

THE BEACON - CELEBRATING ITS 5TH ANNIVERSARY

1825 DAYS AND COUNTING!

BY DAVID MORRISON



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“Just remember, once you’re over the hill you begin to pick up speed.” –

Charles M. Schulz (1922-2000)

At least once a week I find myself incredulous at something concerning the relentless march of time. “Can it really be that long ago?” I gasp, bewildered at how the years have rolled on by unnoticed. Be they meaningful or trivial, personal or detached, the promptings all serve to remind that the second hand only ever ticks clockwise.

These reminiscences are of course a fact of life for us all. But when related to a significant anniversary, the milestone often promotes the desire to take stock and hatch plans for the future. This month, the talented crew responsible for the production of the publication you hold in your hands is nostalgically feeling this way. Looking back in certain reflection, with no small amount of pride, we’re all thinking: “Can it really be five years since *The Beacon’s* first issue?”

Yup, five years! It was in May 2004 that the first incarnation of *The Beacon* was launched as a hand-folded, eight-page newsletter in a print run of 500, bearing the unwieldy moniker, *The Lighthouse Country Beacon Community News*. Yet it was just a short period prior that its intrepid publishers, Sharon Waugh and Linda Tenney, had met for the first time. Call it kismet, a happy accident or what you will, a relationship that would ultimately impact on their whole community quickly developed as the consequence of this chance encounter. Sharon picks up the story:

“I’d decided that I wanted to free-up some time for myself and spend more time reading; it’s one of those ‘be careful what you wish for’ statements that you put out to the universe! I dropped into Baywater Books, a small used bookstore in Qualicum Bay, intending to walk out with an armful of novels, but instead left with a coffee date with a woman, who had just moved into the community, with an agreement to continue a conversation about putting a small community newsletter together.”

Baywater Books was a new business venture for Linda and her husband Bob. They’d recently relocated to the Island from Vancouver, where Linda had founded EyesOnBC when involved in freelance

journalism and graphic design. These facts alone ensured *The Beacon* was already forming in the ether before she or anyone else knew it.

“Meeting Sharon was serendipitous and mutually beneficial,” comments Linda, going on to reveal how relatively easily the project began to take flight. “We met at her house three or four times to decide on editorial content, talk about advertising, and discuss and make decisions on a myriad of other details... then we were off!”

Regular local newsletters had come before, but none had had the legs to stay the course. Seemingly filling the void of local news the community welcomed *The Lighthouse Country Beacon Community News*. Several local businesses jumped aboard to advertise their wares in its first issue, one being the Memorial Compounding Medicine Centre in Qualicum Beach (coincidentally celebrating its own 5th Anniversary in 2009). Run by Sean and Darcy O’Toole, they’ve advertised in every issue of *The Beacon* since, Darcy seeing it as a vital means of reaching her potential market, but a darned good read to boot.

“It’s a credible publication offering interesting and informative articles about and for the people that are the community,” she says. Explaining her company’s loyalty as an advertiser, she states: “There was always an interest taken by the publishers to support the local businesses and share with the community what was going on in their backyard. And therefore, we wanted to support them.”

Darcy’s sentiments pretty much mirror *The Beacon’s* mission statement from Day One, Linda telling me that the publication’s goal was, as one would expect, set out in her first editorial. It was, and remains, “to provide an effective communication tool that celebrates the richness and diversity of economic, cultural and social pursuits in Qualicum Beach and the communities of Lighthouse Country... bring news, stories and information to highlight and promote those who live, work and play in our growing community.” Job done each and every month, wouldn’t you say, readers?



Dave Bartram (centre), RDN Director for Area H helped Linda Tenney (left) and Sharon Waugh (right) “cut the ribbon” to officially open The Beacon’s first office at Magnolia Court in Bowser in May 2005. The Beacon moved to its current office and Gallery space (top photo) in January 2008



The Beacon Team: [standing] Linda Tenney, Cathy Balogh, Cynthia Riglin; [seated] Jeanette Spibey, Sharon Waugh, Deanna Johnson, Frank Hladik

Sharon was obviously not to know at the moment she met Linda how perfectly suited her soon-to-be new friend's upbringing and professional background were to the realization of her community newsletter idea. But she was thrilled to discover that aside from the aforementioned journalism and graphic design experience, Linda brought extensive practice in marketing, sales, accounts, copywriting and editing. She was also a published poet, now owned a bookshop and was developing her own publishing company.

In fact, the worlds of publishing, printing, creative writing and the visual arts present natural environments for Linda. Since childhood she's been rooted in these fields, many of her family members also greatly involved. Considering this background, it should come as no great surprise that Linda is doing what she's doing today.

"Occupational leaves on my family tree include poet, a couple of editors, lithographer, pressman, graphic artist, photographer and writer," she says. "It seems just a little coincidental! And I didn't

realize it, but I guess I've been training for owning a business, and this particular business, all my life."

All her life is true. As Linda told me recently, some of her most poignant childhood memories of growing up in Toronto recall the sounds and aromas cognate with a busy press:

"I spent my first few years in our family home on a Chestnut tree-lined street in Toronto's west-end, complete with root cellar, ringer washer, clunky old furnace and my dad's printing press and photography darkroom in the spooky basement. I knew my dad was working when I could hear the rhythmic chunk-chunk of the press and the distinctive smell of printing ink wafted up through the heating vents."

While Linda offered a lifetime of relevant acquaintance and no less working experience to the fledgling publication, Sharon brought not

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only a hefty complimentary skills package of her own, but also something intrinsic to the success of any locally-focused project: the DNA of the community at which it is aimed.

Sharon is Bowser born and bred. As she explains, her family was amongst those who laid the foundations upon which – as fellow contributor Lisa Verbicky described it in 2005 – this “blink of an eye off the highway” took shape:

“I’m the third generation of ‘community builders’. My grandfather built the Bowser Builder’s – ironic, eh? My dad was one of the initial drivers of the Bowser Legion being built, and the community water system, too. And my mom was one of the core group of women involved with the volunteer groups that made the community hum. My maiden name, by the way, is Gwilt, which is more recognizable than my married name to the old-timers of the area...oh drat, I am one of the old-timers now!”

Sharon’s background up to the point of her momentous meeting with Linda could hardly have been more different to her future publishing partner.

“My post-secondary education started with Archaeology, then tacking on Marine Biology,” she explains. “I ended up with a diploma in Fisheries/Aquaculture. The result: a fifteen-year career chasing fish up and down the coast wearing waders!”

Fishy frolics aside, it’s not difficult to understand one of the key reasons why we celebrate five years of *The Beacon* in this issue, being Sharon’s seemingly absolute understanding of the components that hold societies together. In this regard, considering one dictionary definition of the word ‘community’ as “Sharing, participation and fellowship,” mull awhile on what she told me about the nature of her working life. It speaks volumes:

“My professional background has always been intertwined with volunteer participation; I had lots of mentoring in that respect from watching my parents. It’s just what you do to be an integral part of an interdependent community. As a parent, if your kids are going to be involved in school activities or the extracurricular ones, you get involved. As a community resident, if your community doesn’t have ‘it’ you put your head, hearts

and hands together with people with a similar want, and you build it.”

In 2009 *The Beacon* proudly boasts a circulation of 7,000, quite a hike up from that first issue. Still being produced, as Linda succinctly phrases it, by “a very small team performing a very big job,” the publication is unarguably a consistent roaring success destined for even greater heights in years to come. This potential and its contribution to the compact communities of Oceanside and Lighthouse Country were recognized early by the Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce when handing EyesOnBC the *Best New Business of the Year Award* in 2005, barely twelve months since that first D.I.Y. newsletter. Sharon and Linda were justifiably proud, but seized the moment to ensure that their invaluable production team shared the spotlight.

“I was really happy about it,” beams Linda. “It validated everything that we’d accomplished to date and gave us the encouragement to continue doing it. It was an opportunity for everyone on our team to receive accolades for a lot of hard work.”

Sharon concurs, equally gracious in acknowledgement of the incredible efforts of all concerned, saying: “For me, receiving an award is not about individual accomplishment, it’s about the success of a team.”

But just as the co-publishers heap praise upon those without whom, so those without whom bat it back in the direction of their employers. This is a happy office full of team spirit and mutual respect, each member of the supporting cast seemingly perfectly content with the levels of trust and backing invested in them by Sharon and Linda. Associate Art Designer Deanna Johnson, for example, recognizes why *The Beacon* has become such a hit:

“Sharon and Linda’s success is due to the fact that they have a shared and very clear idea about what they want to accomplish each month and long-term with *The Beacon*, and the fact that they both have the personal strength to hold true to that vision.”

Jeanette Spibey works as a Customer Service Representative for EyesOnBC, though such a modest job title barely does justice to the range of responsibilities of a role she loves.

“Working with Sharon, Linda and Deanna over the past years has been amazing!” she

effuses. “They are beautiful, smart women both inside and out and it’s a pleasure to be associated with such a successful, classy publication!”

A little more dryly, Sales Advertising Representative Frank Hladik tells me the best part of his particular job is “getting out of the house so (my) wife can do her hobbies and crafts,” but in appreciation of *The Beacon*’s publishers he says: “Both Sharon and Linda are hardworking, honest, imaginative, creative, and they know what they want!”

Even so, regardless of the physical and mental efforts of the team behind each issue, Sharon and Linda both openly acknowledge that *The Beacon* has become much more than the sum of its parts. As can happen with anything created with genuine love and care, what may appear to be “merely” paper, ink, words and images has developed into something that almost lives and breathes of its own accord. Sharon says: “*The Beacon* has an energy of its own.” Linda, too, thinks this is so, suggesting: “The *Beacon* seems to be a living entity, taking the lead in its own evolution.” This is interesting, as on many occasions when I’ve interviewed creative individuals – musicians, artists, writers – they’ve expressed a similar sentiment. Controversial though he may have been, the American clergyman Henry Ward Beecher (1813-87) put it beautifully, I feel, when stating: “Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures.” It is in this way that *The Beacon* reaches the streets each and every month.

So to Sharon and Linda, Deanna, Jeanette, Frank, Cathy, Bob, Cynthia and all contributors to *The Beacon* past and present, congratulations on five great years. May many more milestones follow, and long may you...no, we... continue to be ‘inspired by community’.

The Beacon continues at this time to be available as a free publication, but subscriptions are always welcome to assist in keeping us running and delivering such a strong product to the community. If any readers are interested in subscribing to The Beacon at the bargain annual rate of just \$25, or require any other information about what we do, please feel free to contact us at the EyesOnBC office for more information.

Telephone: (250) 757-9914
Email: beacon@eyesonbc.com