

Opinion

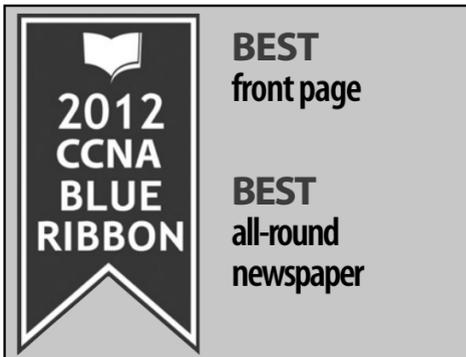


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BEST front page

BEST all-round newspaper

EDITORIAL

Giving tree

When it comes to health issues, Prince George residents give generously with their time, their money and their expertise to make sure this area receives the best.

Ever since the Condition Critical community rally in June 2000, where local residents filled the Multiplex (now CN Centre) to the rafters, demanding action on rural and northern health care, starting with more doctors, more operating room time for surgeons, more beds in the hospital and a medical school at UNBC, health has been top-of-mind.

Although Pastor Lance Morgan wrapped up the rally by insisting a medical school and a teaching hospital were not “pie in the sky,” it seemed like such a distant goal at the time.

Twelve years later and there are now graduates of the Northern Medical Program and the former Prince George Regional Hospital is now formally known as the University Hospital of Northern B.C. – but that’s not all.

An idea so outrageous, so distant, that it didn’t even get mentioned at that emotional rally was a Cancer Centre for the North. Not only is there one today but there is also the Kordyban Lodge to provide accommodation and support for cancer patients from across the region while they are in Prince George receiving treatment.

Also in the last 12 years, the hospital underwent a \$50-million renovation, refitting the facility so it could properly serve as a teaching hospital while also offering modern care and services to patients.

The Spirit of the North Healthcare Foundation, formed in 1991, has really gone into high gear over the last 10 years, raising millions of dollars to buy modern (therefore expensive) equipment needed by health-care professionals to provide the best service possible to area residents.

The Citizen has been an active supporter of the foundation for many years. The late Del Laverdure, one of the paper’s past publishers, was the chair of the board and current publisher Colleen Sparrow was named to the board in October.

Many other businesses have come to see the value of supporting Spirit of the North as a way of giving back to the community and supporting the continued goal of excellent health care for residents across the central and northern Interior.

That support was certainly on display Friday night during the Festival of Trees gala dinner. Started two years into the foundation’s young life, the Festival of Trees recently wrapped up its 19th edition with a bang. At Friday’s dinner, a whopping \$310,000 was raised during the live auction for Spirit of the North, easily eclipsing the previous all-time high of \$200,000 and last year’s \$180,000.

Auto dealer owner Brent Marshall put his name on a \$40,000 cheque for the Finning Canada tree, setting a record for the highest value for a tree at the festival’s live auction. Marshall’s record lasted only 30 minutes.

A friendly bidding war ensued between Jim Rustad and Janet Holder over Bea’s Tree, a silver three-foot Christmas tree that the 104-year-old Bea Dezell bought back in the 1950s for the Christmas parties for her Brownies and Girl Guides groups. Once a garage sale castoff, the tree finally went to Holder, Enbridge’s vice-president of western access, for an eye-popping \$52,500.

The community’s support for health care is more than about helping pay for equipment. It sends a powerful signal to doctors and other health care professionals considering coming to Prince George that residents recognize the value of the health care sector.

The generosity of Marshall, Holder and all of the people who donate time and money to back the Festival of Trees is an investment that will keep on giving well into the future. It’s the most wonderful time of the year, indeed.

— Neil Godbout, Managing editor



Good luck finding a pulse

Went to the office Christmas party Saturday. Got drunk. Stuck my face in the chocolate fountain. Spilled red wine on a white dress (which I don’t even remember putting on). Slugged the boss. Got caught in a compromising position with someone inappropriate in the cloakroom. When the 4 a.m. roadblock cop asked “Anything to drink tonight?” I replied, “Thanks, I’ll have a gin and tonic.”

Same old, same old. Well, no, I was actually at home, stone cold sober, snoring and drooling attractively on the couch by 11 p.m.

Growing old, growing old. Or maybe it’s just a Victoria thing. I was at an event in Kamloops a couple of weeks ago where the dancing didn’t even begin until 10:30 p.m. Couldn’t drag my mother out of there until after midnight, and the dance floor was still packed.

That’s the difference between Vancouver Island, where I live, and the rest of the province. They put on their party shoes around the time that we’re pulling on our slippers. Victoria is pretty much in its pajamas by the end of the late show, which is what we call Jeopardy.

Ah yes, Victoria, where, as Kim Lunman once wrote, the word “hip” is usually followed by “replacement.” In Prince George, Fifty Shades of Grey is a

Slightly Skewed

JACK KNOX

book; in Victoria, it’s either demographics or the weather.

How sleepy is Victoria?

City council is currently lobbying the provincial government to lower B.C.’s default speed limit from 50 kilometres per hour to 40 – which is about twice the speed of the Trans-Canada Highway traffic that crawls into the capital from its suburbs each morning. Traffic cops in the rest of B.C. have radar guns; in Victoria, they use calendars. Drive off the ferry from the mainland, you have to remember to slow to, say, 1955.

That’s under normal road conditions.

You want funny, come to Victoria in winter. It might be where the rest of Canada shovels its flakes, but we don’t get much snow. Two inches of it and there are four-wheel drives abandoned by the side of the highway. Three inches and they call the grief counsellors and start pumping Prozac directly into the water supply.

We are unexciting even by Canadian standards, which is saying a lot. Last Thursday, Britain’s Guardian newspaper ran a piece on the pros and cons of emigrating to the Great White North.

The online comment thread that

followed dwelt largely with the question of how bland we are as a people – which, considering Britain’s buttoned-down reputation, was like being labelled too trashy by the cast of Jersey Shore.

“While a nice bunch, Canadians are also, on the whole, very earnest,” wrote one correspondent. “Try not to point out criticisms of their country, even in jest, as this will not go down well. Dry humour/sarcasm may also not be appreciated. Stay as polite as possible and you’ll be fine.”

“Nice, honest, decent, reasonably liberal but overly earnest and basically a bit dull,” wrote another.

The most generous assessment was that Canadians are “not as humourless or dull as some people would have you believe.” That’s like reading that at least Hitler liked dogs.

The consensus was that we are saved only by the cool kids from Quebec, which is hard to dispute. Canada’s fun index slides from east to west, Franco-phones and kitchen-partying squid jiggers being the most likely to cheer in the dawn. By the time you hit the Rockies, the Albertaliban have stuffed the cork back in the bottle. Get all the way to Victoria, best look for a pulse.

Or maybe it’s just me. Maybe there really is this whole other parallel city that bursts into life in the wee hours, full of off-the-charts action, excitement and passion.

If there is, I hope they keep it down.

MAILBOX: Your Letters

Gov’t feeding us to the wolves

The three federal ministries lumped under Government of Canada (DFO, Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada) conveyed a very desolate impression of the role of the Government of Canada at the Enbridge/Northern Gateway hearings last week in Prince George. The mostly junior bureaucrats appeared scared and hesitant while most intent to communicate the limitations of their mandate.

Asked by a representative of UFAWU if DFO had conducted an analysis of

the effects of a spill on the commercial fishery, the answer was unequivocal: “the Department has not conducted such analysis.” Who can comprehend that the department concluded they were satisfied with the risk analysis conducted by Enbridge? As for Environment Canada, their representative stated squarely, “EC did not review the proponent’s materials related to spills.”

The Government of Canada is clearly showing that they have given up on their mandate while leaving it to

Enbridge to look after us. In the case of an inland spill, the NEB will be in charge and the Environment Canada spill response based in Montreal will be assisting the NEB if asked to do so. Does that make you feel assured that the inevitable spills into our precious rivers will be adequately handled? I confess, this handing over of the keys of the chicken coop to the fox gives me this feeling of dread.

Joseette Wier
Smithers

Let the leaders get their hands dirty

I would be remiss were I not wondering if others have yet to question Alberta’s audacity to refuse to dialogue on their “lion’s share” of profit margin while maintaining little or no responsibility for the inevitable damage Northern Gateway will do to British Columbia’s environment.

At this point, noting that the B.C. Liberals abdicated their jurisprudence on the right to do B.C. voters and non-voters real-time justice with a provincially conducted review of the entire Enbridge scheme by soft-selling the position of

local authority to Harper’s feds, who don’t give a tinker’s damn about our environment, since their basic tenet is “industry at all cost,” I have a couple of questions to pose.

What would Alberta say to a provincial government which allowed the feds to ‘storm-troop’ over their homeland?

Wouldn’t it be fair to hold Christy Clark, Stephen Harper, Allison Redford plus all their cabinets, as well as all of Enbridge’s executive, responsible to physically do the frontline grunt work with hand tools on every inevitable spill

until they are unable to sit on the ground and clean the last seabird or mammal of heavy crude?

After all it is our elected leadership whom we entrust these kinds of mega-decisions to and the long-range inevitability of this must be accepted by those who brought them into reality.

I think it is fair because I am sick of governments who believe fossil-fueled expansion is the only way to enhance the human condition.

Dennis Ouellette
Prince George

LETTERS WELCOME: The Prince George Citizen welcomes letters to the editor from our readers. Submission should be sent by e-mail to: letters@princegeorgecitizen.com. No attachments, please. They can also be faxed to 562-7453, or mailed to Box 5700, 150 Brunswick St., Prince George V2L 5K9. Maximum length is 400 words and writers are limited to one submission every three weeks. We will edit letters only to ensure clarity, good taste and for legal reasons, and occasionally for length.