What’s New?

2014 Cultural Awards Celebration
The Cultural Awards recognize outstanding organizations, groups or individuals in Nanaimo’s arts and cultural fields.

You are invited to attend the 2014 Cultural Awards Celebration, to be held on Wednesday March 12, 2014 at 7:00 pm at the Port Theatre. Congratulations to this year’s recipients:

- Shayd Johnson
  Emerging Cultural Leader
- Pat Coleman
  Excellence in Culture
- Ian Niamath
  Honor in Culture
- Kenneth Gogo
  Lifetime Achievement

Also to be honored at the event, Robert & Lillian Booth. Robert, who was blind and Lillian, who was deaf made a valuable contribution to the island’s musical history through their unique partnership of tuning pianos. Every church, school or individual who owned a piano, in the Central Island region knew Robert and Lillian. In 1993, Thelma Bradbury initiated a fund to purchase a Steinway Concert Grand Piano to honor her late parents as a legacy to Nanaimo’s culture. This piano sits on the stage of the Port Theatre and is the same one Diana Krall plays when she performs at the theatre.

Tickets for the Cultural Awards Celebration are FREE, but must be reserved by calling the Port Theatre Box Office at 250-754-8550 or reserving online here.

Thank You to Keynote Speaker Parker Williams and Staff of the Nanaimo Museum
Thank you to guest speaker Mr. Parker Williams, and staff at the Nanaimo Museum, for their assistance with this year’s 2014 Heritage Summit.

“Culture and heritage defines us as a community and a place. It’s not something we have, it’s who we are. It’s everything we were and will be.” After hearing many similar comments throughout the past eighteen months of community conversations, the draft 2014-2020 Cultural Plan for a Creative Nanaimo has been completed. The next milestone for the 2014-2020 Cultural Plan for a Creative Nanaimo is to present a final draft to City Council on March 10, 2014.

- 2014-2020 Cultural Plan for a Creative Nanaimo

Nanaimo Community Archives on YouTube
Established in 1991, the Nanaimo Community Archives is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving the region’s archival heritage. They acquire, preserve and provide public access to the historical records of Nanaimo. Their holdings include thousands of one-of-a-kind maps, architectural drawings and photographs. The Archives posts materials from their large collection of historic maps, photographs, documents, blueprints and, of course, films, on their YouTube channel (ArchivesNanaimo) and they invite you to check it out:

- ArchivesNanaimo YouTube Channel

For more information about the Archives, please visit their website at www.nanaimoarchives.ca.
Poet Laureate Welcomes Nanaimo's New Citizens


Immigration
by Naomi Beth Wakan

Why did we leave our birth land you and I?
Crossing borders always means a loss -
a loss of family and friends
and the familiar that so comforts...
but does it?
Perhaps our move was rather for to gain -
to gain the right to speak more freely;
to worship, or not, as we wished:
to live where we choose and not be
pushed into ghettos
made by others' prejudices.
Or perhaps we choose this country
for its clean air and clean water
and lakes and rivers stocked with fish,
and forests, forests, forests.
This country of peace-keepers
not war-mongers.
A country that promised shelter
and the nourishment that
fresh opportunities offer'
and the encouragement of skills
and the possibility that fresh views
present.
And in this country you and I have chosen,
we were both drawn to the west,
following past pioneers,
for here on this temperate island
in the Salish Sea,
we can find fertile soil
in which to set root.
And on this island, we have settled
in a harbour that can protect
and watch us flourish, a harbour
where perhaps we can set anchor
and be at rest.

The Pygmy Pavilion (99 Chapel Street)

In 1931, a local sawmill owner (Shelby Saunders) built the Pygmy Pavilion at 99 Chapel Street (was Fiesta bowling lanes, now Studio NA condominiums). Reportedly, he built the dance hall to resemble the famous Grant Palace Ballroom in New York. In 1932, the Pygmy helped to introduce big band jazz to Nanaimo. With a spring-loaded floor (the only sprung dance floor in western Canada) and a hot band, the Pygmy attracted dancers and jazz lovers from all over Vancouver Island.

According to Al Campbell, a big band musician who played for many years at the Pygmy:

"Back in the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s, as many as 1,000 people crammed onto the dance floor for a little jump, jive, and wail.... I remember soldiers coming in for Saturday night dances.... We would go until 2:00 am." 

The Silver Cornet Band was a source of first class musicians for the Pygmy band, and occasionally big name band leaders like Tommy Dorsey and Harry James joined them in battles of the bands. Other performers included the Niosi Big Band, the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, the Syd Moore Band, and Louis Armstrong and his 18-musician orchestra.

By the end of the 50s, big band music had given way to Rock and Roll, and the Pygmy Ballroom was converted to a bowling alley. The Pygmy Band, however, lived on over at the Legion Hall, and eventually it became the Nanaimo Musicians Association Band. Diana Krall, Ingrid Jensen and Jazz band teacher and mentor, Bryan Stovell, all began their professional apprenticeships in that band as teenagers.

Images courtesy of the Nanaimo District Museum and the Nanaimo Community Archives.

Text adapted in part from Jan Peterson's Harbour City, 2006.

Contact Us

Our office is open Monday to Friday, from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact us:

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