

SFU Retirees Association



Newsletter Fall 2009

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President's Column

It seems very soon to report again on the association's activities. Time does seem to fly by! But this has been a busy period for the association and it is time again to be in touch. As always, thanks go first of all to the membership. Our numbers remain strong, with most renewing their membership at the time they received the form through the mail. Some seemed to misplace the renewal form, and Marg Jones followed these down. Most responded to the reminder, but it has been difficult to trace a few folks who may have gone elsewhere to live; and a few others have not realized they need to renew their SFU email addresses on an annual basis in order to receive messages routinely sent to the forum list. This matter is covered, in this issue, by a note from Hilary Jones, reminding everyone to let the association know of any changes in contact points.

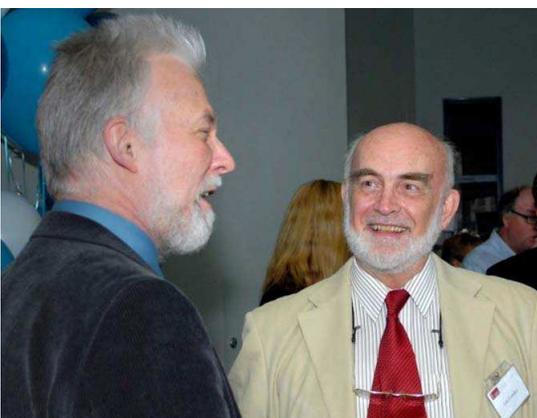
And my own heart-felt thanks go to the hard-working board. Some of what they have been doing is indicated by the reports they have included here. But other obligations have been carried out so well that they deserve special mention: virtually perfect attendance at the monthly board meetings comes to mind. The board has recently been strengthened by the appointment of Barb Diggings who will be working with Marg Jones on the treasurer's file. Welcome Barb! I want also to recognize several individuals, not currently members of the board, who have gone out of their way to engage in activities, or projects, that would not normally be highlighted through a board report. Increasingly, the association may come to depend upon such volunteers for their expertise and involvement. At the moment they include members of the benefits committee, whose names are included in Tom Poiker's report below. Further, Chris Hildred has conducted some pricing research on behalf of the association, and he and Leigh Palmer have acted as 'court photographers' at association events. John Webster and Bev Carlson served on the nominations committee again this past year, a committee chaired by Marv Wideen. Marv also organized the Finance Interest group that has sponsored several very well attended seminars and talks on investment matters. Frances Fournier, recently retired from the university archives, has agreed to advise on SFURA's archives project, as mentioned at the AGM. (If you have records of SFURA activities, and want to clear that space on the shelf or in the filing cabinet, please contact the executive and unload them onto us for sorting and putting into the archival record of SFURA. A few have already offered materials, and it would be good to have as complete an archive as possible.) Elizabeth Michno, a former executive member, continues to make inspired suggestions, especially for social activities. And Evelyn and Leigh Palmer's house became 'party central' for the musical evening, highlighted here in a couple of the photographs.

Many of SFURA's activities may appear to emphasize 'having fun', and we hope for

more of that, making no apologies! Other concerns are, of course, related to issues of benefits and health, and we are gradually trying to gain broader perspectives on some of these issues, including comparisons with retirees of other universities and colleges. These are not easy matters to work out, and that is why membership and participation in CURAC (the umbrella organization of Canadian University and College Retirees) is important. But, as university people, I am sure that most retain an interest in the broader issues of university development, whether they are of research and higher education or the provision of job opportunities within the local Metro community. At the time of the Burnaby centennial, in the mid 1990s, the university compiled information as to its place in the local community. Although I do not have ready access to actual numbers, and to nothing recent, I would expect that the contribution to the local economy, in terms of the purchase of services and the provision of job opportunities, would be just as significant today as it was then.



But in recent years, issues of internationalization, the rankings of the various classes of institutions (Maclean's) and jurisdictional issues (provincial vs. federal government support and expectations) have come to the fore more strongly than before. I was put in mind of this upon opening the current issue of Maclean's (August 3rd) and found an article by Paul Wells, a regular writer for the magazine. He reports on an initiative by the presidents of the self-styled 'big five' universities (McGill University, Université de Montréal, University of Toronto, University of Alberta and University of British Columbia.), the cover heading being given as



“REMAKING UNIVERSITIES: Canada's top five schools propose a radical overhaul of the entire system”. On page 32 the heading is “OUR UNIVERSITIES CAN BE SMARTER: Canada's 'big five' presidents have an ambitious plan for fixing our schools”. This is not the place to present a particular argument about this initiative, or dispute the choice of words and alarmist tone of the heading language, but it is the place to suggest that retirees may have useful perspectives to contribute to any discussion of such a plan. This is not the first time that these five universities have claimed and argued for special consideration, but the superior performances of some other institutions might also deserve recognition. As quoted in the article: “... the big five presidents said their institutions must be given the means and mandates to set themselves still further apart from the rest of Canada's universities – to pursue world-class scientific research and train the most capable graduate students, while (leaving) other schools (to) concentrate on undergraduate education”. This becomes a matter of national concern as well as national discussion, and as such will affect everyone. What do we think?

May you all enjoy the remainder of the summer. I look forward to renewed participation and activity in the fall, with as much participation as possible. (Just before the printing deadline for this Newsletter, the August 17th edition of Maclean's was delivered. It contains a follow-up article from the perspectives of other universities, not members of the "big five". President Stevenson is quoted.)

Len Evenden

Photo Captions: The 20th Anniversary of the founding of the Harbour Centre Campus: Len Evenden shares a .serious moment with Michael Stevenson, SFU President (1) and a light moment with Bill Krane, Vice-Preident, Academic (2).

Future Events

by Marilyn Bowman

September 23, Wednesday. Jaap Tuinman: Surprise: A Call of Botswana

Jaap will describe his experiences as a UNESCO Chaired Prof (Advisor) in Open and Distance Learning, and will highlight the defining characteristics and issues of Botswana, a unique African country.

Oct 15, Thursday. John D'Auria: Isotopes for Life

Abstract: Stable and radioactive isotopes are used in many aspects of our lives and yet are generally unknown to all. Isotopes form a billion dollar industry in nuclear medicine, are used in national security, used for oil exploration, used by the military, used in powering satellites, are used in environmental studies, in biological studies,and the list goes on. What are isotopes, where are these isotopes produced, is there a shortage of key isotopes, are they harmful in any way, is the inventory getting low, should we be concerned and can we still just ignore the whole matter? This talk will deal with some of these issues including production, supply, uses and applications, and what is planned for the future.

Nov 19, Thursday. Jay Burr : Evolution of how nematode eyes see.

(Abstract later)

December 9, Wednesday. Barry Truax: Soundscapes; composing music with the environment

Barry was one of the members of the World Soundscape Project in 1973 at SFU when it pioneered the study of acoustic environments and published the Vancouver Soundscape recordings and booklet. Since then this work has achieved an international profile through the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology. Barry's artistic work has also included the creation of soundscape compositions that create musical pieces using environmental sounds. Barry will trace this history and play examples.

SFURA Seminar Series
Committee report for SFURA Annual General Meeting May 6, 2009
by Evelyn Palmer

Five seminars were scheduled for Fall 2008 and five for Spring 2009, held on Tuesdays at 12:00 to 1:20 pm in 126 Halpern Centre.

FALL 2008

Tuesday September 16, 2008: Janet Blanchet: "Raymond Murray Patterson, A Life of Great Adventure"

Tuesday September 30, 2001: Maurice Gibbons: "Keeping a Working Journal for Self-directed and Lifelong Learning"

Tuesday October 21, 2008: Marilyn Bowman "Tibet: The colours of change"

Tuesday November 18, 2008: Larry Weldon "Exploring Randomness - Delusions and Opportunities"

Tuesday December 9, 2008: June Sturrock: "Dandies, Beauties and the Issue of Good Looks in Jane Austen's Persuasion."

SPRING 2009

Tuesday January 13, 2009: Alan Rudrum Topic: British Intelligence and the strange case of the Master of Balliol"

February 3, 2009: Hannah Gay "A historian's look at theoretical ecology, 1950-2000"

March 3, 2009: Charles Crawford "Teaching Darwin to Chinese Marxists, Drinking Moutai with Party Officials, and Visiting Confucius's home: My adventures in PR China: November 2007"

March 31, 2009: David Huntley: "Make Your Vote Really Count: the May 12 Referendum"

April 21, 2009: Tom Poiker: "A Journey to the World of Native Art"

SFU United Way Book Sale
by Jeff Rudd

This year the SFU United Way Book Sale will be held November 17, 18 and 19, in the North Concourse. We accept donations all year and we have approximately 200 Xerox boxes of books so far. Last year the Book Sale made \$10,400 and we hope to beat that this year.

One of the many things I enjoy about the sale is seeing people from across campus that I see only rarely in my regular work existence. We have some retirees volunteer on the sale days and they enjoy greatly seeing old friends and coworkers (as well as buying some great books at bargain prices).

We are now soliciting donations: books, music CDs, DVDs, but no magazines or encyclopedias. Donations may be delivered to Library Receiving (basement of the library, accessible from the back of the library) between 8:30 and 3:00. Questions may be emailed to me.

Still active at 95

By Bob Horsfall

Photo by Marianne Meadahl, SFU Publ. Affairs + Media Rel.

No one is more surprised than Thelma Finlayson that, at age 95, she continues to carry on an active role at SFU, providing special counseling services to students. The sessions “give me something to live for,” she says, adding, “It’s good for them to have an empathetic ear. I’ll do that as long as I am able.”

She has been involved with academic advising at SFU since 1971, when Peter Belton formed the first academic advice center and promptly brought her into it. She was the first advisor for the Faculty of Science but since then Thelma has always functioned as a “special advisor”, supporting and nurturing students in academic difficulty as they face our complex regulations.

“I’m amazingly well for my age,” says Finlayson, who officially “retired” from SFU 30 years ago (1979). “It’s wonderful that the university allows me to still be involved.” I cannot imagine just how many students owe their success at Simon Fraser to Thelma Finlayson, but the number must be huge!



I’ve been lucky to have Thelma as a colleague in the advice center (for something like a third of a century!). She is a great lady.

One last note (discussed with Thelma several times)—Academic Advising needs more special advisors—if you are interested, please contact the Director, Rummana Khan Hemani khan@sfu.ca or 778.782.4969

Financial Planning Interest Group

by Marvin Wideen.

Last year, the Financial Planning Interest Group held several meetings which were well attended. In September, Marilyn Cairns shared her experience in being audited in a presentation "Surviving the dreaded Revenue Canada tax audit". The topic was well received and a rich discussion followed. In October, a seminar was conducted around the Sun Life Financial retirement fund. Many of us have retirement savings in that fund. The presenter provided a visual demonstration on how to access the fund's website and make changes to one's portfolio holdings. We followed this session with a study group seminar in January with a Sun Life person present as a resource person. In November, a smaller group of retirees reviewed an agenda for the FP Interest group for 2009.

In the spring of 2009, we planned three seminars on estate planning. In the first, Harjit Sandhu from the Investors Group provided a comprehensive overview of estate planning to ensure that we don't outlive our money and avoid the taxman. The second involved Mias Zivkovic, a financial planner from Raymond James, who discussed annuities and how they can be used most effectively to aid retirement planning. In the third, George Suart, Konrad Colbow, and Larry Albright shared their experiences in using a 'buy and sell' strategy to build one's financial resources as opposed to the traditional 'buy and hold' approach.

The F P Interest Group aims to organize events and seminars that will engage retirees and others from the University community in a discussion of topic and issues that will expand our understanding and knowledge of financial matters effecting their retirement planning. We plan a meeting for September to plan next year's program. Please pass on any ideas you may have about financial planning to us at that time or, better still, attend the meeting.



Here they are: the choir and the audience.

The Socialist's Report

Tom O'Shea

Recap of recent events

Sunday, May 24th. Opera at the Winery. Opera Appassionata presented Mascagni's opera Cavalleria Rusticana on Sunday afternoon, May 24th at the Wellbrook Winery in Delta. Twenty-four SFURA members attended, on a beautiful sunny afternoon. For me, at least, the opera was a pleasant surprise...fully staged in an old barn that was used to great effect, with orchestra and chorus, complete with surtitles. The young singers were quite wonderful. Members also had the chance to sample the fruit wines of which the Blueberry was the most pleasing to the palate. Next year Opera Appassionata is planning to present Debussy's Pelleas et Melisande at the winery and I believe this event deserves an encore for the SFURA.

Friday, June 12th. A Musical Soirée. Evelyn and Leigh Palmer opened their home to a total of almost 70 people for a musical evening overlooking Deer Lake. The choral group Chemsemble (20 members of the Faculties of Science and Education, including 3 SFURA members, and led by Irene Percival) performed for an hour and then led us in a sing-along. Members provided a pot-luck dinner and a variety of vintages. Sing-along highlights included "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" even though it was evening, and we never did get to sing "It's a Grand Night for Singing." I had a tear in me eye "When Irish Eyes are Smiling." Members refused to sing "Enjoy Yourself, It's Later Than You Think." We all owe Evelyn, Leigh, and Irene a great vote of thanks for making this evening possible. It was a real treat.

Sunday, June 21st. Baseball at Nat Bailey Ballpark. Sixteen SFURA members were among 4200 people who showed up on Father's Day to watch the Vancouver Canadians play the Everett Aquasox at Nat Bailey Stadium. Contrary to expectations, the hot dogs were cool, the beer was warm, and the Canadians won. But Nat Bailey stadium is a great stadium in a beautiful setting, the crowd was friendly, the weather was pleasant, and the company was compatible. The game ended appropriately with the Canadians executing a 6 to 4 to 3 double-play to snuff out an Aquasox (a name suggested by one our members as better suited to a swim team) rally.



Watch the game, people!!!

Saturday, August 8th. The Marg Jones Stakes: A Day at the Races. This is an annual SFURA event at the Hasting Racetrack. The afternoon includes a full buffet lunch, a racing program, seats in the enclosed section of Silks Restaurant, and opportunities to bet on eight races. Last year, 36 members attended this popular event. This year, we expect even more.

Don't look at the camera!

NB. Given the level of activity this summer, Mike Roberts' field trip on geology and urban development on the North Shore has been postponed to September at a date and time to be determined.

About Emails by Hilary Jones

SFURA members who are not receiving emails addressed to <retirees-forum@sfu.ca> should contact Penny Spagnolo <pspagnol@sfu.ca> to have their names added to the list. SFURA members are reminded that, if keeping an SFU email address, they are required to update their ID annually and, if changing email provider, they should make sure that they advise Penny Spagnolo.

Hilary Jones, Board Secretary, does her bit, demonstrating her prowess at Tai Chi in her community day parade, 2009



Interest Groups by Bob Horsfall

There's been little new interest group activity this year—Marv Wideen's finance interest group has met several times in the last year, Leigh Palmer has hosted meetings around photographic and computer topics, and many of us have thought quite hard about getting something started (I include myself in this rather sluggish group). I'm still asking for volunteers to lead such groups—please contact me if you're interested.

NEW MEMBERS

Sandra Lindahl Operations
Marg Vandenberg Business -Director Advancement
Enid Britt Archives & Recording Management
Linda Wong Meetings & Event Conference Management
John Whitworth Sociology/Anthropology
Robin H Ramsay English

PASSAGES

Edgar Harden English
Robin Blaser English

Our Cuba Trip by Fred and Judy Einstein

In early March, we enjoyed a visit to Cuba: 5 nights in Habana, 3 in Vinales (west of H), 3 nights in Trinidad, a lovely old colonial town and 2 in Cienfuegos on the south coast, where we enjoyed a ferry trip to a small fishing village with friendly, smiling locals. Instead of hotels, we stayed in licensed private homes (“casa particulares”); all these were clean and comfortable and provided a nice breakfast and also dinner if requested. This is a way for tourists to meet locals and for them to earn far more than an average wage. We booked the first home on the internet, and that was part of a particular network of homes. So our current hosts would phone a friend in the next town we were visiting so that we would be met at the bus station when we arrived. Since we speak little Spanish this was very helpful.

The countryside was not as lush as we expected but palm trees were scattered all over the island, even in the many drier areas with stony ground grazed by cattle and goats. Cobble-stoned plazas in towns had large shade trees and some flowering bushes; lovely old restored colonial buildings and museums surrounded main plazas and often live music could be heard there. The Museum of the Revolution in Habana was a very interesting way to learn more about their version of Cuba’s history. Understandably, it had a strong anti-American bias. Wonderful old American cars from the 50’s and 60’s rattle around the streets. Some apartment buildings in Havana look ready to fall down, but they are obviously occupied as laundry hangs from balconies.

After Habana, Vinales was the highlight for us as we do enjoy walking. This small town is in a fertile valley in the west, with dirt tracks and trails leading through small farms and around limestone (karsts) outcrops that dot the landscape. Small caves were great to explore. The recent hurricane damaged many trees in this area; bananas were very hard to find. Tobacco, pineapple and sugarcane fields lay side by side; smaller plots grew potatoes, tomatoes and squash. Chickens scratched everywhere. People ride bikes over bumpy roads and tracks and horse carts clip clop around the town.

On our first walk out of town, we met a cheerful character named Fernandez; he came running up to us when we stopped outside his small farm to admire his goats and a family of pigs. He invited us to see his chickens, pineapple, corn and potato crops, his home roasted coffee and cigars made from his tobacco. Being an entrepreneur, of course he wanted to sell; we bought a pineapple and he included a melon. We met him again later in town with a large battery in his bike carrier; like many in the country his home had no electricity and he needed to keep this battery charged to run his TV. Baseball and music are big in Cuba, so even farm shacks without electricity have a TV powered by a battery or a solar panel. And some noisy arguments heard on street corners could just be men arguing about baseball! Young boys play in back streets with sticks and ‘balls’; they were amazingly accurate at hitting bottle caps.

In the cities, wonderful old American cars from the 50’s and 60’s rattle around. Some old buildings especially in Habana are very dilapidated and look ready to fall down, but they are obviously occupied as laundry hangs from apartment balconies. Some impressive old buildings are being restored. The Museum of the Revolution in Habana was a very interesting way to learn more about their version of Cuba’s history. (Understandably, it had a strong anti-American bias.) As we walked around the tourist areas in Habana and Trinidad, admiring attractive old cobblestone plazas with restored churches and imposing buildings, we often heard live bands playing in restaurants. Tourist groups arrived to drink and dance.

For those lucky enough to have jobs, wages are very low but the government does seem to make good use of tourist dollars. People all get good health care and education, including books and a hostel for University. Also everyone has a ration card so they can buy heavily subsidized food e.g every 5 days they can buy up to 5 lbs rice for 6 cents (CAD) and 5 eggs for 3 cents each. The ration card stores often have shortages of things such as toothpaste so when a shipment comes in there are long line ups. There is a lot of unemployment and non-subsidized items are out of reach for many Cubans. They very much appreciate gifts of clothing. We gave children peanuts and pencils although they asked for candies. For some activities e.g to music events such as opera, a foreigner pays at least the same no of CUCs as the locals paid in national pesos (ie 25 to 50 times as much); also for a ferry trip to a fishing village with an old fort near Cienfuegos. Lots of friendly, smiling locals in this sun-drenched village and so we really enjoyed exploring the streets and visited a school, local market etc. Another day we had planned to take an old steam ‘sugar train’ from Trinidad to a beautiful valley but after waiting over an hour for the promised train to show up, we were told the engineer had been trying unsuccessfully to repair it. So we took a taxi: some of the people waiting there accepted a ride in a hand-operated jitney and had an exciting trip.

We would be glad to give suggestions for anyone considering a trip to Cuba.

A New Name for the Newsletter

by Tom Poiker

At the May meeting of the Board, we talked about a new name for the Newsletter. The argument was that we didn't have a real name for the newsletter. It didn't take too long until one member came up with a name:

“Over the Hill”.

We accepted the suggestion with great enthusiasm. After all, we had all worked on Burnaby Mountain for the better part of our lives. But when I took the name down the hill to Harbour Centre, the reaction was quite different.

So here is my question to you, dear reader: What do YOU think of the name? And if you don't like it, could you think of a different one?

Newsletter, Benefits and CURAC, A report to the SFURA AGM

by Tom Poiker

When I took over the SFURA Newsletter from Janet Blanchet in 2007, I tried hard to get the general membership to contribute in larger numbers. When that failed, we decided to do something else and that was very successful. While in 2007, we had difficulties to fill four four-page letters, in 2008, we had to expand one letter to six pages and another to eight and we had to distribute an additional Mini-Newsletter in March.

The change was the Benefits Committee which we founded at the request of Norman Swartz when he became President. With Norman Reilly, Philip Mah, Walter Wattamaniuk and Bill Yule as Regular Members and George Suart and Bill de Vries as Corresponding Members, we have a very powerful group together. This Spring the Committee was relatively inactive which meant that we had trouble filling four pages in the forthcoming Newsletter.

The College and University Retirees Associations of Canada, appropriately called CURAC, has as its main goal the study and improvement of the benefits of its member organizations. That made me a natural to go to its Annual Meetings. The last meeting was in Montreal where I was talked into joining the Communications Committee. For this meeting in Moncton in June weeks, the communicators decided to make their youngest member chairman. Being very receptive to flattery, I accepted.

An Apology

by Tom Poiker

Putting this Newsletter together was harder than the previous ones. First, it looked as if there would not be enough material for four pages, then, suddenly, the contributions came floating in and the last one is always twice as long as you expect.

But what was harder was the timing. It finally looked like we might have to wait a month to get the letter out in the standard way (light blue, printed and folded by SFU Repro). So, I decided to print it myself at UPS and fold it out at the cabin. I will measure the hours that it will take me and report in the next Newsletter. BTW, UPS is cheaper but demands a lot more work.



The business of the Association requires bread and water (literally) at the Highland Pub.