

Mainland Matters

District 42 Winter Luncheon

by Shannon Redmond and Sarah Maines-Bandiera



Our very successful District 42 Winter Holiday Lunch at the UBC Golf Course was held on Monday December 4, 2023.

A huge thanks to our social committee and other volunteers to make such a lovely event a reality. What a turn out!

President Janice Wasik welcomed 142 attendees to the afternoon and gave an amazing inspiring speech about the history of District 42 and how we have grown over the years. We now have 955 members and nearing 20 volunteers on our executive.

Dance educator Tim Mah motivated the guests into moving and laughing before our lovely holiday meal, which was succulent tender roast turkey with all the fixings, a vegan lentil dish, and a delicious Salmon Wellington. The desserts were absolutely stunning: chocolate mousse cake, cheesecake, warm apple strudel and fresh fruit. So good.





We were encouraged to guess the number of candies in a tall jar and played Treasure Hunt with our table mates which encouraged us to get creative! Our community project committee Teresa Petrick and Vijay Verma presented a cheque to Century Housing Association

as a community grant of \$4000 for their future project called Aging in Place.



A wonderful lunch was enjoyed by all. It was an extremely special afternoon among the festively decorated room and lobby that undeniably inspired the holiday spirit to our District 42 members.



Cheque presentation: A \$4,000 grant from **District 42 Mainland British Columbia** of RTOERO will help **Century House** in New Westminster to offer workshops on aging in place. District 42 members Teresa Petrick and Bernadette Mah, Century House Coordinator MaryAnn Beccher, Century House Volunteer Pat MacDonald, and District 42 members Vijay Verma and Janice Wasik.

Member Spotlight on Michel St-Amant

Describe your involvement in education in three sentences.

My life has been dedicated to K-12 Education—forty-one years this last September. I have been lucky enough to work in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, and

Nunavut Territory. I have been mostly involved in the French language education system as a music teacher, school vice-principal and principal, superintendent, and director of education including seven

years at the Ontario Ministry of Education.

What are four things you would like people to know about you?

I know I may sound and look bossy to others, but my leadership style has been quite progressive in whatever position I held. My decision process was based on collaboration and consensus, but when some people around the table were trying to use that decision making approach to push their own agendas, I moved to a more assertive approach. I am a result-oriented decision maker. My zodiac sign is Taurus and in the Chinese Zodiac I am a Dog which I feel describes me well.

What are you passionate about?

I have two totally different passions. There is my “Zen” one. I need my cozy space, my own oasis to relax and think in, like my nice outdoor space with flowers, a comfortable chair, and a coffee table next to my vegetable and berry garden. Then there is my health and well-being passion. I love working out. I lift weights and keep track of my progress. The gym is my second home. I love it so much that I got my license as a Personal Trainer. Getting the license also taught me about biomechanics and healthy cooking.

What drives you “up the wall”? OR What two things “drive you up the wall?”

I am very patient but after asking or repeating myself three times, I either give up or simply move on to something else. At that point my mind says to me: “If I don’t get it or if the individual doesn’t get it and its important, it will come back in a different way”, so I move on.

Name two destinations you have visited or would like to visit.

Austria and Germany for music, music, music!

Asia—there is so much to discover . . .



What sparks your interest in these places?

Austria and Germany: I began my work life as a classical and pop music performer. I never forgot how magical it was to perform in these countries.

Asia: My partner is from Hong-Kong. I have an interest in discovering and learning about other Asian cultures.

What is one goal you hope to reach in the next 12 months?

I need to find the time to become fluent in Spanish and learn some Cantonese and Mandarin.

Why do you want to reach this goal?

Regarding Spanish, one of my favourite vacation destinations is the Caribbean. There are so many different islands! I have been to twelve so far and believe

that knowing Spanish would be very useful. Also, I would like to learn Cantonese and Mandarin to develop better connections with my in-laws.

What is one question you have not been asked that should have been?

Hum, a very good question. I'm still asking myself, how I ended up in the K-12 education system for forty-one years and what will come next for me.

What is the answer to this question?

I guess, I found multiple ways to grow in education including learning to become a better person. I like helping others, and I like being in charge. The bottom line is what kept me in education are the constant changes and challenges that require one to adapt.



Michel conducting an orchestra he founded In St-Jerome, north of Montreal.

Aging in Place Workshops get Funding Help from RTOERO District

A \$4,000 grant from [District 42 Mainland British Columbia](#) of RTOERO in November 2023 will help [Century House](#) in New Westminster to offer workshops on aging in place. Century House is operated by the City of New Westminster in collaboration with a not-for-profit volunteer advisory board. It provides opportunities for people aged 50+ to explore a wide variety of activities, education, and wellness and fitness programs.

The District 42 funding is part of RTOERO's annual community grants program. Since 1968, RTOERO has been a voice for teachers, school and board administrators, educational support staff and college and university faculty in their retirement.

Our mission is to improve the lives of our members and seniors. RTOERO members also share a desire to give back. Each year, districts apply for grants to support community projects. For 2023,

RTOERO funded 22 projects for a total of \$85,270.

The Century House project will help to support older adults in making decisions about how and where they age. Workshops were presented in 2023 as a pilot project, facilitated by a community volunteer, and accommodated 16 participants. Funding support for the 2024 program will expand services to 20-24 participants and include additional expert-led workshops. Information will cover topics such as health care planning, government financial benefits and services, caregiver support, safety in the home, community connections, advanced care planning and technology supports.

“Many older adults aren’t sufficiently prepared for aging well. That leads to huge demands on our health care system. This project aims to increase awareness around healthy aging in place and promote social connections within a welcoming and supportive community of peers. Participation in the program will help community seniors gain a sense of confidence and competence in planning for their future,” says Janice Wasik, President, District 42 Mainland British Columbia, RTOERO.

Since the inception of the community grants program 23 years ago, RTOERO has donated almost \$2 million to 550 programs and projects. A committee of RTOERO members assesses the merits of each grants submission.

“We encourage all RTOERO districts to support and partner with local organizations that are making a real difference on key issues,” says Martha Foster, chair of the board at RTOERO. “The projects we back advance things like environmental sustainability, healthy and active living, equity and community connections. In their careers and in retirement, RTOERO members have been dedicated to service, and the community grants program is another way to put that into action.”

District 42 of RTOERO covers all of mainland B.C. and includes about 1,000 members. The district plays a key role in helping members stay engaged and connected, with each other and the community.

RTOERO is a bilingual trusted voice on healthy, active living in the retirement journey for the broader education community. With 84,000+ members in 51 districts across Canada, we are the largest national provider of non-profit group health benefits for education retirees. We welcome members who work in or are retired from the early years, schools and school boards, post-secondary and any other capacity in education. We believe in *a better future, together!*

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Photo Contest held by RTOERO District 42 Shutterbug Photo Club

Reported by Maureen (Mo) Patz

Once our Photo Contest was announced in the summer of last year there was a bumper number of photos received. It was far from getting only five photos the previous year. This time we received twenty-one! It was fantastic! Especially as the quality of the photographs was incredible!

You will recognize the photo in the 1st Place as it was the picture on the 2023 Winter Greetings card sent out to all RTO BC members in the Fall.

Here are the photos earning positions in our contest:



*2nd Place: "NY Eve at Osprey Lake"
by Alan Holmgren*



*1st Place: "Rugged West Coast (Vancouver Island)"
by Linda Talbot*

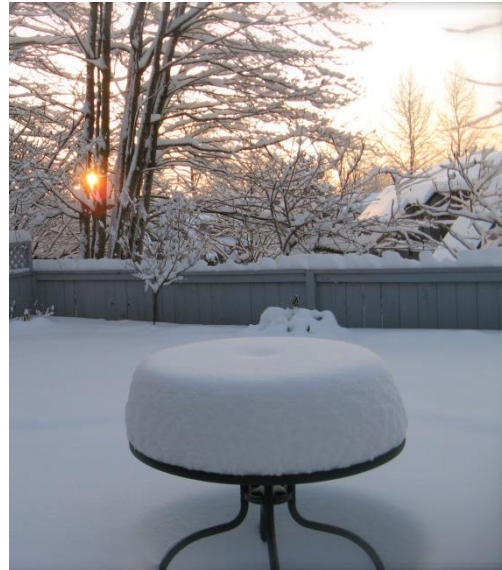


*3rd Place (i): "Ocean and Snow"
by Daphne Roberts*

Honorable Mentions:



*3rd Place (ii) "Blissful Retirement"
by Harvey Sample*



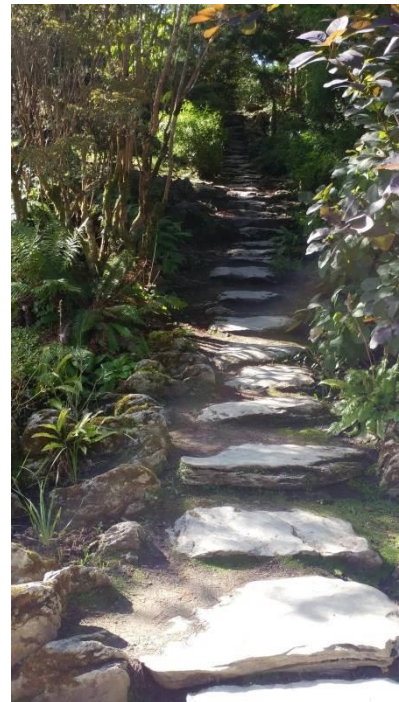
*"It Never Snows in Vancouver"
by Helen Shaunessy*



*3rd Place (iii) "Winter's Day at Osprey Lake, BC"
by Shannon Redmond*

As one can see, the Judges had quite a challenge in completing their task, All the photos were beautiful.

May I take this opportunity to thank all who were involved in this Photo Contest: those who worked on the basic planning of the contest, those who helped on the communication side of things, those who agreed to be a judge, and of course, the contestants. It couldn't have gone so well without your great assistance.



*"Sweet Was the Walk"
by Wayne McNiven*

Grand Forks Winter Holiday Luncheon

by Dan Macmaster

The Grand Forks Winter Holiday Luncheon was held on Friday, December 1, 2023 at the Omega Restaurant on the Crowsnest Highway. RTOERO member Dan McMaster graciously volunteered to organize the event and here is his description.

What a great time we had and what a surprise to find out we all had something in common besides RTOERO membership! All of us have traveled extensively world-wide and continue to do so. We also all have a personal connection with my daughter who teaches kindergarten here in Grand Forks. Obviously, the dinner conversation around the table was animated and interesting. Everything conspired to make this a memorable kickoff to the holiday season for us, even the first real snowfall of the season here in Boundary area.

Thanks again to RTOERO, and we wish all of our colleagues in District 42 the best

of the season and the coming year.



The guests from left to right:

Nicola and Wanda Hecht

Dan Macmaster

Helen and Kevin Argue

[unknown couple at nearby table who looked like they would like to join our jovial group!]

Andrew and Sonia McKinlay

Lissa Macmaster

Wanda and Curt Garrison



On a Perch at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre

by Carla Pitton

While lunching with a friend in downtown Vancouver on a gray November afternoon, I was told about an event she had attended the previous night at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. It was Ballet BC's season opening performance called *HERE*. Her lively descriptions got me thinking about attending the following evening's performance.

By the time I went online to purchase a ticket, seat choices were slim pickings. Unfortunately, they were all up in the nose-bleed section (more formally called the balcony section) and only in the very last row. Undeterred, I purchased a ticket for the last remaining aisle seat. How bad could it be?

The following evening at the theatre I took the stairs to the second floor, then climbed another set of stairs where my aisle seat awaited. Breathless, I looked down at the stage and mumbled, "Crap, this is really bad!" The stage seemed miles away. Binoculars would've come in handy (I should've listened to my husband).

For a few minutes I sat dissatisfied as I took in my surroundings. Above my head loomed a low black ceiling. If I stood on pointe I could almost touch it. I noted the utilitarian pocket lights hovering overhead and compared them to the fairy lights that twinkled like stars above the mezzanine section. Clearly, I was in the poorest quarter of the theatre.

Soon, all the seats began to fill with young and old alike. The closer the time ticked toward the start of the performance, the more intensely my eyes searched for a better seat. Like a hawk on its perch, I scanned the aisles from one side of the theatre to the other hoping for a no-show. No such luck. Then came the ding-dong-please-take-your-seats signal, and soon the theatre lights began to dim. I took off my coat and reluctantly succumbed to the inferior seat I had paid for.

On the stroke of eight, jarring orchestral notes struck my ears as the curtain went up. Alarmed by this heavy volume of sound, I felt fortunate not to be down in the orchestra level where earplugs would've been necessary. Out of the hard menacing score came two lithe toy-like dancers who erupted into precise angled movements. From my high perch I had to squint in order to see them more clearly. Oh, for those binoculars!

As the performance progressed, I realized there were a few advantages to being in the last row of a theatre. One, is having the freedom to shift positions as often as needed without disturbing the person behind. That evening, seated in front of me, was a gentleman with a large burst of black hair. Whenever he shifted in his seat, he obstructed my view. Finally, I did something I had never done in a theatre during a performance: I stood. No one noticed. From a standing

position I had a full, unobstructed view of the stage and audience below.

Another advantage was the panoramic view of people's backs. Peppered through the balcony-level audience were a number of women with their hair pulled back into tight ballerina knots. There were various bejewelled necks, an array of earrings, neck and arm tattoos of various sizes, and attire that ranged from the blasé to the eccentric. On the other side of my aisle a couple was locked in a warm embrace; she was planting little kisses on his cheek. Ah, young love! From my last row seat, I took in this microcosm of humanity.

As the end of the performance drew near, I realized I was at an important disadvantage: I would be one of the last to exit the theatre. From my nose-bleed position, I would have to wait patiently for everyone in front of me to spill out from the numerous aisles and slowly make their way down the many stairs. As it was a late, dark November night, and I would be walking home alone, the thought left me with an uneasy feeling. I needed a

quick escape. I knew that hawks were among the most intelligent birds, so from my high perch I began to plan my exit. How could I be one of the first to leave the theatre? The answer came soon.

At the end of the performance, when the curtain came down and quickly rose again to exuberant clapping and a standing ovation, I spotted my exit. The stairs were clear; no one ahead of me was leaving. I grabbed my belongings, left my perch, and flew down the stairs to the balcony-level door. Darn! It was closed! An usher stood sentinel-like in front of it. We made eye contact; he knew what I wanted. For a few seconds I turned toward the stage and applauded along with the audience. When the door opened, I made my exit. I ran down the stairs, out the main doors, and flew fast into the dark November night.

Oh, about the performance? It was excellent and worthy of a standing ovation. Ballet BC, I'll be back. But next time my perch will have a much closer view.

District 42 President's Message

by Janice Wasik, President of RTOERO District 42

Happy New Year, everyone! I hope that your holiday season was heartwarming and memorable. The new year is often a time to reflect on the past and to look forward to the future. 2023 has been an exciting year for RTO/ERO nationally and for District 42 which represents BC's mainland and most of the Gulf Islands.

District 42 Mainland British Columbia was created in 1992 and was the first district to exist outside of Ontario. 2019 saw

the addition of new districts for the Prairies, Quebec and the Atlantic Region, and there are now 51 districts right across Canada. Membership in District 42 increases every month, and we now have almost 1000 members. Since 2019, your district leadership team has increased from 7 people to close to 20 people who volunteer on the Core Executive and a variety of committees.

We have made an amazing recovery from Covid lockdowns and the suspension of in-person activities. One huge benefit of the pandemic is that we learned to use Zoom, which allowed us to connect more effectively with members all over the district and made it possible for several members who live outside of the Lower Mainland to join the Executive Team. Our plan is to maintain the dual track. We are going to continue some Zoom events so that members who live in smaller communities or far away from other members can still be involved in activities. We are also resuming as many in-person events as we can organize to help members get acquainted with other members nearby that they never knew existed.

In 2023 we held two Zoom Health Talks (Gut Health in January + Healing Power of Laughter in October), four Zoom Travel Talks (France, Oregon/Washington, Mexico and Ethical Travel), and an in-person excursion to the Beaty Biodiversity Museum at UBC in August. Your Executive members had an in-person team-building event in June. In the fall we created a French group in response to a request to have activities where members could practise their French. The group is in the final stage of choosing a name for themselves and they have events planned in January and February 2024.

Another highlight of the year was our Winter Holiday Luncheon at the University Golf Club. We are absolutely delighted to have had over 140 people at the event in Vancouver. In addition, members around the province have been planning area luncheons in communities like Kamloops, Summerland, Kelowna,

Grand Forks, Gibsons, Nelson and Powell River. Some of the groups are getting together for a second or third time because they are enjoying their new circle of friends so much.

One of the wonderful aspects of RTOERO is that the organization is founded on six pillars as part of its mandate. In addition to Insurance for which we are most famous, the pillars include Perks and Products, Member Services and Activities, Advocacy, Community Service, and Research and Education. In other words, in RTOERO we go beyond ourselves to make the world a better place for others too.

As part of our outreach, District 42 makes a donation every year to the RTOERO Foundation in memory of our district members who passed away during the year. In 2023 that group included the former long-time President of District 42, Lionel Brathwaite, who passed away last November. District 42 also nominated the Alzheimer's Society to receive a \$10,000 donation which is given each year to one organization by national RTOERO. I'm happy to say that our recommendation was the winner in 2023.

RTOERO has a program of Community Grants and Scholarships for organizations and individuals who have a connection to an RTOERO member. Every year RTOERO accepts nominations from all 51 districts for 20 scholarships of \$3000 each to students in fields that relate to the vision and goals of RTOERO. The two individuals nominated by District 42 in 2023 both won a \$3000 scholarship. They included Jeanine Wasik who was enrolled in the Master of Education in Educational Leadership Program at Van-

couver Island University and Nicole Fradette who works at the Whitehorse General Hospital and is a Registered Nurse in the Master of Nursing, Nurse Practitioner stream at Athabasca University. As part of the Community Grants and Scholarships, community projects can receive grants of up to \$4000 and only a limited number are awarded by the national office each year. I'm proud to say that District 42 submitted our very first nomination ever in 2023, and it was successful! The community grant submission from Century House Senior Citizen's Activity Association in New Westminster received a \$4000 grant. This project called "Aging in Place" offers older adults an opportunity to participate in workshops designed to support them in making decisions about how and where to age.

We look forward to seeing you at events in the coming year (both in-person and via Zoom). Watch for details in our news-

letters and email messages. We are doing our best to respond to your needs and interests, and always welcome your input. You will soon receive a survey via email, the results of which will guide us in our planning of events in 2024. You can also contact me or any member of the Executive at any time if you have questions, concerns or more ideas for activities that we could initiate in the district.

We are always interested in helping members get involved as volunteers as well, so if you have been looking for a way to share your talents and expertise while having fun at the same time, please let us know. Several members first volunteered to be a member-at-large so they could get to know the organization better before they chose a particular area of interest. Please give the idea some thought.

On behalf of the District 42 Executive, I want to wish you all the best in the coming year.

Issues that Concern Educators

By Dr. Avis Glaze International Education Adviser

The perseverance of educators across the globe knows no bounds. They continue to work assiduously to ensure that students continue their learning during these "disruptive" times, while maintaining their equilibrium and optimism. I have chosen to briefly address a few issues that require ongoing attention, including:

1. Artificial Intelligence and the Digital World
2. Mental Health

3. Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Artificial Intelligence and the Digital World

There has certainly been a major proliferation of articles on the promise, benefits, cautions and inevitable challenges of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The pace and scope of this technology in terms of its impact on our daily lives is unprecedented. Some writers discuss these

changes against the backdrop of our five the Industrial revolutions. What is most interesting about the Fifth Industrial Revolution is that it is said to be powered by values and incorporates concepts such as sustainability “human connectedness” and concern for the environment.

Experts and pundits are certainly weighing in daily on these discussions. Whereas the industry is most impressed with the promise of this innovation, they state that if technology goes wrong, it could go very wrong, emphasizing that piecemeal, baby steps will not reign in this “existential threat” to humanity.

But there are others like Tapscott (2023) who suggest that we do need the benefits that AI offers, but caution that guardrails, rules and constraints must be established to avoid its misuse. For Tapscott:

“The possibilities of Artificial Intelligence on our economies and culture are spectacular. Its dark side are equally breathtaking...we have entered a new and potentially dangerous stage of human existence...From this point forward we can no longer ignore the depth and magnitude of the changes we are likely to experience as the continued shock waves of AI ripples through our economies and cultures. Like the internet, we’ve entered the second era of the Digital Age. Are we prepared? How will we fare? What will human society look like after these waves have subsided?”

Recent Globe and Mail articles report that US senators are being asked to create a “Referee” for AI with lawmakers seeking to mitigate the dangers and that constantly emerging technology has created boomed investments, increased consumer interest and popularity since

the opening of Open AI’s ChatGPT Chatbot. Regulators globally have been scrambling to draw up rules governing the use of generative AI. They encourage us to devise ways and means to encourage creativity and experimentation and to address students’ mental health needs and their sense of agency so that predictions that AI will be the “super villain of teaching tools” do not take root.

Another editorial talks about what we should have learned from the development of social media over the last two decades, and the promise and dangers of modern technology, encouraging policy makers to act quickly to head off problems.

At the risk of sounding jeremiad, I reiterate the November 23 Globe and Mail editorial comment that “this is what should make regulators wary. The past 30 years of tech innovations and lax antitrust enforcement have created corporate behemoths that can stare down large countries.”

We certainly cannot predict the future but with technological dominance, automation, loss of jobs, virtual learning assistants, and even suggestions that teachers will be replaced - to come across a book by Canada’s David Sax (2022) titled ***The Future is Analog: How to Create a More Human World***. Let’s persist in our efforts to educate solutions-finders, who seek to make ethical decisions, address issues such as poverty and narrow the digital divide.

Mental Health

Shelemy et al., (2019) state that teachers are uniquely positioned to identify mental health symptoms which include anxiety, depression, irritability, social withdrawal, and inability to concentrate in class. They

acknowledge previous research findings which found a connection between increased emotional support from teachers and a reduction in students' behavioural challenges and depressive symptom scores. They emphasize the necessity to focus on mental health and to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to support students who may be struggling.

People for Education provides some quick facts on the state of mental health in Ontario schools in their 2022-23 Annual Ontario School Survey, with data demonstrating a decline in the mental health of young people between 12 and 17. "In 2019, 73% of 12 to 17-year-olds described their mental health as very good or excellent but in 2022, that number had declined to 61%." This has long been a concern for educators who have reported other concerns such as burn out. Unicef states that up to 20 per cent of adolescents globally experience mental disorders, and that 5-10% in high-income countries and 15 per cent in low-and middle-income countries attempt suicide.

The World Health Organization (WHO) also reports that an estimated 1 in 7 youth between the ages of 10 and 19 are experiencing depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders, listing mental health disorders are a part of the leading causes for illness and disability for youth. For 15-29-year-olds, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death. Failure to address mental health in adolescence and young adulthood have a detrimental impact on life outcomes and school success. WHO places a strong emphasis on multi-level prevention and intervention strategies, while People for Education recommends increased human, financial and needs-based, differentiated resources.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Researchers such as Grimmer & Echols, (2000) conclude that teacher and school administrative shortages vary by geographic region, level and school subject and that increased student population and changes in workforce demographics were two forces behind this issue. While government policies do have an impact on teacher supply and demand at the local level, other factors such as an aging workforce, challenges with recruiting qualified teachers, changing student populations and course demands, do take their toll. There is a need "to respond to diversity and multiculturalism" and the alignment between teacher-preparation programs and "the needs of the field" (p. 323).

As Niyubahwe (2023) states, the challenges facing school districts to hire and retain professionally trained teachers is a multilayered issue which begins in teacher training and continues throughout the profession. Some school districts are having to fill the gap with teachers who are not legally qualified and are not prepared to work with students with disabilities or learning challenges. Niyubahwe's recommendations include reconciling their studies with their in-school teaching, flexible professional learning programs and peer mentoring systems.

In summary, I would like to emphasize that there is no shortage of research-informed recommendations and possible solutions that illuminate the issues. Our challenge in education remains the lack of deep and sustained implementation of recommendations already made. With political changes often driving educational priorities, a change in government

often means a change in priorities. Teachers and principals are often forced to change course and abandon priorities in which they have invested time, energy, resources and commitment. Incomplete implementation remains one of the most intractable problems we need to address. There needs to be a forged consensus by political parties to agree on the educational priorities that they will all support regardless of the party in power to get rid of the revolving door of initiatives. This is not wishful thinking. Countries like Finland have addressed this issue successfully.

References

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Call for submissions from our RTOERO Members!

We're excited to be in the planning stage for our **May 2024 issue** of the RTOERO District 42 newsletter! The Newsletter Committee is looking for submissions from our membership to enrich our newsletter and engage our members.

We'd love to get a submission from you! It'd be great to see a picture and/or a paragraph (approx 550-750 words) about:

- an experience in education you had when you were working (for example, a student you remember, a program you were involved in, an award you won, etc.)
- a travel experience you had or are planning. Include pictures if possible.
- a milestone you are working towards or have completed (for example, a skill you are learning, a personal achievement of some kind, an anniversary, etc.)
- a hobby or interest you are passionate about (for example, kayaking, bird watching, scuba diving, music, cycling, cooking, furniture making, hiking, volunteering, etc.)
- If not a written article, then how about a picture you've taken that

you'd like to share with other members? Be sure to let us know where and when it was taken.

Are you willing to be interviewed for our "Member Spotlight" section? Or do you know of an RTOERO member who might be? Please email me with this information. We're searching for our next interviewee!

Send your submission to me, Kate Yoshitomi, at eileen372@gmail.com by

April 1, 2023. Please add "Newsletter Submission" in the subject line. If you're submitting an article, please indicate if you're willing to include your email address in the submission so that members can get in touch with you if they would like more information about your topic. Pictures add great visual appeal, so send in those shots with your submission! Looking forward to hearing from our members!

Kelowna and West Kelowna Winter Holiday Luncheon

It's been a while, but RTO members from Kelowna and West Kelowna finally got together for a Winter Holiday/Christmas luncheon on Wednesday, December 13, 2023 at Boston Pizza. It was a chance to renew old acquaintances and make some new ones. A good time was had by all! Many thanks to Stella Majic, Meg O'Brien and Kim De Scally for organizing the event.



L-R Larry and Min Hunt, Patrick and Dragica Roy, Diane Graham, Alice Greydanus, Nancy Tully-Peever and Grant Peever



L-R Leo and Sherry Knight, Julie Palmer, Stella Majic, William Lee, Ron Palmer, Marion D., Carol Chisholm



L-R Fes & Kim De Scally, John O'Brien

Newsletter Correction: Scholarship Recipients

In the September newsletter article, we announced the two scholarship recipients, Jeanine Wasik and Nicole Fradette, and described their graduate studies. We mistakenly had two pictures of Nicole included rather than one of each! Our apologies to Jeanine.



Jeanine Wasik



Nicole Fradette

A Tribute to Lionel Brathwaite

by Imants Straumers

We met Lionel one Sunday morning shortly after Sointu and I had moved to Abbotsford from Mississauga, Ontario. Being new to the area, we visited several churches and started attending one near our home. This is a large building with multiple doors into the auditorium. One of the first people we met there was a smiling usher at the door we had chosen to use. Lionel was very welcoming and liked to chat. Over the next few times we met, Lionel learned that I had retired from the

Peel District School Board, and he mentioned that his brother had been employed by the same board. I had been with the board for 23 years, so I asked his name as there might be a chance I would recognize it. What a surprise when he said “Harold Brathwaite.” I certainly knew the name and the face, as he was the Director of Education for the board for years, and in a sense my boss.

As we got to know Lionel at church, our visits learned he was the president of

RTOERO District 42. Being interested in retired educators' advocacy and extended health benefits, he suggested I join RTOERO District 42.

I had just gotten my membership when Lionel had a request: would I be willing to travel to a workshop in Toronto as the current webmaster for this district was not able to go. I had told Lionel some of my background and my teaching subjects--electronics and computer technology. It sounded interesting, and a trip back to Toronto would be welcomed, so I booked a flight and made the trip a few days later. Guess who I met at this workshop--Harold Brathwaite, who was now the executive director for RTOERO. He wanted to meet the new recruit that Lionel had sent.

The challenges of technology kept confronting Lionel, much of it to do with leading this district: email, newsletter, accounting, website. I was glad that my skills were a 'fit' to help Lionel.

Many times, I would get a phone call. "Imant", Lionel would say (he never got used to putting the 's' on my name) and he would then describe what he could not get to function on his computer. Then there was his relieved "Thank you" when the series of steps resulted in success.

Often the issue could be resolved over the phone, but other times required a trip to the Brathwaite home. I learned that Lionel was a 'night owl'. It was not unusual to get an email from him with a time stamp of 1:00 AM.

In the summer of 2019 Lionel and Audrey were visiting our home. Out on the deck, Lionel took me aside. He began "Audrey and I had a talk, and I have decided that it is time for me to step down as President." I could understand his decision having had that responsibility for over a decade and facing the challenges aging brings. In September of that year, at the district AGM, Lionel was honoured for his service and the new president was elected.

As the days and months progressed, both Lionel and Audrey were dealing with health concerns. Sointu and I had Lionel come to our home for a meal, watch gospel singing or animal antics on TV to give Audrey time for appointments and outings. It was good to see Lionel laugh or clap along with the music.

We could see the dementia in Lionel progressing, and we were glad to have had a small part in helping the family. Sadly, Audrey passed away January 30, 2022 and Lionel on Nov 13, 2023.