

Local news

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City Editor



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Local 503

32-YEAR COURT VETERAN GEORGE STEWART

Retired judge gives views on justice

by MARILYN STORIE
Citizen Staff

A retired provincial court judge refused Wednesday to hand out magic cures, band-aid solutions or much hope that crime in Prince George or the rest of Canada will ever end.

But George Stewart, a 32-year veteran of the provincial courts, did supplement a Towncenter Business Association luncheon with a dose of common sense, personally testifying to the reality of Voltaire's observation that he who is merely just is severe.

Stewart began his talk by stating that what he had to say might be considered rather obvious.

"But a lot of things that are obvious have to be restated," he said. "The place that I worked for 32 years... is a rather unhappy

place to work. Nobody really wants to be there — it's not a fun palace."

Stewart told the audience:

■ You can't look to the courts to solve all the economic and social problems. "I think of the court as one of the social controls. The court is there to serve the community and to serve the individual accused. It's in bringing those two together that the difficulties come in."

■ The system deliberately allows judges great latitude to deal with the many factors involved in deciding each individual matter. "The difficulty we get into is we think we can exercise discretion, but we think we can deny that to anyone else."

■ There should be no place for vengeance and retribution in a

courtroom. One purpose of the courts, said Stewart, is to reduce the amount of human suffering. "How often have you heard it said, 'He got off on a technicality'? Have you ever heard anyone say, 'He was convicted on a technicality'? There are thousands convicted in Canada every week on a technicality."



STEWART

■ Many factors come into play with each individual case and sometimes the unreported 'punishments' can be more severe than the legal penalties: "Did he (accused) lose his job as a result of what he did? Is he quadriplegic as a result of a self-inflicted acci-

dent? Is he married? Has he got dependents? Was the offence premeditated or spontaneous? Is he truly remorseful?"

■ The social problem of violence is nothing new: "Violence has been around for a long time."

■ Judges are not isolated from the community: "Judges are not Martians, they don't come from Algeria. We live here. We're aware of what's going on. Judges are also victims of break-and-enters and assault."

A question sounding out Stewart's views on whether community policing, in particular the Community Policing Access Centre scheduled to open downtown this spring will help battle crime, brought a quick response from Stewart.

"I don't know," he said. "I

think the more liaison between police and the community the better, but it's a motherhood statement. How can you speak against it? There are some problems, but the reality is we have one of the best police forces in the world."

A ballpark question followed: If you had a magic wand what would you change?

"I don't know," said Stewart. "I'm not here as a guru. Always be suspicious of people who always have a solution. Everybody has ideas, but a fanatic has only one."

The TCBA justice system speaking series will conclude with a talk by defence lawyer Simon Wagstaffe next month. Wagstaffe will explain the role lawyers play in representing clients charged with criminal offences.

Artsweek under way early here

Artists from the Prince George region are busy during Artsweek, because they have nothing to lose but their anonymity.

Although Artsweek will officially be celebrated beginning Saturday, the Prince George Dance Festival and P.G. Theatre Workshop get a jump on things.

The dance festival has its honors performance today starting at 7:30 p.m. in the Vanier Hall auditorium and Theatre Workshop presents the series of monologues, Talking With, at P.G. Playhouse. The play continues Friday and Saturday.

"We have gone out to our member groups," said Claudia Reich, Studio 2880 administrator, "to find out what they're doing."

"In just one week we have a full calendar of event of things that are happening."

The Prince George Symphony Orchestra and the P.G. and District Community Arts Council start the actual Artsweek celebrations with an invitational reception at the P.G. Art Gallery, following the P.G.S.'s performance at Vanier Hall auditorium.

The band Rymes With Orange performs Saturday at the Civic Centre.

The arts council and the city's Leisure Services Department present a Spring Costume Ball On Skates to be held Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Coliseum. Live music will be featured.

Special guests will be the P.G. Figure Skating Club. Prizes will be awarded for best costume, participation and early bird ticket purchases. Makeup artists or costume rentals will be available.

The arts council will have a business before hours coffee and goodies March 25 at Studio 2880, with those presenting business cards eligible to win door prizes.

Those who know the city has art but don't know where to find it can enjoy a guided Artwalk March that starts March 27 from the Civic Centre at 2 p.m. and wanders through 20 businesses that support the arts or arts places that are businesses. It ends at 4 p.m. at Other Art Cafe.

Again, prizes for participants will be drawn. Registration is only \$1, but a map comes with it.

Reich said Other Art Cafe is also co-operating with arts events during the week.

Those are only the major items. The entire week has something going on. One-page calendars of 2880, almost any of the participating venues and at The Citizen front counter.

ICBC moves worry private agents

by MARILYN STORIE
Citizen Staff

Independent insurance brokers say a new payment schedule imposed by ICBC this year will cause hardship to B.C. communities in the form of reduced services and layoffs in the industry.

The Insurance Brokers Association of B.C. represents 950 insurance agents across the province who include public and private car insurance in the services they offer. Commission revenue cutbacks and new charges imposed on independent insurance brokers this year have the association worried.

Under a new payment schedule that brokers say was imposed without consultation, ICBC commissions to agents are reduced if the agents sell a low proportion of ICBC collision coverage.

Communities outside the Lower Mainland will suffer more, says Mel McMillan of Porter and McMillan Insurance in Prince George.

"The demographic area we service is rural/farm and blue collar primarily and the majority of vehicles are of the older variety. . . We are in the process of hiring more staff to cope with the additional workload of motor vehicle transactions and short-term expiries," McMillan said in a complaint to ICBC officials.

McMillan and other brokers believe salary and staff reductions around the province are inevitable if ICBC refuses to revamp the new rules.

Brokers' remuneration has been capped at the 1992 level without consultation and negotiations continuing this week could end in brokers' Autoplan agreement being changed to include a termination clause.

ICBC's 1992 report was released this month. ICBC president Robyn

Allan announced the Crown corporation could turn a surplus of over \$100 million by the end of 1993 because of new measures introduced to control claims and operating costs.

According to ICBC officials, the controls will return the corporation to a sounder financial footing and bring stability to drivers' premiums.

Jack Hamilton, general manager of the Insurance Brokers Association of B.C. (IBABC), has a different view.

"The only reason ICBC can point to decreasing costs (for 1992) is because we had the mildest winter on record," Hamilton said Wednesday from Vancouver. "They booked far fewer claims."

Hamilton suggested ICBC should concentrate on traffic education programs instead of gouging insurance brokers.

"The reality of life is that B.C. has the highest number of (motor vehicle accident) claims in Cana-

da. If they can stop the claims, educate the public, then they really will save money."

Brokers admit there has been a general increase in broker remuneration from 1988 to 1992 because of the influx of new residents to the province and the ensuing increase in motor vehicle registration. With popular short-term policies introduced last year, the increase has been sharper.

However, with insurers taking advantage of new short-term policies to renew as many as four times a year, insurance brokers in Prince George are finding they are picking up as little as \$25.50 more per year for four times the work.

"It's the only option there is for the average person," said Hamilton.

"There was a 19-per-cent hike

last year and with a further 9 1/2-per-cent this year, people have to insure four times a year. People can't pay \$1,200 (all at once). Insurance brokers are stuck with absorbing the cost of doing the paperwork without sufficient remuneration."

IBABC says nearly 18,000 people are either fully or partially dependent on income from employment in the general insurance industry.

According to an impact study produced by Bakes Insurance Consulting Ltd., the average ICBC employee salary is \$38,355.68, almost \$9,100 more annually per broker employee than at private companies.

Private companies are allowed to compete for what is known as optional coverage for the province's 2.2 million vehicles.

Such coverage includes liability in excess of \$200,000, collision and comprehensive policies. Basic liability coverage, however, must be taken with ICBC.

CRIME STOPPERS PROGRAM

Murder re-enactment set

A Crime Stoppers re-enactment of a murder is expected to air on local television later this month.

Police are hopeful a review of the circumstances leading to the strangling death of city resident Therese Marie Umphrey, 38, will jog the memory of someone with information crucial to solving this case.

Umphrey's body was discovered Feb. 14 at about 2 p.m. about 50 kilometres southwest of the city near the Pelican Lake Logging Road.

A team of special investigators from the Vancouver RCMP Serious Crimes Unit were brought in to assist police here that week.

But in spite of an intensive investigation, including door-to-door inquiries throughout the rural area, a suspect has yet to be located.

The lack of an arrest has sparked police to do a Crime Stoppers re-enactment while memories are fresh.

Police have released the descrip-

POLICE BEAT

tion of a male suspect believed responsible for robbing a beer and wine store clerk at gunpoint Tuesday evening.

The man is in his 20s, of medium complexion, five foot seven inches to five foot nine inches tall and has wavy, light brown hair. He was wearing a leather jacket and blue jeans.

The armed robbery took place at JJ's Cold Beer and Wine Store shortly after 9 p.m. The suspect was last seen heading on foot for Devonshire Crescent.

Prince George Crime Stoppers is taking aim at random acts of shooting at trains in recent years.

In one instance last Oct. 2, the nine-millimetre gun used could have resulted in injury or death. If hazardous goods with the potential to explode if hit are struck, environmental as well as personal in-

jury could result, Crime Stoppers said in a news release.

In the incident, a B.C. Rail freight train was en route from Prince George to Vancouver. At about 2 a.m., near Alexandria south of Quesnel, the conductor and brakeman heard gunfire.

The brakeman looked out, saw muzzle flashes and ducked out of sight. When the shots stopped, both men looked out to see an older model vehicle similar to a Ford Bronco being driven away. It was white and had a blue decal on the passenger door.

One shot fired was powerful enough to go through the wall of one railway car, ricocheting off the lumber and passing through the opposite wall.

Anyone with information is asked to phone Prince George Crime Stoppers at 564-TIPS. Callers' identities are kept confidential and your information about this or any other crime could lead to a reward.

Anglers' rights top agenda

Local anglers will hold an Interior fisheries symposium to discuss inland sports anglers' rights at a time when most concern seems to be about coastal commercial and native Indian fishing concerns.

Sponsored by the Okanena region of the B.C. Wildlife Federation, the symposium will be held April 3 at the Yellowhead Inn in Prince George.

Topics to be covered will be the extent of stocking, and monitoring existing stocks of steelhead, coho, chinook, rainbow trout and sturgeon.

"It's about time the local anglers have some information and input about local fishing issues, such as: seasons, the Nechako River diversion, native fishing, tackle restrictions on the Stellako River, B.C. Hydro's reservoir rehabilitation (projects), the state of fish stocks for recreation," says Ray Maher, regional BCWF president.

Symposium speakers include:

Dr. David Narver, federal Environment Ministry fisheries director; Phil Hallinan, BCWF president; Bob Hooton, SMWF's Environment Ministry fisheries biologist; Dennis Ableson, Prince George Environment Ministry fisheries biologist; Bob Melrose, well-known Prince George region outdoorsman; and Arlene Galisky of the Rivers Defense Coalition.

Discussion topics will include future sports fishery following the Kemano Completion Project's

further reduction of Nechako River flow; native fisheries, impact of reservoirs on sports fisheries, whether only fly-fishing should be on more lakes than currently, whether ice fishing bans on lakes should be increased, as well as discussions on fish stocks.

Pre-registration for \$10 can be made through Northland Sports in Prince George or by calling 564-3300 or 561-1501, or registration for \$12 can be made at the symposium.

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Teachers elect Worley

Citizen news services

VANCOUVER — Vernon teacher Ray Worley was elected Wednesday to a second term as president of the B.C. Teachers Federation.

Worley defeated Jack Stephens of North Vancouver at the federation's convention.

Worley told delegates that teachers face difficult times in the coming year in areas such as funding, contracts, the defence of local bargaining and violence at schools.

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