

**Car dealer talks scheduled**

Both sides involved in a lockout at three car dealerships in Prince George are scheduled to meet Wednesday morning with a provincial government mediator.

The lockout, now in its fourth week, affects about 40 unionized mechanics and partsmen at Prince George Motors, Nicholson Chev-Olds and Fred Walls Lincoln-Mercury.

Both sides were approached by the mediation services branch last Friday, company negotiator Lorne Reader said.

The dealers posted lockout notices in early July after asking a previous mediator to book out of negotiations with members of the International Woodworkers of America, Local 1-424.

Talks failed on the issues of wages and concessions.

The union wants to keep the two-year contract that expired June 30, said Jack Higgins, first vice-president of the IWA local.

Higgins said the companies rejected a proposal the union put forward two weeks ago.

The companies are asking for a flat rate in pay with no guarantee of hours, a wage cut of between two and 10 per cent, and a reduction in vacation pay, Higgins said.

IWA mechanics and partsmen now earn hourly wages of \$16.38 and \$15.24 respectively.

**Injured woman critical**

A Williams Lake woman is in critical condition in Prince George Regional Hospital after a two-vehicle accident about 9:30 p.m. Monday on Highway 16 at Ferry Avenue.

Rita Thomas, 47, the injured woman, was driving a van that was in collision with a car driven by Halliwell Morgan, 52, of Prince George.

Laurie Philips, 59, of Soda Creek, and Anastasia Sandy, of Williams Lake, passengers in the van, are in satisfactory condition in hospital.

Shawn Woodford, 17, of Prince George, who was riding in the car, is also reported in satisfactory condition. Halliwell Morgan, Tania Morgan, 15, and Darryl Nelson, 31, also of Prince George, were treated and released from hospital.

Police are investigating.

**Airport expansion coming**

Aerobatic teams like the Canadian Armed Forces Snowbirds may be able to appear at Vanderhoof's air show next year thanks to a planned airport expansion.

Highways Minister Alex Fraser announced Monday that \$230,000 will be spent to extend and widen the Vanderhoof airport. The runway will be lengthened to 1,500 metres.

"Continuing development of the airport should result in the establishment of scheduled air service," said Fraser, who encouraged the Vanderhoof district to pursue this objective.

The enlarged runway will accommodate jet planes and bigger, corporate aircraft which have been unable to land on the present 1,200-metre airstrip.



Ray Levy holds the portable computer which will help B.C. Hydro get its bills to households with more efficiency and speed.

Citizen photo by Brock Gable

**METER READERS' COMPUTER**

**Your bill gains speed**

by ARNOLD OLSON  
Staff reporter

Those fellows walking about your back yard, holding a black box in their hands are not from the Starship Enterprise, asking Scotty to beam them aboard.

They're B.C. Hydro employees with a new tool that's designed to transfer your debt to the company's records with the speed of light.

The hand-held computers have been used in the U.S. for about 10 years but they were introduced to B.C. about six months ago and brought into use in Prince George just last week.

Called Porta-Printers, the \$6,000-computers have a 6K memory bank which allows meter readers to carry the information they need on their rounds, to be displayed on a small screen.

The information can include whether to be aware of dogs, get keys from an office, or special requests to stay off the grass.

It also contains all the information Hydro needs to get the right bill to the right house three days earlier than the old-paper-and pen system.

Gary Rogowski, in charge of the local program to get the computers into the field, said up to 20 per cent improvements over the old

system have been predicted. No plans exist to lay anyone off initially but attrition might be used to reduce the number of meter readers.

He said the weatherproof units have been tested and approved for use at -20 C.

"These things — you can read overnight. They're more versatile than a piece of paper, for these guys (meter readers)."

The meter readers used to go into the field with sheaves of paper containing the names of people on their routes. They'd have to write all the information on the slips and return to the office in time to transfer the information to Hydro records.

Now, they record the information, return to the office and plug the units into a system which feeds the computers' contents into the main computer. By morning the bills are on their way.

"This increases Hydro's cash flow from three to five days — the amount of time we used to take to do the job," said Ray Levy, one of the meter readers.

The time-saving is only in larger centres. Rural areas must still be visited and travel time in this instance far outweighs the meter-reading time.

**DANGERS ON JOB**

**Farmers given reminder**

by BEV CHRISTENSEN  
Staff reporter

Last year an Okanagan farmer died when the tractor he was hauling tree stumps with flipped over backwards, pinning him underneath.

A Fraser Valley farmer was killed when his tractor rolled off a pile of grass he was flattening.

And a 22-year-old Endako girl drowned in a creek when a bridge collapsed as she drove a hay stacker over it.

Those cases are "classic examples of situations that could have been avoided," says Stephen Thomson of the B.C. Federation of Agriculture.

At least six British Columbians die every year in farm-related accidents, while another 400 are injured.

"It's right up there as far as being a hazardous occupation," says Thomson, who estimates farming falls third behind forestry and construction as one of the most dangerous jobs in the province.

Farm Safety Week continues until today in an attempt to reduce farm-related accidents that claim the lives of 150 Canadians and injure 12,000 annually.

In British Columbia alone, the Workers' Compensation Board

has paid out \$2.8 million in losses for death and injury occurring on farms since April 1983.

About 80 per cent of farming accidents involve tractors. Half of those accidents involve roll-overs, because a tractor has a high centre of gravity and can easily tip in a ditch or on a steep hill.

Thomson, a co-ordinator for the farm health and safety program of the B.C. Federation of Agriculture, says many tractor-related deaths could be prevented if the farmer installed roll-over protection and wore a seat belt.

Another portion of accidents involve livestock, where farmers who accidentally "spook animals end up

getting charged, stepped on or crushed.

"There's been a lot of injuries where farmers remove guards (on the moving parts of machinery)," Thomson added.

"What happens is that clothing will get caught and pull the person in."

Thomson says accidents happen if farmers don't check equipment, or are tired from working long hours or under extreme pressure.

"Sometimes, because they've been operating so long, farmers tend to get a little complacent," he said. "Sometimes they'll say 'that needs to be fixed, but I'll fix it tomorrow.'"

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**Mill fires battled**

Prince George firefighters spent three hours Monday afternoon extinguishing a fire in some wood strips behind the Brink Forest Products Ltd. mill on River Road.

The mill wasn't damaged, said a fire department spokesman.

The fire is believed to have been started by a spark from a nearby beehive burner, the spokesman said.

Firefighters were also called out Monday to a small fire in a sawdust pile at Rustad Bros. mill at the BCR industrial site. That fire was out when firefighters arrived.

It is believed to have been started by a spark from a metal-cutting saw, the spokesman said.

**New exec appointed**

The Unemployment Action Centre in Prince George has hired a new co-ordinator.

Cecil Kelley, a member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America Local 1998, will replace Allan Morrey, who steps

down Friday after heading the centre for a year.

Kelley has been a member of various unions since 1960.

The centre operates a non-profit food store and provides counselling to unemployed people.

**CAMERON STREET**

**Overpass costs eyed**

by JOHN SPILKER  
Staff reporter

City council will look ways to cut the costs of the proposed Cameron Street overpass, which threatens to surpass its \$2.5-million budget.

Council voted Monday to have a second look at the cost of building a concrete structure, which council rejected last year as being too costly.

Recent construction trends indicate concrete could be cheaper than gravel fill, said Alderman Richard Godfrey.

"We'll have to look at it again, it may not be too costly," he said in an interview.

So far, the lowest tender of \$1,978,325 by Co-

lumbia Bitulithic Ltd. to build a gravel-graded structure will push the project \$291,500 above the cost-sharing agreement between the city and Canadian National Railways, city engineer Ernie Obst said in a report to council.

Other costs such as land acquisition, landscaping and engineering will force the overpass beyond the \$2.5 million agreement.

Obst added that negotiations are underway with Columbia Bitulithic to bring the project within budget.

He also said the Canadian Transport Commission is expected to decide soon whether it will approve the project.

**Boxing answers wanted**

Prince George aldermen want a report from the city's boxing commission before acting on a complaint from fight promoter Wayne Sponagle.

Sponagle said he wants new members on the commission following a boxing match controversy more than one year ago which saw a fight between his son and a Seattle boxer declared no-contest.

Mayor Elmer Mercier told council Monday "I have had my share of calls" about the controversy and said he suspected the "commission is falling apart."

Alderman George McKnight said the bylaw which regulates the commission may have to be changed.

"This isn't a great deal of interest to me, but I know it's near the hearts of others," he said of the volunteer commission which oversees professional boxing and wrestling matches in Prince George.

But Alderman Richard Godfrey said he didn't know what council was talking about because it already had accepted a report from the commission on the fight.

In a letter to council, Sponagle said the commission needs new members.

"Two of the present members do not attend

the fights, and after speaking with them on several occasions, they have expressed a desire to not be on the commission."

The three-man commission consists of Bill Mahood, Walter Bush and Doug Martin.

The dispute between Sponagle and the commission stems from a June 28, 1984 fight that featured the promoter's son, George.

The commission declared the fight no-contest because Don Sponagle, the promoter's brother and the fighter's uncle, was selected by Sponagle as one of the three judges.

While all the judges declared Sponagle the winner in the match, commission member Martin said in an earlier interview the decision had to be thrown out.

"We're not questioning the judge's competence or honesty, but there is the question of the family connection . . . The fighter is entitled to impartial judging," he said of the Seattle boxer.

Council also decided to refer the names of people Sponagle said are willing to serve on the commission to a committee that annually recommends appointments.

Those named are Ron Drane, Ed Bodner, Del Anderson, George Winters and Jim Gibson.

**Hotel's fate on hold**

The 60-year-old Europe Hotel is going to be around for at least another two weeks.

City council agreed Monday to table a recommendation by the heritage advisory committee to lease the building to a Prince George businessman as a cold storage facility.

By the time council looks at the matter again, it also will have a report on tenders to demolish the building.

The hotel was scheduled to be torn down after a 90-day moratorium on the demolition expired earlier this month.

However, the final decision may be delayed another week because Alderman Monica Becott will not

be able to attend the Aug. 12 meeting. Mayor Elmer Mercier said council could table the matter again to accommodate Becott, who said she has worked hard on the issue.

Alderman Art Stauble said he wants to know who will pay taxes on the hotel under the proposed lease.

Rene Lamoureux, owner of Spruce City Resale, said he is willing to repair the building's roof, clean up the front, and take out \$75,000 of fire insurance and \$1 million of liability insurance if the city rents the premises for \$1 per year.

The city purchased the Europe for \$465,000 in 1981 when a major downtown mall was in the works.

**Letter set for peace**

Prince George city council will send a letter of support to the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for a peace conference they are holding to mark the 40th anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Japan.

Lorne Murray of the Prince George Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament urged council Monday to send the message to the conference, which starts Tuesday, the day of the anniversary.

Murray also told council that Vancouver Mayor Mike Harcourt will attend the conference in addition to two Terrace alderman who will be there as private citizens.

**FOREST FIRMS**

**Costs were 2 per cent**

Last year the forest companies in the northeast quarter of the province, including Prince George, paid the government two per cent of their sales dollars for raw materials.

It was less than \$13 million in cash to generate more than \$650 million in sales.

In the Prince George Forest Region, which runs from Hixon to the Yukon border and from Endako to Alberta, companies harvested 15,584,110 cubic metres of timber between April 1984 and April 1985, covering 52,413 hectares, or 202 square miles of forest.

In return their cash payments to the provincial government were \$12,869,753.

The gross stumpage charges were higher: \$26,328,904. But the companies received

\$18,579,808 in credit for roadbuilding and reforestation, which was necessary because of harvesting.

Rentals and annual fees for forest rights, unchanged since the present Forest Act was introduced in 1978, added just over \$3.6 million.

Interest, scaling charges and miscellaneous fees brought the total to \$12.8 million.

During the year, lumber prices averaged about \$150 in U.S. dollars per thousand board feet of lumber, according to the Council of Forest Industries.

This year they're cutting more timber than ever before. Through May, the

latest figures available, enough wood to make an additional 55 million board feet of lumber was added to last year's record volume.

Each cubic metre makes about 210 board feet of lumber, making total production over 3.2 billion board feet in the past year.

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