

THREE-DAY INQUEST

Jury says alcohol a factor in death

by BILL McEACHERN
Staff reporter

A Prince George coroner's jury has ruled Patricia Ann Kruska, 35, who disappeared last summer while fishing in the Nechako River, died by drowning.

Under the terms of the B.C. Coroner's Act, her death has been listed as due to "unnatural homicide," with the "freedom of alcohol a prominent factor in the death."

The phrasing of the verdict, reached Friday night after several

hours of deliberation, has sparked concern by both lawyers involved in the three-day inquest over whether the act adequately defines the causes of death without imputing motives.

Kruska disappeared while she and her husband were fishing Aug. 11 on the banks of the Nechako River near Miworth. Her badly-decomposed body was found 10 days later in the Fraser River near Lillooet.

The use of the term homicide in the Coroner's Act came under heavy criticism by the lawyer representing Dennis Kruska, the dead woman's husband.

"It's vague and misleading and inappropriate to this proceeding because in light of definition it's not clear what the significance is by the jury," said Paul Pakenham.

Under the act, there are five categories for the manner of death.

"A homicide is a death that was caused, directly or indirectly, by another person. Homicide is a neutral term that does not imply fault or blame," the policy guideline states.

Coroner counsel Don Kennedy called the term a "loaded word."

Under law a homicide means one human being killed by another human being, said Kennedy.

RCMP Staff Sgt. Jim Swanson, chief of the city's General Investigation Service, attended the inquest and called the homicide term misleading.

"To the average person it's synonymous with murder—it's confusing," he said.

Kennedy said he will discuss the term's use in view of a possible change with chief Crown Counsel Peter Ewert.

The coroner's jury also recommended that police have a second boat available for marine searches, that camping areas along the Nechako and Fraser Rivers be posted as "hazardous areas" and that the flow rates of area rivers be measured and made available to the public.

"I'm tired and very relieved that it's all over," Dennis Kruska, 42, said in an interview after the verdict was read.

Earlier Friday, Kruska went through a grueling five hours of testimony and cross-examination, sobbing several times while he told the jury he loved his wife.

He told the inquest he and his wife had two drinks before he went fishing the night of Aug. 11—leaving his wife with a 40-ounce bottle of vodka. He also testified he left his wife to fish along the riverbank, and heard his wife call for help. He said he searched for her but was unable to find her, then drove into the city to report her disappearance to the RCMP.

Earlier testimony indicated Patricia Kruska had a severe drinking problem, often stealing liquor from tenants' suites in the apartment building the couple owned.

Witnesses stated she was frequently found passed out, and previous to her death had been on anti-alcohol abuse drugs to combat her problem.

Perjury earns jail sentence

William Garnot, 24, who told an inquest he saw another man die in the Prince George RCMP lockup, has been sentenced to 18 months in jail for perjury.

Garnot, of Prince George, told a provincial court here Nov. 12 he lied at an inquest last February.

He told the inquest he saw police push 25-year-old Leonard James McKay into a cell and heard a scuffle and what sounded like a human head hitting the floor.

Under questioning from an RCMP lawyer at the inquest, Garnot admitted he could not have seen what he said he saw.

He was then charged with perjury. The inquest found McKay's death to be unnatural, but could not determine the cause of the brain hemorrhage that killed him.

Region office to be moved

The Fraser-Fort George regional economic development offices will soon move into city hall, thereby gaining a higher profile than it has in its Third Avenue offices.

The decision was made at last week's regional district board meeting.

Until then several alternatives were studied, including a store-front operation, but advantages of locating in city hall were too great.

Mayor Elmer Mercier said because 68 per cent of the regional district budget comes from Prince George the city has a great interest in the economic development commission's functions. He said the city is willing to put up an extra \$20,000 toward those functions would be postponed for another year.

Advertisements for a successor to economic development officer, Chris Stanley Jones, who leaves soon, are ready for publication the board was told.

Ald. George McKnight, board chairman, said the transitions should be closely-monitored so the last two years of a four-year program which is financed by both the federal and provincial governments are successful.

Expansion supported

Fraser-Fort George Regional District board members have given support for Valemount to expand its boundaries to include a densely-populated surrounding fire protection district and three pulp mills.

A report to the board said such an expansion would increase the mill rate value to \$14,000 per mill from \$4,000, based on 1982 assessments.

Such an increase would give the village more funds for fire protection in areas outside of its boundaries than it now receives under an existing contract.

The report states the proposed expansion would probably be advertised, and if fewer than 10 per cent of the affected fire protection district population objects, the municipal affairs ministry would likely approve without need for a referendum.

If more than 40 per cent objected, a referendum would probably not be allowed. A petition from village residents could precipitate a referendum, the report said.

School pact arbitrators appointed

Two arbitrators have been chosen to sit on the three-person board which will hammer out settlements for teachers in three Northern Interior school districts.

Prince George, Nechako and Quesnel teachers associations appointed Clay Perry and Charlie Campbell as the unanimous choice of the school districts concerned.

Perry and Campbell, both of Vancouver, must jointly appoint a third arbitrator by Dec. 7 or the responsibility for establishing a complete board will fall to the labor ministry.

The arbitration board will produce settlements for the Prince George, Nechako and Quesnel teachers associations.

Council tonight

In a report on tonight's agenda, city council will be asked to select which assessment option it wants for municipal tax purposes in 1983.

Currently the city is on an assessment option based on 100 per cent of market value which has the advantage of maintaining equity between properties and classes of properties, city treasurer Bill Kennedy says in the report.

Other options permit different types of properties to be taxed on various percentages of assessed market values, or an average percentage of actual values as determined April 1 of the preceding year.

In his report, Kennedy notes the proportion of city taxes paid by residential property owners as a group increased by five per cent, while commercial and business properties decreased between 10 and 12 per cent. The increase was a result of a rapid rise in market values of residential properties in the 1982 assessment roll.

The Downtown Parking Commission will designate 750 parking stalls in the Cross Street, McDonald and library parking lots and the Second Avenue parkade for downtown tenants and employees at a reduced rate.

The commission is concerned that the current parking system is not being used to the benefit of downtown merchants, who pay a levy for off-street parking lots and parkades.

In response to a request by the Towncenter Business Association, the commission will offer two-hour free parking from Dec. 6 to 24 in the Second Avenue and Plaza 400 parkades.

A report from city engineer Ernie Obst says based on findings of an independent traffic study it can be concluded that traffic to and from the new Canadian Tire store can be handled by the existing roadway system.

But he suggests the city wait for an evaluation of the intersection by the Ministry of Highways, which is considering either placing a traffic light or median on the bypass at 18th Avenue to control left turns into the store.



Never too cold

A lone diver hustles along the dock to don his diving apparatus in preparation for an icy dip in Cluculz Lake. About a dozen divers braved Sunday's cold to take part in an adult-education course on scuba diving.

B.C. TIMBER IN PRINCE RUPERT

1,700 face mill layoffs

PRINCE RUPERT, B.C. (CP) — B.C. Timber will lay off 1,700 north coast forestry workers this week but the president of the union representing nearly half of them said Friday he is devastated by the move and will consider a shorter work week to save their jobs.

Joseph LeBlanc, president of the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada, also said in an interview that while there is nothing the union can do about the cause of the shutdowns, workers are bitter over administration of the seniority clause of the collective agreement with the company.

"There will be some work available, but we are experiencing difficulties in putting people into those jobs by virtue of seniority," he said. "If there are any bitter feelings as a result of this thing, they are being caused over this whole issue of seniority."

In addition to closing its pulp mill here, B.C. Timber is shutting down three of four sawmills in the region on Nov. 26.

Company president John Montgomery said the closures are the result of poor demand for bleached kraft paper and increasing inventories.

The closure affects 800 workers at the pulp mill, represented by the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada, and an additional 950 workers at the Skeena and Pohl sawmills in Terrace, another sawmill in the Indian village of Kitwanga, the Renn mill in Hazelton as well as loggers supply.

correction

In referring to percolation rates of sewage lagoons in Friday's paper, a conversion from 60 minutes to one hour became one minute.

The sentence should have read: Until Nov. 1, 1983 lagoons will be approved on existing four-acre lots where soil percolation (rate of water absorption) exceeds one hour an inch; after that no permits for lagoons as sole methods of sewage disposal will be given within the health unit.

Mark Moncur, who spoke during Thursday's Fraser-Fort George Regional District board meeting was incorrectly identified as being with Mark C. Moncur and Associates Ltd., rather than with Aquaterra Consultants Inc. The Citizen apologizes for any inconvenience that might have resulted.

ing the mills, who are represented by the International Woodworkers of America.

The Renn and Skeena sawmills have been closed since June and the Kitwanga mill will remain open until an order destined for the United Kingdom is filled.

On Thursday, the company, a division of the B.C. Resources Investment Corp. established by the Social Credit government in 1978, said poor demand for plywood had forced permanent closure of the Kootenay Forest Products plywood division in the southeastern B.C.

40.7 CENTS A LITRE HERE

Gasoline prices fall again

Gasoline prices, which have been dropping in the Prince George area since late summer, continued their decline during the weekend and are now at their lowest level in seven months.

Motorists were paying 40.7 cents a litre for regular gasoline at many self-serve stations Sunday. That means people are paying 11 per cent less to fill up than they did in late September.

Last March, people in this city were paying 40.1 cents a litre, said one self-serve operator.

The price was raised to 41.7 cents the following month. They've already been undercut by a full-serve station which is offering gas at 40.6 cents.

Don Watson, retail administrator for Gulf Canada in Vancouver, said the cause of declining prices is that full-serve stations are trying to match prices at self-

serve outlets. The company tries to maintain a half-cent a litre price differential between self-serve and full-serve outlets.

That's the main cause of the price war, he said.

Another Gulf employee said prices could drop again at self-serves in this city soon.

The exception to the Gulf's pricing rules is in Quesnel, where one full-serve outlet is selling

Disarmament backed

VANCOUVER (CP) — The B.C. electorate was in a positive mood Saturday, voting "yes" to the majority of questions asked in referendums held in conjunction with municipal elections.

Voters gave solid support to nuclear disarmament — in votes Municipal Affairs Minister Jack Heinrich had advised local councils not to hold.

The question — which most municipalities phrased as "Do you support the goal of disarmament?" — was considered by provincial officials to be outside the jurisdiction of local governments and not allowable under the Municipal Act.

However, a court challenge by a citizen against a disarmament referendum in the Victoria suburb of Oak Bay was rejected three days before the election.

B.C. Supreme Court Justice Patricia Proudfoot ruled that disarmament "affects not only the municipality, but the entire universe."

In Oak Bay and Victoria, 84 per cent of those voting supported nuclear disarmament, and in the other 10 or so communities holding the referendum the vote was equally overwhelming.

four capital spending referendums which were all approved.

Vancouver voters had the most complicated time at the polls. They had 76 candidates running for positions on council, school and park boards as well as the six referendums. The average Vancouver voter had to spend about 20 minutes in the poll booth this year.

On the question of a ward system for municipal elections — a system where a community is divided into areas in which each elects its own representatives to council, Nanaimo and Vancouver went in different directions.

Nanaimo voted 58 per cent in favor of abandoning the ward system and returning to the at-large election system, while Vancouver voted 57 per cent in favor of instituting a ward system.

It's not known what the outcome of the Vancouver vote will be though, because the Municipal Affairs Ministry has said that any vote on the issue would have to be at least 60 per cent in favor before the government would give its approval.

Vancouver also held

workers have been off the job since September, 1981, when the first of several shutdowns began because of depressed markets.

Mayor Peter Lester said while the closure will affect this city of 20,000, its impact will be diminished by other projects.

"One of the things that makes a difference is that there's a tremendous amount of construction going on on Ridley Island with the coal and the grain facilities. The impact isn't as great as it would have been without these developments but certainly it's a very severe impact."

Many of the sawmill

Disabled get help shopping

Handicapped persons in Prince George will be able to do some of their Christmas shopping this week without fighting crowds.

Operation Wheelchair, now in its seventh year, will be held from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at Woodward's.

Program co-ordinator Laurie Waghorn said 50 volunteer staff including cashiers and helpers are ready to welcome and assist handicapped people of all ages at the upper-floor Winnipeg Street entrance.

Shoppers, who may bring a helper if they wish, will have the run of the store with the exception of the grocery and bakery departments.

Waghorn said Operation Wheelchair "is much more than just a shopping excursion."

"There will be caroling choirs, coffee and doughnuts and Salvation Army sunshine treat bags," she said.

"And, of course, Santa Claus will be there to have his picture taken free with all shoppers."

In Vancouver, gasoline costs 38.3 cents a litre, about two cents less than in September.

Watson added demand has dropped because of economic conditions and because there are more small, fuel-efficient cars on the road.

Fort St. John has missed out on the latest round in the gas wars. Prices there have held at 44.8 cents a litre since mid-October, he said.

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