines like any other computerized card holder in the system. I have no quarrel with a fine system that deters abuse of a publicly funded system. I do take issue with some of the new fines that I would categorize as punitive towards good respectful users of the library. One that comes clearly to mind is the new renewal fee. A user who returns unfinished loans on time will now be charged \$.50 to renew them. To pay \$.50 to complete your reading is bad enough, but downright backwards when the late fine rate is \$.30 per day, and if left, the article may be taken out for free on the next open day! I do not believe it sound policy to penalize members who are punctual with their returns, at least not on the first renewal. I encourage users to express their feedback about the new fines by filling out a "customer comments" form at our branch and by phoning and expressing your concerns to our local library board member, Charlie Cornfield, at 923 2599.

Brent Henry

Dear fellow Islanders,

These days we read a lot about the ferry fare hikes. It has impacted people of all ages and outraged just about everyone. I want to share a story that I think has some relevance to our situation. It was first told by David Icke in his video "Turning of the Tide" - a very ominous title. I highly recommend this tape, I have a copy and am willing to lend it to anyone interested. His books "The Robots Rebellion" and "and the truth shall set you free" are full of information we cannot any longer not afford to know.

The story: A comedian friend of Icke's was performing in a Variety Hall in England as part of a human pyramid. the kind acrobats do. He was the last man and had to climb to the top of the pyramid. All was going well that night and then, just as he was midway up, the man on the bottom left corner of the pyramid, coughed. Down came the pyramid, bodies were falling all over the stage and Larry who was supposed to be at the top was on somebody's lap on the second row.

Icke uses this story to show that the power in a pyramid; be it corporate, political, or acrobatic, is not at the top as we have been taught to believe but with the ordinary man/woman in the street. If a lot of us start "coughing" maybe a lot of pyramids will come tumbling down. Merry Christmas.

Bettina Sluzki Lewis

Dear Islanders,

Looking for novel ways to protest ferry fare increases? The following is from a letter, dated Dec. 10th, which I received from Heather Harbord, a Powell River writer/photographer.

" P.S. Thanks for the clippings of the ferry chamozzle. Yesterday, a man in a truck came over from Texada on the first ferry. As soon as he drove off, he stopped the truck and threw the keys into the sea. No one else could get off the Texada ferry and the Comox couldn't dock either. Don't know what happened beyond this! H."

Hilary Stewart

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BC Ferries To Do List

In a proactive spirit to find alternative ways for BC Ferries to overcome their financial shortfall, here is a list of possible actions. This list is distilled from the letters and articles that have appeared in the *Islander* as well as from community meetings, casual conversation etc. Lets see how long it takes BC Ferries to enact five of these suggestions.

Please **help add to this list** for the next issue, call or write, you know where to reach us....

- Charge unloaded log trucks a mean fare based on their much higher and longer load on the return journey.
- Change to a 45 minute turn around schedule during off peak times.
- Have a ferry crew person conduct the traffic onboard from the terminals.
- Provide residents with a residents card/car sticker qualifying them for a realistic fare. All others pay the going rate.
- Impose a 1 & 4 cent road tax on clear gas & diesel in regions with ferry service.
- Create price incentives to encourage higher ferry use.
- Return minor routes to the Ministry of Highways and appropriate subsidies.
- Eliminate the Dangerous cargo sailing.
- Cut bureacratic costs within BC Ferry Corporation.

Marlena's Salon



For Appointments

Call
285-2938

Island Calendar

Dec.25, Thu. Loving Kindness Med. 11 - 12 noon	Community Centre
Dec. 26, Fri. Casino Night	QI Legion
Dec. 31, Wed. New Years Eve Dance	QI Legion
Jan. 10, Sat. Bottle Drive School 10:00 a.m.	Quadra
Jan.11, Sun Quadra Writers Group Mtg. 9:30 a.m.	Wry Bakery
Jan. 17, Sat. Old Time Country Dance 8:00p.m.	Community Centre
March 1, Sun. Winds of the Southern Cross 2:30 p.m.	Community Centre
Mar.29, Sun. Penderecki String Quartet 2:30 p.m.	Community Centre

News and Events

Quadra Island United Church

Quadra Island United Church invites you to the annual celebration of Christmas in poetry and song, **Sun., Dec. 14th, 7:30 p.m.** Refreshments will be served after this service. On **Sun., Dec. 21 from 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon** will be an Advent Service for children and their parents. Everyone is welcome to all services.

Meditation

Sunday continues to be a lively, and energizing meditation at the Community Centre, 10 - 12 noon. Call 285-2882 for details. All are welcome, no fee.

Christmas Day Meditation

Loving - Kindness Meditation at the Community Hall, **11 - 12 noon Dec 25th**. All welcome. Tea. Free !!

Mitlenatch AGM

Mitlenatch AGM and slide/talk show with Betty & Allan Brooks, "Birding and other adventures in South America". **Friday, December 12, 8:00 p.m. at the Community Centre.**

Bottle Drive

Saturday, **January 10th, 10:00 a.m.** at the Quadra School - Bottle Drive for Murray Garland's grade 5/6 class trip to ski Mt. Washington. Please support our new efforts!

Quadra Conservancy Needs Poem

Quadra Conservancy Endowment Committee is preparing a brochure to encourage gifts and bequests to the Conservancy. We require a short, powerful poem relating to:

- Quadra's natural diversity and beauty, as well as
- the continuing need to acquire and protect "special places" on and around our island.

If you already have a suitable poem, or would consider writing one yourself, or know a poet who may be interested, please call John Grant 285-3444.

Quadra Recreation Society

The Winter/Spring Recreation brochure will be in your mail box after January 5. Activities scheduled week nights in the school gym are: women's sport night, folkdancing, floorhockey, volleyball, ninjutsu, and kid's soccer. At the Community Centre there will be: aerobics, women's karate, tai chi, yoga, meditation, parents and tots, belly dancing, drawing, quilting, singers, films, concerts, dances;, after school: kid's - creative crafts, yoga, dance, music classes and rollerskating. Tuesday and Sunday nights are open right now for possible rental.

Interested in helping organize a "Home Show" or some derivative on Saturday, April 4? Please phone the Centre. Such an event has the potential to be a good generator of small business activity if enough people got behind it.

Sandra Spearing Community Centre, **285-3243** 8-2 p.m.

Old Time Country Dance

Swing into action at an Old Time Country Dance, **Saturday, January 17th, 8:00 p.m. at the Quadra Community Centre!!** The acoustic group "Whirlwind" performs stirring Old Time and Celtic dance music: jigs, reels, polkas and waltzes. Beginner dancers are instructed by Bob Sutherland. There is no need to attend with a partner. All ages are welcome. the cost is \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children. For more information call Terry at 285-3157 or Shawn at 285-2551

Needed - Writers with a voice!

Calling all active writers. There will be a breakfast/brunch meeting on January 11th to discuss the funds currently in the Quadra Writers' Group account. We are looking for ways to use this money to benefit writers. If you have ideas and want your opinion heard please join us on Sunday, **January 11th at 9:30 a.m.** at the Wry Bakery-Sage Cafe, located in the Village Square.

Island Cookery Christmas Sale

News & Events

The Quadra Island Preschool is offering our popular cookbooks at a reduced price of **\$20 a set or \$12 per single book**. They are available throughout December through stores on Quadra Island or call the Preschool at **285-3711**. Cookbook sales help support our preschool.

those who participated and helped to make it a success. There was a wonderful variety of crafts and baking available for sale. Thanks also to those who came and supported us by doing some Christmas shopping. A special thank you goes to Santa "Thew" and his mini elf Maha. They really made the day special for the little ones. Merry Christmas to all.

Legion News

Dec. 26 Is our annual casino night, **7:30 - 12:00**. Come and try your luck at Black Jack and other games of chance. Proceeds go to various local charities including the Variety Club. **Dec. 31** - Dance to the music of 'Outshined'. **9:00p.m. - 2:00 a.m.** Come and ring in the New Year with your friends at the Legion. Buffet will be served at Midnight. All this for **\$10.00 per person**. A free ride home will be provided if necessary. From all of us at the Legion, all the best in 1998.

Ladies Auxiliary News

The Ladies Auxiliary to the Legion held a very successful Christmas craft and bake sale on Nov. 29th. We would like to thank

Items For "News and Events" Welcome, Brevity Appreciated.
No Business Related Material Please
Next Deadline - 5:00 p.m. December 31st

All of us at Quadra Credit Union extend our warmest wish for a Safe and Happy Holiday season to our friends and members on the Discovery Islands! Your patronage and support is very special to us all, and we look forward to serving you in the New Year. Merry Christmas to all!

Steve Holliday
Joni Lee
Ann Bone
Bob Lambert
Christy Blair
Margaret Heald
Hal and
Cheryl Hartwig
Eric Rind
Nancy Hender
Jim Lewis

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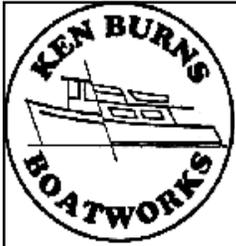
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Now it's our turn A Very Merry

A huge thank you to all for the support we have received since taking on the *Discovery Islander* earlier this year. It has been a satisfying task worth all those deadline crisis. Very special thanks to Tanya Storr whose reporting anchors the whole paper, Craig & Vicki McGowan for their patience & late nights and of course Bruce Johnstone for making us all turn to page 2 first of all.. Gratitude too to the Heriot Bay Store and Quadra Foods for continuing to provide the invaluable space for submissions.



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Money Matters

By Steven Halliday

As the year is drawing to a close, and this will be the last issue of the *Discovery Islander* of 1997, my thoughts have turned to my experiences since arriving here on Quadra way back in May.

Many of you do not know that I had sought to move to Quadra since approximately 1991, and made a point of seeking out Marnie Kirk at every opportunity to remind her of my desire to move here. Unfortunately nothing came of those efforts, but you can imagine my joy when I saw that the position I now have advertised in December of 1996. Over the years, while driving on the Island Highway I always looked over at Quadra Island and thought "What a beautiful island, and it's such a short distance to Campbell River!". Trust me, I can sympathize with our friends on Cortes on the joys of having a 45 minute ferry ride, with a sparse sailing schedule, as Alert Bay's ferry run is almost identical. After 4 months of interviews and nail biting waiting time, I finally got the green light to move to Quadra. Our main concern when moving here was housing, but through the good graces of Katie Wilson

and Joanne Crawshaw this problem never materialized. So we're here, we're relatively settled, and we're not going anywhere! Trust me, when a banker can finally stop moving, that's heaven!

Two things that I quickly realized about Quadra; it's a humungously big island, and it has a tremendously diversified and interesting population. The former is of interest to me as it gives us the space required to allow the island to develop in a controlled manner, maintaining the rural qualities we all enjoy. The latter is one of the things that makes life interesting on the Island, and apathy is a rare emotion among Quadra Islanders. I think it was only my second column for the *Islander* that provoked a great deal of comment, fortunately 99.8% positive. But it helped me to realize the passion that exists on the Island, something that has been missing in most communities I have lived. I don't think a month has gone by that a new issue hasn't surfaced, from logging to houseboats to ferry fare hikes, and each issue has experienced a healthy and open debate. The only way the Island will grow and prosper to the benefit of all is if this type of debate continues to thrive.

Another pleasant benefit of living

on the Islands is the genuine friendliness of the people in the community. Amazingly, even members coming into my office to complain (a rare occurrence, of course) generally have a smile on their face. As I have noted in a past column, the people who work in Island business' have no need of a course in customer relations, they seem to come by it naturally. I realize this may be starting to sound awfully "warm and fuzzy", but let me assure you that having lived in towns from Alert Bay to Whitehorse, we have a real special place here on the Islands, something unique. I wouldn't trade places with anybody, or for any thing.

So to all of our new friends on the Islands, some of which read the "Islander", Norma and I extend a warm wish for a wonderful Holiday season and a great 1998!! I'm sure there will be lots of interesting things happening next year, with the accompanying diversity of opinion. I can't wait!

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Island Report

Fire at Quadra Elementary School

by Tanya Storr



Fire fighters on the scene at Quadra Island Elementary School

Photo: Tanya

Most of Building Saved in Fire-Fighting Effort

Quadra Island and Campbell River firefighters fought a blaze at Quadra Elementary for over four hours on December 17, managing to save most of the school from the flames. Two excavators, operated by Doug Peters and Leo Dahlnas, contributed substantially to the fire fighting effort. No one was injured in the fire, which began early in the morning. Fire chief Bill Williams, who also teaches at the school, said the cause of the fire has been deemed accidental and electrical related with no signs of arson.

The fire took place on the day the school planned to perform its annual Christmas concert. It was located in the old wing of the school building, and the kindergarten and learning assistance classrooms were destroyed in the blaze.

Jesse Hansen, a former Quadra Elementary pupil, was at the scene around 6:30 a.m. "The flames were pretty big and they were shooting into the air," he said. Another witness said he could see the flames while driving towards the Cove from Heriot Bay.

Bill Williams said the fire department was called at 6:37 a.m. "When we first arrived we did our size-up and called the rest of our crew. As soon as I saw the flames in the kindergarten classroom, I called the fire department in Campbell River, because we have a mutual aid agreement with them. Then we did an interior attack and knocked down the flames with hoses. At that point in time—approximately 7 a.m.—Everything in the building we could see was extinguished and I called the Campbell River fire department to put them on hold."

However, the fight was not over yet. Williams and the rest of the crew looked for an extension of the fire, in case it had spread into any hidden spaces in the building. At 7:11 a.m., the firefighters determined that the fire was indeed in the space between the ceiling and roof.

"As soon as we have a fire in a void space, it can travel quickly and we can lose the whole building. We continued with our request for mutual aid from Campbell River at that point," said Williams. Six firefighters came over from Campbell River initially, and then another eight were called.

Island Report

He added that firefighters would normally cut a section of the roof out with a chainsaw to combat such a fire, but due to earthquake upgrading on the school building the roof has several layers. Firefighters were having trouble cutting through the layers of roof, plywood, electrical conduits, and wiring trays, so the decision was made to bring in an excavator to open up the roof. As it turned out, two excavators were needed at the scene.

"The excavators did an excellent job," Williams continued. "Doug Peters opened up what he could from the front and then went to the end of the building to help vent the fire. The second excavator [operated by Leo Dahlnas] had a greater reach and continued opening up the building. As they opened it up, we were able to knock down the fire with our hoses."

Each time one of the excavators ripped off a chunk of wall or tar roof, flames and thick smoke shot out through the opening. The fire was finally under control at about 10:30, when the excavators had torn down that section of the building completely.

Williams said fire department volunteers did a wonderful job fighting the blaze, and the Campbell River fire chief—who was at the scene—described the Quadra firefighters as "very professional".

Barb Williams added that the fire department was very grateful for all the sandwiches, coffee, and juice provided by the community during the fire fighting effort. "It really made a difference. The community worked together so well."

School principal Kevin Kavanagh said he was very impressed with the work done by firefighters on the scene. "They've been just terrific—they're the hardest working crew I've seen." Kavanagh added that he was very glad the fire happened at a time when no one was in the building.

Grade three/four teacher Jack Mar also expressed his admiration for the fire-fighting effort. "If it wasn't for our volunteers and the tremendous spirit in our community, we'd be standing in front of a pile of ashes right now. You can't say enough about community spirit when the chips are down."

Max Vorkampff, supervisor of operations for school district 72, said the school is insured through the Ministry



of Education. An adjuster visited the site of the fire that same day. Vorkampff said after the adjuster's assessment is handed in, the district will wait for approval from the ministry to go ahead with rebuilding. A clean-up crew started work the day after the fire, and Vorkampff explained that they will endeavour to get the school ready for reopening on January 5.

Williams said despite smoke and water damage, two of the classrooms in the old wing—Mia's and Diana's shared grade two class and Gordon Burkholder's grade three class—will be able to go back to their classrooms in January. Kindergarten will be relocated, possibly to the multipurpose room, and learning assistance will move back to its original room adjacent to the library.

The kindergarten classroom had to be completely torn down in the effort to stop the fire's spread, and only half of the learning assistance classroom remained standing after the fire. The staff room—also located in the old wing—had a trench cut in its roof, but the crew began patching it the day after the blaze. The crew also erected a wall where the end of the building was torn off, and made the structure watertight again. "The rebuilding crew are incredible. School district 72 should be congratulated for their quick planning," said grade three/four teacher Jack Mar.

Islanders Express Sorrow over Loss of Kindergarten Classroom

One of the classrooms lost in the blaze was Juaneva

Island Report

Smith's kindergarten classroom, a room full of history and special toys and books. Although the classroom and most of its contents were destroyed, some of the kindergarten toys were saved from the flames, including the wooden Quadra ferry.

Juaneva has taught kindergarten at Quadra Elementary for 23 years and has been teaching in that classroom since 1980. Island residents expressed their sadness as they watched the classroom being consumed by fire.

"There are 23 years of treasures in Juaneva's classroom and every one of them has a story. It's terrible," said one school mom.

Jesse Hansen, who was in Juaneva's first kindergarten class on Quadra, said the classroom contained drawings, class photos, and toys dating back to when he was a kindergarten student. "I went back to talk to the class a few years ago and saw the same toys were still there. Juaneva put so much work into that classroom. It was her life."

Parent Russ Avon said Juaneva had one of the nicest classrooms he's ever seen, and several other people commented on the great effort she has put into it over the years.

"It's a piece of history going up in smoke," said Tony Bryant Junior, a former student of Quadra Elementary.

On the day after the fire, Juaneva said she would like to thank everybody for their expressions of love and support. "The phone never stopped ringing and people never stopped coming over. I appreciated every phone call and every visit. It was really wonderful."

Juaneva added that the classroom was a second home to her, but many other people are also affected by the loss. "Maybe now is just a time for people to remember their happy memories."

End-of-Term Assembly

Cape Mudge Village provided its community hall so the school could have an end-of-term assembly on December 18. Jack Mar described the assembly as "a coming together of body and soul after a tragic time." The teachers told the kids what happened at the school and students and ex-students reminisced about their time in kindergarten. Everyone sang carols and the theme song for the Christmas concert, which has been postponed until January 8.

"The spirit of the community prevailed. The fire is just a minor setback in how we operate because of how much we pulled together. It was really extraordinary," Mar said.

Ferry Fare Protest Update

by Tanya Storr



Island Protesters on the steps of the Legislature.

Photo: Laurence Hargreaves

User Groups Prepare to Meet with Mediator

As the Discovery Islander went to press, ferry user groups were preparing for a December 20 meeting with John Fryer, the mediator appointed by minister responsible for B.C. Ferries Dan Miller on December 17. Fryer is a resident of Saturna Island and former president of the B.C. Government Employees Union.

Jim Abram, who has been a key organizer of the protest movement against the November fare hikes, said user groups originally decided not to meet with Fryer as their requests for a total rollback of fares and an audit of BCF's books have not yet been met. However, user groups later reconsidered and agreed to a meeting with Fryer, after a group of Southern Gulf Islanders decided to meet with him.

"The decision was reluctantly agreed to by most of the stakeholder groups that we would send representatives to the meeting, but we wanted a single meeting with all groups in Nanaimo, not Victoria."

The meeting was then arranged for December 20 at 1 p.m. in Nanaimo. Abram said ferry users groups were planning to meet together beforehand. BCF has asked to attend the meeting but user groups have denied the corporation's request, saying the meeting should be between the mediator and users only.

Miller has asked Fryer to present a verbal report on the situation on December 23. According to Miller's press release, Fryer has been instructed to "meet with ferry stakeholders to look at ways of mitigating the effects of fare increases on users."

Island Report



Jim Abram speaks to the crowd of protesters at the legislature. Photo: Laurence Hargreaves

The decision to appoint a mediator was made at a Cabinet meeting on December 17. Ministers attending the meeting all had a copy of a letter from user groups, stating why Cabinet should rollback the fares and permit an audit to take place. Reacting to the news of the mediator's appointment at a Vancouver press conference immediately following the Cabinet meeting, Abram said he was extremely disappointed that there has not yet been a rollback and that Miller has appointed someone to "stall us again."

During a telephone conversation on December 19, Abram said Cabinet has basically passed the issue on to John Fryer. "Fryer is a skilled negotiator and has lots of experience. He is certainly a friend of the NDP but I don't have a problem with that—that's the way it works. When people are in government, they appoint their friends."

Abram added that he was feeling fairly optimistic going into the meeting. "If Fryer's recommendation to Miller represents what we tell him at the meeting, the minister will have no choice but to listen. It would be unwise of him to ignore Fryer. It's up to us to give Fryer clear direction about what we want to see happen."

User groups remain united, he

stated. "Our basic position is still for a 100% rollback, then we'll go back to the table and reorganize the corporation and look at all the issues."

Miller's suggestion that commuters may be given a break on ferry fares is unfair, said Abram. "The government would keep the 40% increase but a certain class of ferry user would get a discount. It would most likely apply to commuter books and only those who could afford to pay \$105 for a book will get a bit of a discount. Those who must pay individually each time because they can't come up with the money for a book are the ones who most need the discount, but they wouldn't get it."

Abram said he thinks Cabinet is revisiting the ferries issue for a number of reasons. "There has been a phenomenal protest throughout the province about the increase in ferry fares. Incredible amounts of energy have been put into trying to make the government understand they screwed up royally. This is a serious issue for communities from Victoria to Port McNeill and it affects a considerable number of voters. MLAs have been threatened by possibilities of recall in a number of ridings, and the government can't afford to lose any MLAs. This week's Angus Reid poll revealed support for the government has dropped to 25%

and the Liberals are at 42%. Glen Clark is way down in the polls compared to Gordon Campbell and Gordon Wilson."

Protest at BC Legislature a Success

A major protest at the BC Legislature on December 9 undoubtedly had an effect on the government's decision to re-examine the ferries issue. Over 400 protesters travelled to Victoria from Quadra, Cortes, and other Gulf Islands to express their anger over ferry fare hikes. Wearing lifejackets and singing the 'Recall Song', protesters thronged around the steps of the Legislature. Quadra Island's own Howling Dogs band played music throughout the protest and kept everybody's spirits up.

Laurence Hargreaves said the protest went very well. "The bus trip was good and the weather was decent. There were lots of people there." Don McDonald added that the feeling of unison made it well worth it to travel to Victoria and back in one day.

Dan Bingham, who played a harmonica at the protest, said both buses leaving Campbell River for the protest were full. "There was a whole range of people and ages at the protest. It was quite a festive atmosphere." The money to hire the buses was donated anonymously during a planning meeting two days before the protest.

Abram described the protest as "incredible". Despite repeated requests by the crowd for Dan Miller to come out and speak, he did not. Instead, Abram and a few other people were allowed inside to speak with Miller after the protest. Abram asked all the protesters present if they wanted him and the others to go inside. The crowd agreed to the plan, once it became apparent Miller was not going to come out to speak to them. During the meeting, Abram, Peter Gellatly, and others reiterated the user groups' position to Miller. Miller told the media afterwards that Cabinet would be taking another look at the issue of subsidies.

BC Ferries Reorganizes

In other ferries news, BCF

announced a reorganization of the corporation into two major operating divisions on December 18. The divisions are as follows:

1. Mainland: the four major routes originating from the mainland and possibly the Prince Rupert-Charlottes run.

2. Inter-Island: all the other routes.

Each division will be headed by an executive vice-president and Inter-Island is divided into North and South units. Glen Brown is now executive vice-president of Inter-Island and Norm Craddock is in charge of the Northern unit.

Abram said the reorganization is an internal administrative move designed to move the ferries into more sensible groupings. "It's what we've been asking for over the past months. Glen Brown will now be able to manage our end of the fleet separately from the big runs. We still need a major restructuring, a rollback of the rates, and an audit." Abram cautioned that the reorganization should not be viewed as a sign that BCF will go back into highways.

Other Ongoing Activities

Recently, islanders have been raising more ferry protest funds through sales of donated Christmas trees and festive cards containing pictures and clever rhymes about the government's handling of the ferries situation. Some islanders have also been investigating the possibility of recalling North Island MLA Glen Robertson. Islanders with Internet access have been busy posting letters and comments to the Unfare web page at <http://users.online.bc.ca/~unfare> and the listserv for island issues at <http://www.connected.bc.ca/bcislanders>

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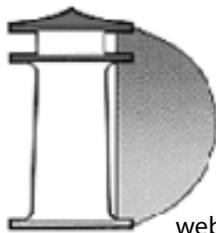
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