



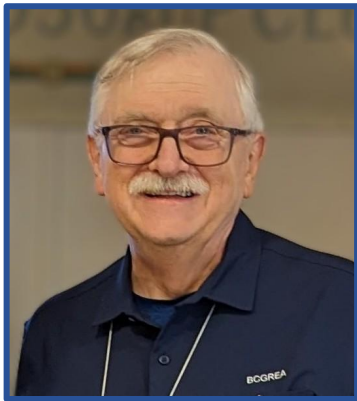
# Annual Newsletter

Western Communities  
Branch 2700

DECEMBER 2023

## OUR FIRST YEAR

by  
*Al Coccola*



Actually, it is our first year and a half. We officially started as a new branch July 1, 2022.

This was the first new branch for the BCGREA in nearly 20 years.

Progression was slow and after seven months, there were 80 members. Then last January the Provincial body, with the support of the Public Service Pension Board, sent out membership requests to all eligible retirees who were not already members of the BCGREA. Two months later our memberships topped 300. We currently have 315 members. In size we would rank 11th out of the 23 provincial branches.

Branches supplement the benefits provided by the Provincial Body. They create social connections amongst members, provide interesting guest speakers, and pass out local information. We have a dedicated, engaged Planning Committee and have done our best to provide these supports.

You may remember our visit to Elements Casino where I learned that there were ways to lose money besides mutual funds. Or the games day at the Hall.

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Most notably is our ongoing epic hike “to Sooke and Back on the Galloping Goose”. Stage four will pick up sometime in the New Year. The Galloping Goose Trail is part of the Trans Canada Trail which crosses the country and forms one of the most scenic trail systems in Canada. It is named for a noisy gas rail-car which carried passengers between Sooke and Victoria in the 1920s and 30s. You can join the hardy adventurers at any point. Our biggest success has been the June and Christmas luncheons.

We continue to look for fun and interesting outings. Do you want to see a wine tour, a trip to the Malahat Skywalk, or an outing to a theatre? All we need is a few more people to help make it happen. Please contact me if you are interested in helping. We could also use help with finding guest speakers. Speakers from the past year are recapped elsewhere in this newsletter. It is always a bit of a challenge to find speakers that will appeal to our demographics. We have had good ones and we’ll continue to work hard to find speakers worthy of your attention.

Our Facebook Group continues to amaze me. We currently have 57 members with more joining every week. It provides useful information for our group as well as behind the scenes details of our activities. If you have not already done so, please consider joining [Branch 2700 Facebook Group](#).

It has been a good first year and a half. I hope you all had as much fun as me.

Season’s Greetings and Best for 2024 - ***Al Coccola***

➤ **LIFE MEMBERS**



The BCGREA recognizes those who have been an active member for 20 years with a “LIFE” designation.

**MEMBER SINCE.....**

Robert Wiltsie	1994
Albert (Jim) Fisk	1996
Darlene Crighton	1997
Donald Thomson	2001
Alice (Aileen) Larsen	2002
Jim MacDonald	2002

Our Branch has six such members, and we thank them for their loyal support!

Jim Fisk attended our Christmas Lunch, so we were able to show him our appreciation in person.

## ➤ MEMBER INTROS

It's no secret that most of us BCGREA members have had long lives, which include many interesting chapters. Here is a section where we can share our experiences, and get to know each other.

Hang on to your hat..... you might be surprised how interesting we are!

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### Meet Charles La Vertu



#### *A MULTI- FACETED MAN*

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Writer, editor, publisher, karate teacher, small business owner, public servant, union activist, sailor, volunteer and amateur photographer, Charles is a multi-faceted man. Born in Prince Albert, SK, he moved with his family in 1946 to Sooke where the family owned and operated the world famous Sooke Harbour House for 25 years.

His first jobs were as a dishwasher at age 10 and waiter at age 11. Interrupting his education, he trained in Nanaimo as a meat cutter, briefly studied to become a priest, and earned his first-year university tuition commercial fishing.

A graduate of Victoria High School, Charles attended Victoria College which morphed into the University of Victoria where he fell into his career as a journalist, first as editor of the student newspaper *The Martlet*, then as a junior reporter/office boy at the *Victoria Daily Colonist* writing obituaries, followed by a five-year stint as city editor of the *Penticton Daily Herald* where he was a founding director of the Penticton Municipal Library. While editor, *The Martlet* placed second in Canada-wide competitions for university student newspapers.

The major highlight of his life was marrying Cathryn (Kate) and adopting her two children, Marisa and Barbie in 1987.

Prior to joining the B.C. government as a communications specialist in 1987, he was a member of the B.C. Legislative Press Gallery in Victoria for 11 years, serving 8 years on its executive including 5 years as its president. He worked as a reporter/columnist for the Thomson Newspaper chain, correspondent for Radio Canada and then as senior correspondent for The Canadian Press, Canada's national news service. Charles was a frequent guest interviewer on BC Television's Capital Comment, then the premier public affairs program in BC.

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A member of the La Guilde des Journalists, the Canadian Media Guild and the American Newspaper Guild, Charles gained some notoriety in the 80s for refusing to cross a BC Government and Service Employees Union (BCGEU) picket line that surrounded the Parliament Buildings.

On his return to Victoria from Penticton, and before returning to journalism, Charles became a fish fryer at the family-owned London Fish and Chips, currently home of John's Place on Pandora Ave. in Victoria. He served as secretary of the Vancouver Island Fish Fryers Association for 4 years.

Charles joined the BC Government's Public Affairs Bureau in 1987 after working as director of communications, Ministry of Intergovernmental Relations, and a stint as public relations manager for the government-owned BC Steamship Company which operated the Princess Marguerite ferry service between Victoria and Seattle. In the latter capacity, he was instrumental in getting the Princess Marguerite on a Canada Postage stamp, and served as a director of Tourism Vancouver Island.

For several years Charles was editor of the BC Government News with a circulation of more than one million, going to every household in the province. He served as secretary of a commissioner inquiry into the collapse of a roof over a major Burnaby supermarket, and wrote part, edited and oversaw publication of the final report which is used as a text book at engineering schools.

In 1989 Charles facilitated the Property Tax Forum Panel established by the BC government to tour the province and hear direct comments from citizens about the current property assessment and taxation system. The review was prompted by a large volume of complaints regarding escalating residential property taxation rates.

While in government Charles was fired 4 times and demoted once as the various political parties changed the face of government. As a result he became an activist with the BCGEU, serving on the Victoria Local and Provincial Component executives for several years. On retirement he was appointed a life member. He was also a trustee of the Victoria Labour Council. After being fired for the last time, he was asked to create the government media monitoring unit working out of the Office of the Premier.



Sensei Charles was given the title of Sensei by Top Master Masaru Shintani in 1996, and was awarded the rank of Shichidan (7<sup>th</sup> degree black belt) by Saiko Shihan Greg Reid in 2019. He has taught karate at the James Bay Community Centre in Victoria for more than 20 years. Early on, Charles was entertained by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip aboard the royal yacht Britannia and visited Number 10 Downing St.

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Charles served 12 years on the executive council of Karate BC, the governing body for sport karate in B.C., the last 4 years as president. He is a member of the Karate Canada governance committee and the KC nominations committee.

Charles was also a founding director of the Wado Karate Association of Canada and was its president from 2000 to 2023.



He was also president for several years of the Vancouver Island Karate Society, which includes all Island dojos and clubs that are members of Karate BC. All are volunteer boards.

Charles retired in 2006 and was the founding editor-publisher and co-owner of the Island Sports News Network, now Independent Sports News, and served on the United Way of Victoria campaign cabinet for one term. He joined the BC Government Retired Employees Association in 2007 and served as editor/photographer of its newsletter *The Pen* for 15 years.

A keen sailor, Charles and the family owned and sailed the Alden-designed ketch ATEA, built in Auckland, New Zealand in 1938. Member of the Maple Bay Yacht Club for more than 30 years, he served on its executive for several years and edited the club newsletter *The Spreader*.

Today Charles is still very busy with Karate, his strata council, a seniors group newsletter, and now also cares for his wife Kate, who has Parkinson's, but he says he is enjoying every moment of it all.



Photo by Arnold Rossander on our first Branch Hike at Iron Mine Bay, Sooke.

Sometimes it pays to take it slow and look up once in awhile!

Can you see him?

# Meet Aileen Larsen



## ***FROM SCOTLAND TO OUR WESTERN COMMUNITIES***

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In 1963 I made my way to Canada with the initial plan of staying for a short period, perhaps a year, before heading back to Scotland. Little did I know that this "year" would stretch into a much longer journey.

Initially, I joined the Department of Lands, Forests & Water Resources, Payroll Office at the Legislature Buildings as a Clerk Stenographer, where I remained until 1966 when I married. Following my marriage, my spouse and I relocated to East Sooke, where we embarked on a new chapter, took up Commercial Fishing, and raised our growing family. From 1969 to 1970, I resumed working part-time at the Municipal Affairs Building Inspector's Office. My responsibilities included processing building permits and addressing public inquiries. However, the position eventually transitioned into a permanent full-time role, which was not ideal for me at the time.

In 1971, I obtained contract work with the Attorney General's Press Release Office. One of my duties included reading major Canadian Newspapers each morning for articles relevant to the Provincial or Federal Government. Then it was back to full-time work with the Ministry of Education, Examinations Branch from 1972 to 1982. The Branch was responsible for evaluating overseas transcripts, issuing Grade 12 transcripts, Provincial Grade 12 examinations, and later G.E.D. testing.

From 1982 to 1991, I held various positions at the Ministry of Social Services/Human Resources, specifically in the Accounts Payable and Reconciliation Section, before becoming the Day Care Supervisor. Following that, I transitioned to the Ministry of Attorney General from 1991 to 2002, which later merged with the Solicitor General. During my time there, I served as the Accounts Payable Supervisor, Customer Services Manager, and eventually a Financial Systems Analyst. I was fortunate enough to be able to buy back time from my breaks in service and take advantage of the early retirement package offered. Throughout my tenure with the Provincial Government, I had the pleasure of working alongside many exceptional colleagues, and friends and I am happy to be able to still maintain contact with a number of them.

It's hard to believe that it has been 20 years since I retired. Retirement has provided me with the opportunity to indulge in my passion for travel and, most importantly, spend quality time with my grandchildren and great-grandsons.

HELEN MYERS

## *LIVING P/T IN MEXICO*

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Since 2013, I have spent about 5 months a year in Playa del Carmen Mexico, avoiding Victoria's gray skies and all the weather that goes with those gray skies. I have a house, in a residential area, away from the tourist areas and the beach. Though, when I decide its time for a swim in the gorgeous, warm, turquoise ocean, it is only a 15-minute drive and I am all set up. The beach is starting to get busy, as the snowbirds are starting to arrive, and I can meet up with friends from across the country.

Mexico is very supportive of its' seniors, as I have a Mexico seniors' card, for example:



- ★ I get considerable discounts on the ferries and bus transportation,
- ★ Special prices at the movies,
- ★ A discount on the entry fee to the archeological sites,
- ★ A dedicated line at the supermarkets, and the cashier sends 'interlopers' away, and
- ★ Perhaps best of all, property taxes are reduced by 50 per cent. (For everyone else, if you pay your taxes 3 months early, you get a percentage off, usually around 20 per cent).

I don't see my life here as a vacation, but as living differently – I still look after my little garden, do the laundry, (though it always dries really quickly, no dryer needed), sew, visit friends, much as I spend my time in Victoria, and yes, you'll find me at the beach 3 or 4 times a week!

After my husband passed away, I wasn't sure whether I'd be OK on my own – I soon decided I'd be on my own in the dreary weather of home, or on my own in the sunshine, it was no contest, and I'm glad I've made the decision to continuing to spend time in Casa Myers Dos!



LYNDA HOEL

## ***JAPAN CRUISE***

### ***October 2023***

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After 3 years of cancellations my husband and I were finally able to go on our trip to Japan. After leaving our car at the Park 'n Fly in Vancouver, which I booked through the BCGREA partner program on the website, we flew on All Nippon Airlines (ANA) direct from Vancouver to Tokyo, a 10 hour flight. I must note that the Park 'n Fly gave a generous discount for being a member and the service was fabulous with airport drop-off and pickup. Highly recommended!

After a stay in Yokohama, we boarded our ship for a 12 night Best of Japan cruise on the Celebrity Millennium from Tokyo. Our itinerary took us to 8 ports as we circled the main island Honshu with a day in Busan, South Korea as well as Hakodate one of the main cities on Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island. Over the next 12 days we got to visit temples, castles and shrines as well as:

- ★ Enjoy the countryside of Shimizu on our way to see Mt Fuji, a highlight for me!
- ★ Wander the Sorakuen Gardens and enjoy the Motomachi shopping street in Kobe.
- ★ Ride the Shinkansen bullet train from Osaka to Kyoto - another highlight!
- ★ Visit a Sake brewery and castle in Kochi.
- ★ Eat fresh seafood from the famous Jagalchi Fish Market in Busan, South Korea
- ★ Explore Hakodate with a ride on the ropeway to see the views from the summit before enjoying a delicious sushi lunch.
- ★ Visit an original Japanese pottery kiln, see the Fuji apple orchards and view the amazing festival floats in Aomori.
- ★ Marvel over the Ginza shopping district and the Shibuya scramble crossing in Tokyo.
- ★ And best of all ... meeting many beautiful people from around the world.



Each city has its own beauty whether large or small. We were fascinated with the transportation and technology, the architecture old and new, while still upholding their traditions and culture. It was beautiful to see the ladies wearing their kimonos whether shopping in downtown Tokyo or attending a celebration at the temple.

Our Japanese experience will remain very memorable to us!



Branch 2700 of the BCGREA has been organizing walks for members and guests since the start of 2023.

Our first walk was to Iron Mine Bay out in East Sooke Park. A beautiful hike on a lovely day to an area most of us don't usually get to.



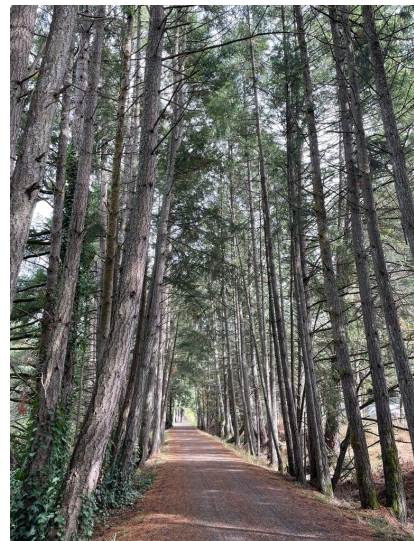
We then had a walk around Matheson Lake which was very interesting as the group ran into a Tick Researcher who had a lot of information about ticks in our area.

Over the summer we decided to set a goal of walking all the way to Sooke on the Galloping Goose Trail, about 3 kilometers at a time.

We started out from the parking lot at the end of Atkins Rd. From there we walked up to where the trail crosses Sooke Rd, by Denny's restaurant. We again had beautiful fall weather. Along the trail we spotted numerous apple trees bearing an abundance of fruit not being picked. Good for the bears and raccoons we think.



The 2nd leg started from the Park and Ride at Juan De Fuca for the main walking group. A second group who wanted to go a little less distance, started from the parking lot across from the entrance to Royal Roads. We had yet another beautiful day for a walk and went along the Goose until it intersected with Kelly Rd near the Westshore Town Centre.



Our luck with the weather stayed with us for the 3rd leg from the Town Centre to Luxton Road.

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The walking group breaks into smaller bunches for part of the walks depending on speed etc. One of the groups was walking near the Hatley Park Cemetery when a bear crossed the path about 50 feet behind them!

The hikes have been really enjoyable and we would love to have more members join us. It is a great chance to see the beautiful area we call home and also a good opportunity to get to know some fellow BCGREA members.



It might take awhile 3 km at a time, but we're walking to Sooke!



## ➤ GUEST SPEAKERS



Our Planning Committee has done a terrific job managing to host an eclectic range of interesting guest speakers at our general meetings. Each presenter offered a great deal of information relevant to our members. So, not only are our meetings nice social events with goodies to munch on, they are a great opportunity to learn things about our community, BCGREA services, and more. Take a look.....

★ **Nov/22: Johanna Morrow - BCGREA elected trustee on the BC Pension board and also the Provincial BCGREA Treasurer**

- At our 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting since forming the Branch, our first speaker was one of our very own members. Johanna gave an excellent presentation of her experience in those roles.

★ **Feb: James Stenson, BC Investments (BCI)**

- James provided a brief history of BCI, insight into the company's investment philosophy and details on how they are continuing to evolve to ensure a secure and sound financial future for all pension plan members.

★ **Mar: Mark Costales, Johnson Inc. (Zoom Meeting)**

- Johnson Inc. is an affinity partner that offers group insurance for such things as health, dental, and travel. Mark gave a very interesting presentation about the Health Benefit plan and travel insurance options.

★ **Apr: Bernie Dinter, Dinter Nursery**

- 'Spring Gardening - Making it Easy'. Bernie talked about things to do in the garden this time of the year in order to produce a healthy and beautiful garden, providing tips on the most manageable and popular plants and the best fertilizers.



★ **May: Tom MacLean, Trip Merchant (Zoom Meeting)**

- Trip Merchant offers BCGREA members exclusive discounts with a variety of travel suppliers. Tom gave an overview of the Trip Merchant website and provided highlights of some upcoming trips. He noted that friends and family who travel with you will receive the same savings. There is a new feature being added to their website whereby members can create their own trip itinerary.

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★ **Jun: Brian Green, Provincial President, BCGREA**

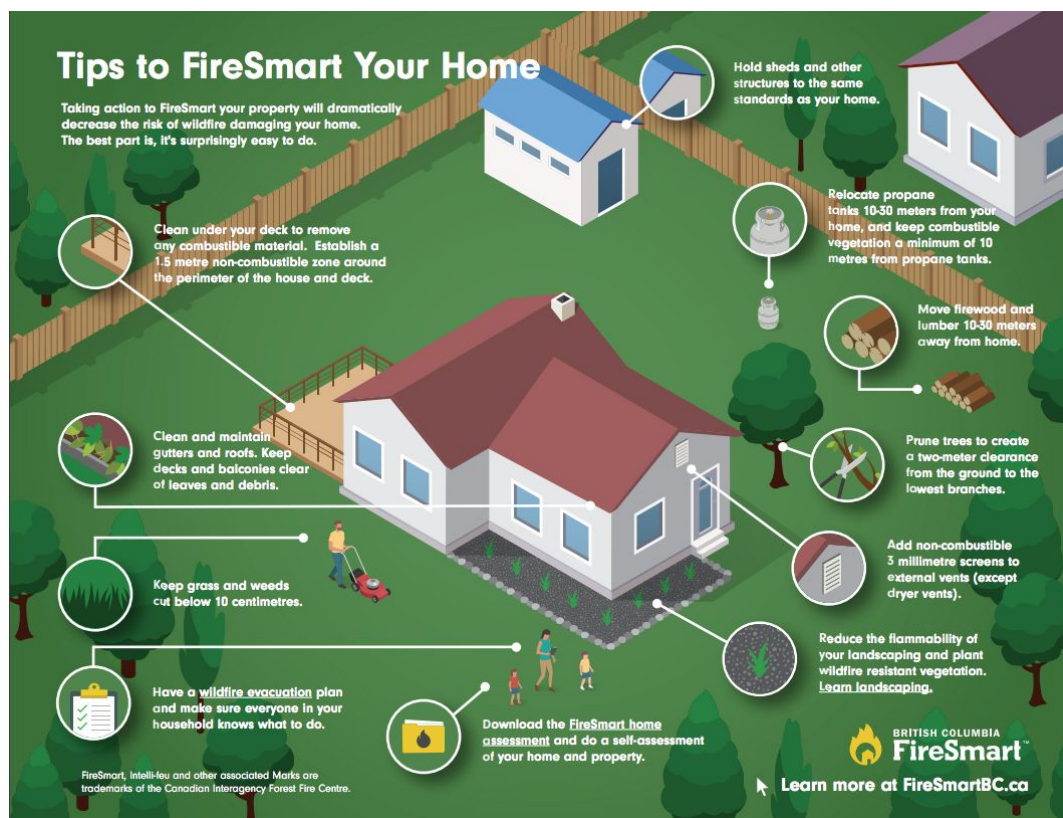
- Brian gave us a quick overview of how membership has recently grown due to an email campaign, and talked about how the BCGREA is evolving. His kudos for how our new Branch has developed was much appreciated.

★ **Sep: Cst. Justina Webb, Westshore RCMP**

- Constable Webb gave a presentation on 'Fraud Awareness'. She talked about several different types of fraud, how to protect yourself, and what to do if you are a victim.

★ **Nov: Tianna Dupuis, Langford Firesmart Coordinator**

- 'Firesmart Begins at Home'. Tianna's presentation highlighted things that owners can do to minimize damage to their homes and properties in the event of a wildfire. There is a rebate program offered by the City of Langford which will pay 50% of expenses, up to \$1000, for actions taken to reduce fire risks (this must be preceded by a Firesmart risk assessment).



★ **Dec: Elsie Chan, Toastmasters**

- Elsie gave a fun presentation at our Christmas Luncheon, providing tips on how to prepare and present a speech.



*Elsie & Tammy, our Treasurer*

## GRANDMA MCKNIGHT'S CHRISTMAS CAKE

*I've made this cake at Christmas for the past 37 years, and part of the tradition is that each member of the family gives the batter a good stir for good luck!*

~ Tammy Welch



- **Ingredients:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ○ 3 3/4 c Seedless raisins<br>(or 1/2 date/1/2 raisin) | ○ 1 juice of lemon                      |
| ○ 2 C currents   | ○ 1 juice of orange                     |
| ○ 1 C mixed peel (glazed fruit)                        | ○ 1/2 C grape jelly<br>(or cold coffee) |
| ○ 1 C chopped almonds                                  | ○ 3 cups flour                          |
| ○ 1 C walnuts (pecans)                                 | ○ 1 tsp baking soda                     |
| ○ 1 C glazed cherries (red & green)                    | ○ 1 tsp cinnamon                        |
| ○ 1 glazed pineapple rind                              | ○ 1 tsp allspice                        |
| ○ 2 C butter   | ○ 1/2 tsp cloves                        |
| ○ 2 1/2 cup brown sugar                                | ○ 1/2 tsp nutmeg                        |
| ○ 12 eggs  | ○ 1/2 tsp ginger                        |

- **Preparation Steps:**

1. Mix all fruit and nuts in large bowl.
2. Add 3/4 cup of the flour to the fruit/nut and mix to coat.
3. Add remaining dry ingredients into large bowl/pot and mix together.
4. In separate bowl cream butter & brown sugar.
5. Add eggs to butter mixture one at a time, beating well after each, then add remaining liquids.
6. Add liquid to dry mixture and stir well.
7. Pour mixture over fruit/nuts and mix well.
8. For best cooking results prepare pans with 2 layers of oiled brown paper and one layer of oiled wax paper.
9. Baking time:
  - a. 4" pans: 3-3 1/2 hrs @ 250°F
  - b. 6" pans: 3 1/2 hrs @ 250°F
  - c. 8" pans: 4-4 1/2 hrs @ 250°F

Check after 2 hours to ensure cooking time as ovens are different.  
If not brown enough then turn up to 325 F for last half hr.
10. Once cooled, wrap in plastic wrap and put in refrigerator.
11. Each week, for six weeks, baste with Brandy (Rum or Grand Marnier also work well,) and then wrap well and freeze until needed.
12. Top with almond paste if desired.

## WHIPPED SHORTBREAD

*If raised in Victoria, you may remember Joe's Notebook. This recipe is from the 3rd edition, published in the early 1960's. It's been a Christmas staple in our family ever since. Enjoy.*

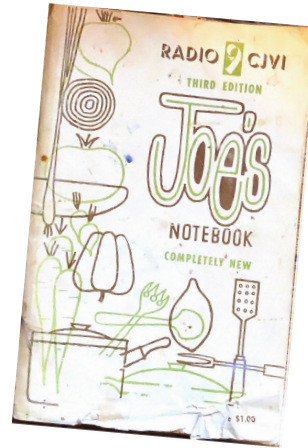
~ Sharon Stewart

- Ingredients:

- 1 lb. butter
- 1 cup icing sugar
- 1/2 cup cornstarch
- 3 cups flour
- 1 tsp. vanilla

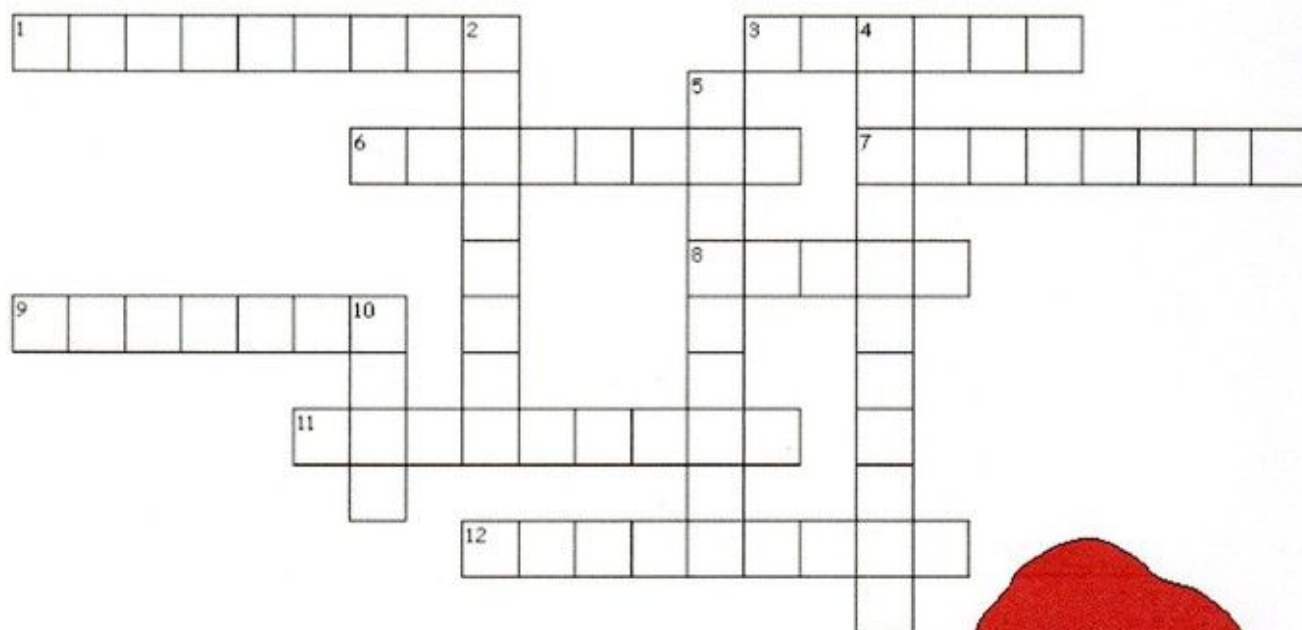
- Preparation Steps:

1. Beat all ingredients until consistency of whipped cream.
2. Drop from spoons onto lightly greased cookie sheet.
3. Bake 15 minutes at 350°.





# Christmas Crossword (easy)



## Across

1. Pretty baubles to hang on the Christmas tree.
3. Guardians who announce the good news.
6. Wrapped with love.
7. Jolly old Saint \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Dasher, dancer, prancer, vixen, \_\_\_\_\_, cupid, donner, blitzen
9. Warm snacks for Santa.
11. Sweet and red and white.
12. We wish you a merry \_\_\_\_\_.

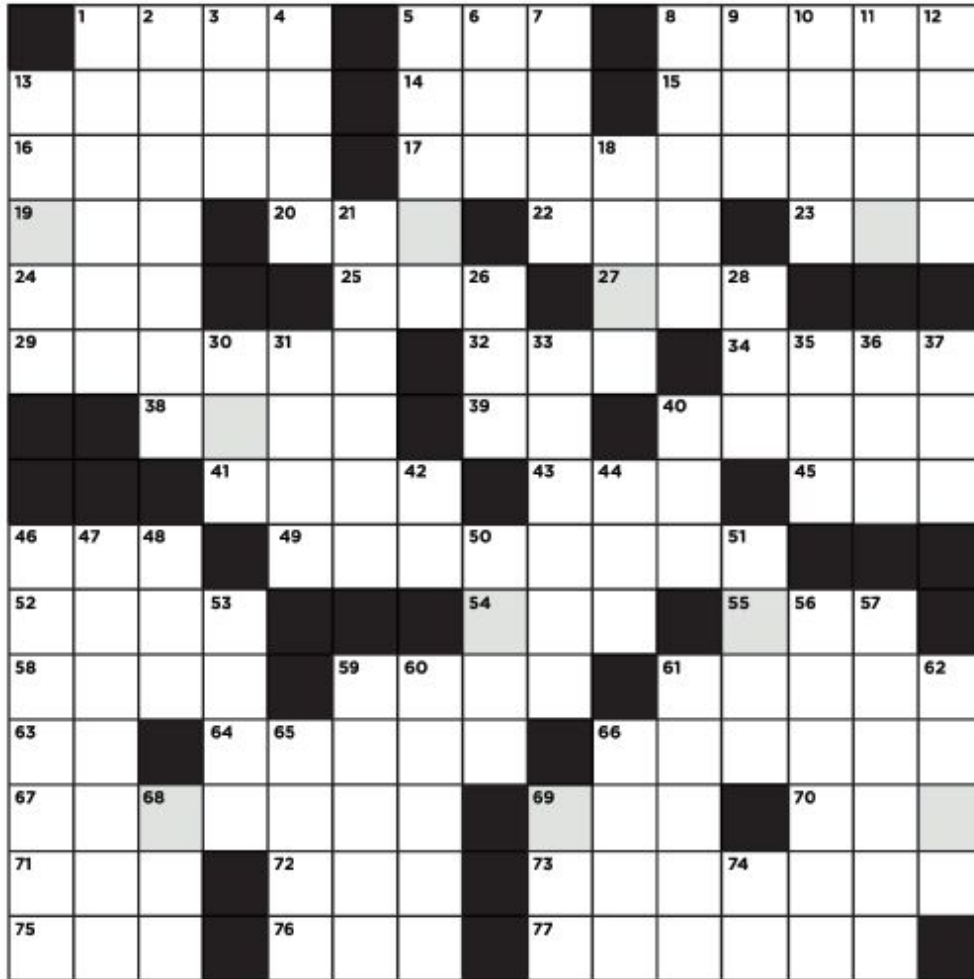
## Down

2. Keeper of the flocks.
4. House made of sweet treats.
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ were hung by the chimney with care.
10. Bright light marks the way.



# ➤ CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD (not so easy)

- Shaded cells contain two letters!
- Solutions on next page



## ACROSS

- 1 Outdoor house feature
- 5 "Dancing With \_\_\_ Stars"
- 8 Word after great or study (plural)
- 13 Connection to the thing that comes next
- 14 Brexit continent, for short
- 15 Useful Scrabble letters
- 16 Second of the five stages of grief
- 17 Animals where the males get pregnant
- 19 Word after state or no
- 20 Mardi Gras city, informally
- 22 How's it going?, in slang
- 23 Drag queen lingo for doing something great
- 24 With an s, exclusive Italian restaurant
- 25 Blog feed inits.
- 27 \_\_\_ Christmas, I gave you my heart
- 29 "That's right!"
- 32 Pompous idiot
- 34 Leave (out)
- 38 Foal : horse :: cria : \_\_\_
- 39 Govt. city
- 40 AOL communication
- 41 Word after north or south

- 43 \_\_\_ doll, old-timey Christmas present
- 45 What you post on Insta
- 46 \_\_\_-state area
- 49 Things you've collected
- 52 *Hamilton* songs
- 54 CA cops
- 55 Produced a 40-down
- 58 Door-to-door makeup giant
- 59 Sealed document
- 61 Non-alcoholic New Years Eve drink
- 63 Monty Python Knights of \_\_\_
- 64 He's known for his belt
- 66 Teeny tiny
- 67 Visitors' sleeping arrangements
- 69 Lyrics referenced in this puzzle
- 70 Character to be played by Beyonce in 2019
- 71 What the <3 emoji might be used to convey, in txts
- 72 College students might end up with this
- 73 Carrot alternative
- 75 It is fancy?
- 76 "\_\_\_ Grinch Who Stole Christmas"
- 77 One of four every year

## DOWN

- 1 First of the five stages of grief
- 2 Chinese food staple
- 3 Tool for pool
- 4 Adjust your typography
- 5 Futuristic cars
- 6 Cranberry or emerald, e.g.
- 7 Historical time frames
- 8 Shoot some \_\_\_
- 9 Bubble wrap content
- 10 Lad's opposite
- 11 Futurama pilot
- 12 YouTube CEO's nickname, possibly (alt. spelling)
- 13 Surfin' \_\_\_, Beach Boys hit
- 18 Grass skirt dances
- 21 Harvard \_\_\_, Rory Gilmore's college decision
- 26 Winter condition with an appropriate acronym
- 28 Cruise or Riddle
- 30 Word before happy or stick
- 31 Run \_\_\_
- 33 Go off-\_\_\_ (improvise)
- 35 What's often in the front cover of fantasy books
- 36 Jr.'s son
- 37 *Say Yes to the Dress* channel
- 40 It's often broken in the morning
- 42 B+ on your O.W.L.s
- 44 Conjunction junction subject
- 46 Subway, streetcar, bus, etc.
- 47 Dish to order at 24-across
- 48 Tech. start-up's big event
- 50 Word before Jane or White T's
- 51 What dragons are at the end of fairy tales
- 53 One looking down their nose
- 56 "I'm not sure," in lazy teenager speak
- 57 Hold in custody
- 59 4A-4E, in shoes
- 60 Famous riveter
- 61 "1, 2 Step" singer
- 62 Do 69-down again
- 65 No \_\_\_ for the wicked
- 66 Female's counterpart, if you made a typo
- 68 Elves, in poetry
- 69 Units during running or swimming practice
- 74 Snake's warning



*The fabulous tiramisu cake at this year's Christmas Luncheon!*

**BCGREA Provincial** website - <https://bcgre.ca>

**BCGREA Branch 2700 - Western Communities**

Website

<https://bcgre.ca/branches/western-communities-branch-2700>

Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/896339241725276>