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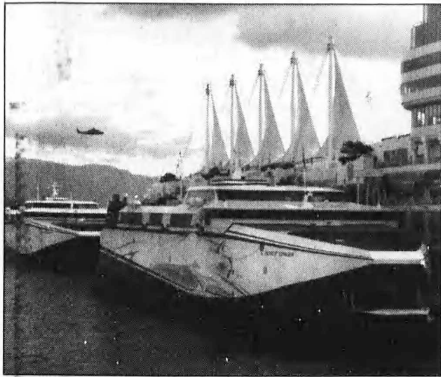
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CP photo

Two of the three mothballed fast ferries sit at the Vancouver Trade and Convention Centre on Monday as an auction takes place inside to get rid of them.

Auction is final fast ferry chapter

by DIRK MEISSNER
Canadian Press

VANCOUVER — An unknown North American buyer paid \$13 million US Monday for British Columbia's three mothballed fast ferries, a fraction of the \$450 million the vessels cost to build.

Seven bidders, including one from Dubai via the Internet, participated in the auction, which took about 15 minutes to complete.

Vancouver's Ritchie Bros. Auctioneers, which conducted the bidding, refused to identify the successful bidder, but said there were participants from Canada, the United States, Singapore and China.

A spokesman for Crown-owned B.C. Ferries, which commissioned construction of the fast ferries at taxpayers' expense, said the company needed to sell the vessels to move forward with a new economic agenda.

"Our goal was to sell the fast ferries and that's precisely what's been done," said chief executive officer Doug Allen.

"It was important to us to bring this to closure. We didn't have any price expectations."

The buyer paid \$4.5 million US for two fast ferries and \$4 million US for the third vessel.

Ritchie Bros. spokesman Randy Wall said the deal will take 10 days to close.

The buyers did not want to make an immediate public statement, he said.

Allen said the three fast ferries had a book value of \$70 million Cdn before the auction.

The selling price at the current exchange rate is equivalent to about \$19.23 million Cdn.

British Columbia's three aluminum-hulled fast ferries were a huge failed megaproject that helped sink the former New Democratic Party government.

The vessels, officially named Pacificats, were originally projected to cost \$210 million, but ended up costing more than \$450 million.

Coronary health improvement meeting set for PGRH tonight

Citizen staff

People with health problems like heart disease, diabetes, by-passes and high cholesterol may want to look into the Coronary Health Improvement Project (CHIP) in Prince George tonight.

The final information session about the program will be held at 7 p.m. in Room 103 at Prince George Regional Hospital for the CHIP spring program beginning March 31.

Irena Lipovszky, program co-ordinator, said about 60 per cent attend the program because they already have a health problem, and others come because they have a family member who has a disease.

The program, which goes for 16 evenings, features videos by Dr. Hans Diehl, program founder, cooking demonstrations, skits and competitions among the groups, along with discussions about diet, exercise, stress reduction, label reading and more.

Those attending pay \$210 for PGRH lab testing and course materials like a workbook, manual and video.

The program is supported by the Seventh Day Adventist Church which provides volunteers, library books, space to hold the program, follow-up meetings and cooking schools at the church for program alumni and the public.

The course is on for two hours and 15 minutes Monday to Thursday from March 31 to April 28 at the church, 4388 15th Ave.

About 80 people have attended the courses held spring and fall since 2001.

For more information call Lipovszky at 564-8967 or e-mail: irenal@magnet.com

Proposed Winter Olympic dates changed

VANCOUVER (CP) — To avoid a clash with the Super Bowl and other major international events, the Vancouver 2010 Bid Corp. has decided to change the potential starting date of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

The Vancouver bid book had proposed the Olympics begin Feb. 5, 2010, and end Feb. 21.

The new dates would see the Games open Feb. 12 and conclude Feb. 28.

"The reason for that is to ensure the marketing period is a clear period for the Games to be staged in," John Furlong, the bid corporation's president and chief operating officer, said Monday.

SFU hit by job action

by GLENN BOHN
CanWest News Service

VANCOUVER (CP) — Unionized clerical and support staff at Simon Fraser University walked off the job Monday to hold a noon-hour rally at the university's Burnaby Mountain campus.

Kathryn Aberle, the SFU media relations director who is speaking for management, said one more negotiating meeting is scheduled for Wednesday.

But the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which served 72-hour strike notice Friday, has indicated it will start rotating pickets at different university buildings in the coming days.

A CUPE bulletin described Monday's work stoppage and rally as "the first job action by this group, whose aim is to achieve a fair collective agreement. Other actions aimed at disrupting work as usual on all campuses will be announced as they are planned."

The union local, which represents about 750 people who work in offices, labs, libraries, gyms and other university services, has also announced an overtime ban.

Aberle has said a challenge both parties face is the edict by the B.C. government Public Sector Employers' Council that there be no wage increases for public sector employees for three years.

Meanwhile, a labour-management dispute at the University of B.C. is heading to mediation or arbitration if members of another CUPE local and UBC's board of governors agree.

CUPE and UBC negotiators plan to use Mark Brown, who has already worked as a mediator in the dispute which has led to union protests that have blocked university entrance roads.



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• bed-in-a-bag by ToGo™ & Wamsutta

save 40%
Nautica solid-coloured towels

save 40%
all duvets and mattress pads
By ToGo™, Wamsutta, Healthy Living,
Laura Ashley, Royal Velvet & Ralph Lauren.

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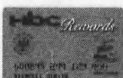
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