



# The Steller's Quill

BCGREA New Westminster & District

Branch 800

“Spring 2020” Newsletter

Contact info:

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## Membership Dues Notice

**Membership dues of \$20 are payable each year by January 2<sup>nd</sup>** For members not on automatic deduction of dues on their February pension cheques, your cheque should be made payable to BCGREA and mailed to the membership Secretary for the Branch: **Rita Pollock**, 302 – 1110 Howie Ave, Coquitlam, BC, V3J 1V1.

Members whose dues are now in arrears are requested to pay their dues **no later than March 15, 2020** or be removed from the membership list. To be reinstated you must reapply with a new application and pay dues by automatic deduction from your pension cheque (dues check off).

## Two public service messages

Not to be confused with “Public Service”. A couple of items we thought members should know about. In our “Fall 2019” newsletter the item on Elder Abuse mentioned the Seniors First BC Society. The following is some additional information about the Society.

**Seniors First BC Society** is a safe, confidential place for older adults, and those who care about them, to speak to a trained intake worker about abuse and issues that impact the health and well being of an older adult.

**Seniors Abuse and Information Line (SAIL) Ph. 1-866-437-1940**

Hours: 8am to 8pm seven days a week, (excluding statutory holidays)

Translation services 9am to 4pm Mon to Friday

TTY Ph. 1-855-306-1443 (equipment required)

Free Programs:

- Elder Law Clinic for legal matters

- Trial Preparation Clinic, if you are self-represented in Court
- Legal Advocacy for Benefits, pensions, residential tenancy issues and debt
- Victim Services program to provide support and assistance to victims of all types of abuse

Seniors First BC Society acknowledges generous funding of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General and the Law Foundation of BC.

**BC HYDRO – Customer Crisis Fund.** We owe COSCO a “thank-you” for informing us about this.

If you’re a residential customer experiencing a temporary financial crisis, such as a loss of employment or benefit income, unanticipated medical expenses, or a death in the family and you’ve fallen behind on your BC Hydro bill, you may be eligible for a grant payment to avoid disconnection of your service.

The Customer Crisis Fund (CCF) is a program that offers support for residential customers who are facing disconnection of their BC Hydro service, despite attempting to make payments.

You can apply for a grant towards an overdue balance (arrears) and the amount of the grant will vary depending on your amount owing. Maximum grants available are \$600 for customers who heat their homes with electricity, and \$500 for customers with non-electrically heated homes (e.g. natural gas heat).

Eligibility for a CCF grant.

To receive a grant from the Customer Crisis Fund, you need to meet a few criteria:

- You need to be the residential account holder
- Only your primary residence is eligible
- Your account must have overdue payments and be facing disconnection. Your current bill isn’t eligible for a CCF grant if it is not overdue or if there are credits on the account.
- You must have experienced a life event, within the last 12 months, that caused a temporary financial crisis.
- To apply for a grant, you need to have an outstanding balance of \$1,000 or less and should have demonstrated some attempt to make payments towards your bill.
- You may receive one CCF grant per account-holder annually (one per year). If a grant application is denied and your circumstances change, you can apply again in the same year.

#### How to Apply:

The fastest way to have your application reviewed is to apply online, but you can also fill out and submit a paper application. **Service BC** locations across the province have copies of the paper application form [**PDF, 126 KB**].

If you choose to apply with a paper form, you have three options to submit your application:

- Bring it to your local **Service BC** location for customers outside the Lower Mainland. Find a location near you.
- Mail it in to PO Box 8910, Vancouver, B.C., V6B 4X3.
- Fax the completed application to 604-909-4861

If you need help filling out the online application form, you can get assistance over the phone from BC211 by calling 1-844-708-3208.

You can also visit a participating community service organization in your area for assistance with submitting an online application. Find a participating organization in your area [**PDF, 68 KB**].

Other support available:

The Customer Crisis Fund is just one way that customers with difficulty paying their bills can get assistance from BC Hydro. Hydro offers flexible payment arrangements including instalment plans for customers who need longer to pay their amount owing. Customers can make payment arrangements by calling the customer team at 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376). Other payment options such as the equal payment plans can help spread higher seasonal bill costs through the year.

<https://app.bchydro.com/accounts-billing/bill-payment/ways-to-pay/customer-crisis-fund.html>

### **Welcome New Members**

**Welcome to the following new members who have joined Branch 800 since our last newsletter:**

**(Frances) Linda Asgeirsson, Shawn Adrian Burgess, Sylvia Labunos Burgess,**

**Dawn Carolyn Mann, Douglas Stephen Matiation, Icen Leonard Walwyn,**

**Donald William Ward**

### **Chair Report**



**Bonnie Billington**

As of December 2019, Branch 800 Membership stands at 671 with 306 of these as Life Members. Executive members continue to attend Public Service Pre-retirement Seminars to promote our Branch of the BCGREA. These seminars now include the BCGREA promotional video that is attached to the Provincial website. Click on and you will see two of Branch 800's Executive – **Myrna Cresswell** and **Donna Main** as participants.

### **Activities and events since the last edition of the Steller's Quill:**

**September 17, 2019:** Branch Meeting with a speaker from Hearing Life "Lunch and Learn". **David Ellison** spoke about hearing loss, various types of hearing aids, technology and services. Members enjoyed Pizza!

**October 15, 2019:** Branch Meeting and Fall Social food event – potluck desserts.

**October 17, 2019:** Provincial BCGREA AGM was attended by **Bonnie Billington**, as Branch 800 Chair; **Myrna Cresswell**, **Navin Goburdhun**, **Rita Pollock** as Branch 800 Delegates with **Alfred Malcolm** as Observer. Election results: **Carrie Mulcahy** remains as 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. New 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President **Brian Green** from Victoria Branch is leading the *Database Project* with outcomes designed

to provide online application, updates and better privacy protection. New Provincial Treasurer **Johanna Morrow** assumed office as of Oct 31<sup>st</sup> 2019. (See *the Pen*, Fall 2019 issue for AGM details). **Myrna Cresswell** was the lucky winner of a 'Fit Bit' courtesy of the draw sponsored by Johnson Insurance. **November 19, 2019:** Branch Membership Meeting with speaker **Shianne Baines** on the topic of Falls Prevention; an interactive session with practical tips and useful handouts developed by *Fraser Health Seniors and Injury Prevention*.

### **Meeting dates, speakers and activities for the balance of this fiscal year:**

**January 21, 2020: Fatma Taha; MD, MPH,** topic: *Diabetes & Healthy Eating*.

**February 18, 2020: Ray Fournier; Computer Technician,** will do an interactive presentation on problem solving issues around *Computer Maintenance*.

**March 17, 2020: Branch Meeting and Spring Social Food Event.**

**April 21, 2020: Tracey Lundell; Investment Advisor** from TD Wealth will speak on the topic of "*Planned Giving, Leaving a Legacy*" - with a focus on Powers of Attorney, practical tips on avoiding pitfalls in the division of personal property as well as maximizing the impact of charitable giving.

**May 19, 2020: Joel Grigg; Retirement Living Consultant** will do a presentation on "*Understanding Seniors Housing and Terminology*" expanding our knowledge on Levels of Care & residential housing.

**June 16, 2020: Branch AGM and Summer Social.**

### **Branch 800 Christmas Luncheon**



*Lt to Rt: Donna Main and Jean Ing*



The Annual Luncheon was held December 3, 2019 at the Centennial Community Centre River Room with 61 tickets sold. The traditional hot turkey menu was well prepared, promptly served buffet style by **Sugar Mountain Catering** and enjoyed by all. The Executive recommends the same venue for December 1, 2020. This event is subsidized by the Branch for costs over the ticket price.

We thank the following Community Sponsors who generously donated a total of **\$354** in goods and gift cards for door prizes:

- **Canadian Tire - Market Crossing, Burnaby**
- **GardenWorks at Mandeville**
- **London Drugs - 6<sup>th</sup> St, New Westminster**
- **McBride Safeway – New Westminster**
- **Real Canadian Superstore – King George Highway, Surrey**
- **Save On Foods – Market Crossing, Burnaby**

Greater Vancouver Food bank donations organized by **Anna & Ross Tremere**, totalled over \$200 along with a substantial amount of non-perishables again this year. Poinsettias were delivered to our members in facility care and to some at home who are unable to attend the luncheon.

A lot of preparation goes into this event so a big **THANK YOU to all Branch Executive** who participated in various ways and to those members at large who assisted with decorating, set up, gift distribution and clean up. Door prizes were solicited by **Chris and Harry Demchuk**. **Carol Erickson** won the gift basket, put together by **Jean Ing**.



**Branch 800 Executive December 3, 2019**

## Announcements

- **BRANCH SECRETARY POSITION YET TO BE FILLED. Meanwhile any member willing to take notes at a General meeting is appreciated. We need volunteers!**
- Branch 800 Travel Policy developed and approved by the Executive in keeping with BCGREA Provincial Travel Policy guidelines effective January 1, 2020. Policy reflects increases in mileage allowance and accommodation for members incurring personal expense for legitimate organizational activities and events approved by the Board.
- Door prize amount at Branch General Membership Meetings increased to **\$20**.
- Westminster Savings has merged with *Prospera Credit Union* effective January 1, 2020.
- Theme for COSCO Conference on October 4 and 5, 2020 - 'A Seniors' Strategy for Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. A dedication to deceased past COSCO Presidents: **Art Kube** and **Lorraine Logan who was a member of our branch.**

**Computer 'Phishing' Scams are on the rise** and BCGREA Executive has been targeted – both at the Branch level and Provincial with a common request – e transfer of funds. This type of scam is commonly generated by computer. BCGREA President **Ken Prendergast** reminds us that we need to be suspicious of any requests we have not prepared for in advance. Look carefully at the email address/ name at the top of the request; if incorrectly spelled or unrecognizable don't even open (especially attachments) and DELETE.

**Bonnie Billington**, Chair.

## HELP WANTED – Call for Nominations

Under the branch regulations, elections are held at the AGM in June of each year to fill the executive board positions as follows:

**Chairperson**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-Chairperson**  
**Secretary**  
**Membership Chairperson**  
**Goodwill Coordinator**

**1<sup>st</sup> Vice – Chairperson**  
**Immediate Past Chairperson**  
**Treasurer**  
**Six Directors**  
**Phone Convenor**

The regulations state: "Nominees must be nominated by a member in good standing and will provide written consent to stand for office and may submit background information along with their names."

It is important that we have continuity of service on the Board and new people joining the branch executive to provide new ideas and energy to our organization. A number of branches have closed because new people have not volunteered to serve on the Executive and long-term board members have refused to take on the tasks until death!

Please consider volunteering to serve or nominating a member to serve on the Branch Executive. Anyone interested in possibly serving on the Board is asked to discuss the matter with any member of the Nominating Committee: **Myrna Cresswell** 604-209-0492 Email: [myrna818@gmail.com](mailto:myrna818@gmail.com); **Donna Main** 604-525-9013 Email: [donnaemain@gmail.com](mailto:donnaemain@gmail.com);



## **‘Phil’ by Andy McColl**



Back in the days when I was in training at the Argyll & Bute mental hospital in Scotland, we students would be rotated through the different wards to give us as wide experience as possible. We were also ‘slotted in’ to fill any vacancies in the ward complements of staff. The wards were named for districts in the counties, rather than numbered. Argyll ward was the male division’s refractory ward, i.e. where patients who had not responded positively to the medications available were housed. New staff being posted to that ward would be warned about patients with a propensity towards violence.

One man we were warned about was ‘Phil’ (not his real name). Phil was a local man, with a reputation as a formidable fist fighter and habitual escapee. He would abscond from the hospital two or three times a year by running away from an exercise party. (We were also clued in that Phil could ‘run like a deer’). There was also a belief among us teenage staff that Phil had taken part in the *Raid on Rommel*. This was still only 13 years since the end of the war, and the *Raid* was still ‘up there’ in the popular imagination with the likes of *Tobruk* and *El Alamein*. Well planned and well executed, the raid was a British commando operation to infiltrate Rommel’s Afrika Korps HQ and abduct the Field Marshal. The raid failed because Rommel had chosen that precise time to nip back to Germany for a few days’ leave.

It turned out we were getting our legs pulled, for when I asked Phil about it, he laughed and said it wasn’t true. He declined to divulge anything about his wartime experiences.

I did, however, learn about one of his wartime exploits. Jock, another local man (and distant kinsman on my father’s side of the family) had held several jobs after his demob in 1945, and at the time the hospital terminated its farm operation was working with the dairy herd as a byreman. The redundant farm staff were offered employment on the nursing staff and Jock accepted a position as a ‘mature student’.

One day at our teabreak, Jock told us about an evening in Italy in 1944 when out of camp on a ‘midnight pass’. I don’t recall the town, but it held a number of bars. There were a number of British soldiers about the town, and Jock spotted a familiar face - Phil. The two teamed up for a ‘pub crawl’.

Eventually, Jock started getting anxious about getting back to camp on time. Phil, who was AWOL, had no such time constraints. He assured Jock they had plenty of time for he knew a shortcut to the camp. This shortcut proved to be through a supply dump.

Supply dumps were stacks of war materiel laid out in a chequerboard pattern, criss-crossed with access lanes. These dumps were patrolled by armed sentries; one of whom stepped out of a side lane and gave the pair the customary greeting of ‘Halt! Who goes there?’

‘I do’ said Phil, and, stepping smartly forward, felled the sentry with one punch to the chin. As sentry and rifle clattered to the ground, the pair took off running in opposite directions, Jock got back to camp on time; and it was two or three years after the war before they met again. One of those “square pegs in a round hole”, Phil was hospitalized shortly after the end of the war.

In 1947 or ’48, Jock was working for the Crinan Canal co. This canal, which opened about 1807, runs from Ardrishaig on Loch Fyne, in an arc that curves around the edge of Knapdale district, to the village of Crinan, on the Crinan Loch. (**Editor’s note;** the name Knapdale is a combination of the Gaelic ‘knap’ and the Norse ‘dalr’. I have read that this denotes a land of knobby hills and gentle valleys. The word ‘dale’ in British place names reflects the Norse presence in historical times. But that doesn’t account for Kerrisdale or Cloverdale.)

One day Jock was cutting brush growing on the canal bank about a kilometer out of Lochgilphead when Phil showed up at his elbow, having come across country from the hospital.

After the greetings were exchanged, Phil got down to business and asked if there were any rowboats or punts moored along that stretch of the canal. ‘Och, ye’ll no’ find anything like that this side o’ Cairnbaan’ says Jock ‘If ye want to cross would ye no’ be better to go down and cross by the bridge?’ ‘Aw’ says Phil, ‘they might be there by now’. Jock had no need to ask who ‘they’ would be.

Laying his jacket open on the ground, Phil stripped buck naked and folded his clothing in the jacket making a neat package with the sleeves hanging loose. He placed the pack on his head and tied the sleeves under his chin. Carefully, he lowered himself down the bank into the water, swam across the canal keeping his clothes ‘high and dry’, climbed out the other side and dressed himself. Then he vanished into the Knapdale woods.

On Phil’s ‘outings’ from the hospital he would ‘lie low’ for the first night, then wind up at his mother’s house. The hospital strategy was to wait until the third day then send a ‘retrieval team’ to collect him. Phil’s mother lived in a ‘council’ house. These council houses were built by the local authority to standard plans. The 2 bedroom dwellings built in the 1930s were two storey structures built in blocks of four side by side dwellings. Fronted by small patches of garden between the houses and the sidewalks (sidewalks are called ‘pavements’ by the Brits), viewed from the street, the doors were configured 1-2-1. On entering the front door, the stairs to the upper floor were directly ahead, in the 01 and 03 dwellings the door to the living room was immediately to the left. In the 02 and 04s the living rooms were to the right. The rear doors were the same 1-2-1 configuration and backed on to a paved path about 6 or 7 feet in width. This path was to allow access for the coalmen and dustmen. Across this path were the back greens. Primarily used for hanging out laundry, some of the more enterprising tenants would plant a couple of dreels of potatoes or small patch of carrots or onions. These greens backed onto the back greens of the adjacent row of council houses.

The tale was told of one of these retrievals from the early ‘fifties. Of the three man team dispatched, two would go to the front door while the third went to guard the back door. In a town of 1600, where everyone knew just about everyone else, these interactions were quite informal. The team leader and his partner knocked at the door and when Phil’s mother opened it said ‘Hullo Mrs F----. Is Phil here?’ ‘Och, no’ says Mrs F---- ‘He hasna’ come anywhere near the hoose yet.’

As Mrs F---- was saying this, the number three man, still some yards from her back door, saw Phil come hurtling out the door and race off across the back greens for an extra couple of days of freedom.



This tale was generally told implying that the team leader had not given the number three man sufficient time to get in place. There is an abundance of archaeological evidence showing Mid Argyll has been continuously inhabited since the bronze age; and I have sometimes wondered if this may instead have been a demonstration of the indigenous population's instincts for survival.

The last of Phil's outings I know of took place after I had left the A & B. Sadly, Phil's mother had passed away since his preceding outing, the Council had cleared the house and let it to another tenant. This tenant reported that during the night someone had tried to gain entry to the house, first by the back door and then by a window but had run off when challenged.

Then came a report from the hospital's laundry, located on the hospital outskirts, that someone had spent the night in the laundry's break-room and had consumed a quantity of the bread, jam and margarine kept there for the workers' breaks.

That evening a stake-out team was placed in the laundry's break-room after the laundry had shut down for the night. They were well supplied with a stack of sandwiches and flasks of tea to see them through the night.

About 8:30 in the evening (shift change from days to nights took place at 8) the team spotted movement out in the dusk. They waited quietly while the figure raised the window's lower sash (these were the old wood frame windows that had counterweights in the frame to hold the sash in place when raised). Phil placed his hands on the windowsill and leaned forward into the room, then paused to let his eyes adjust to the dark interior.

At that, two of the team grabbed an arm each and pulled Phil into the break-room. Phil braced himself and began pulling back. The team's number three man stepped forward and lowered the sash, pinning Phil's chest against the windowsill.

At that, Phil stopped struggling. 'Alright, boys, Ah give up'. The window sash was raised, and Phil clambered in the window.

Forty-five minutes later he was back in his bed in the hospital's New Cowal dormitory. With his tummy full of the stake-out team's tea and sandwiches

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## 2020 Indexing

The cost of living increase to Public Service Pensions, taking effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, is 1.9%. The PS pension indexing is fixed at the CPI increase as of the previous October 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Branch 800 Facebook Page**

Branch 800 has a Facebook page, where we can share information about up and coming events and announcements. This is a great way to reconnect with those that are members and no longer can make it to our meetings. If you would like to join, please Facebook messenger **Donna Dunedin Main** or **Rita Pollock** and we will add you to the page. This page has a high security setting and you cannot search for it. You must be invited to the page.

### **In Memoriam**

**We regret to announce the passing of the following members since the last newsletter:**

**Ronald Langley Anderson, Monique Marie Charest, Walter Compton**

**Valerie Joyce Cuthbert, Ena Roberta Dalling, Josephine Louise Kelley**

**K Marjorie Lae, Idina Justina Lothian, Walter Fritz Miklas**

**William Douglas Moe, George Neeson, Ida Myrtle O'Brien**

**Patricia Louise Farquarson Parker, Alma Ruskis-Rusko, Lois Maureen Smith**

**Sherrel Beeman Smith, John Forrest Stewart, Jeune H Williams**

The Executive and members of the BCGREA, New Westminster & District Branch 800 express sincere condolences to these families and their friends.