

President's July Update

Community Greetings and Congratulations Grads!

I hope my community update continues to find you healthy and now active as we taste limited freedoms during the challenges of this pandemic . Congratulations to all students in Scenic Acres for making it through the school year virtually and especially those graduating. A special thank you to teachers who have been engaging their students and working through the curriculum remotely while balancing their own family and personal lives. I attended the drive-by parade today, June 26th held in front of École du Nouveau Monde. The teachers were out front dressed in costume with signs and honking vehicles filled with kids drove by, waving, celebrating and expressing their appreciation. Isabelle, the Vice Principal visited and celebrated with the 40 students finishing grade 6 this week by visiting each of their homes. It was great to see the mutual care and personal attention among the teachers and kids; Bon Vacances!

I'm still walking most days and meeting, greeting old and new friends, catching up on family news and providing community information to those who have questions. It was great to finally get a haircut! I am impressed with the vibrancy I observe from our residents; extensive gardening, the significant volume of bicycle traffic especially families traveling together, professional house renovations and 'do-it-yourselfers' busily at work. It is great to see lots of neighbours meeting together on driveways and in our green spaces. The flower displays planted and nurtured by Pixie look fabulous and I especially enjoy the beautiful displays in the new flower beds surrounding 'The Fort' area (the wood structures west of the tennis courts on Scenic Acres Drive).

Scenic Acres - My Story

I haven't provided my own story with Scenic Acres for many years so I thought I would give the short version of it; if you want the long version, book time with me!

In 1994, shortly after we moved to Scenic Acres, I soon discovered that our premium bus service was going to be discontinued (pre-LRT). I depended on this service and decided to attend a community meeting hosted by our Councillor at the time, Dale Hodges. I was impressed by the passion from the audience and its large size as well as the decorum and factual discourse presented which justified continuing the service (the route actually made money and it was maintained). Fast forward to 2001, I discovered that bus routes were changing in preparation for the opening of Dalhousie Station and the draft schematics I reviewed did not include bus service to north Scenic Acres. I made inquiries to the project team; found out that the community association only has input into route planning; discovered no one from Scenic Acres was involved; presented my case to the SACA Board and was appointed Transportation Director. Once this bus route project was completed, the work transitioned to Crowfoot LRT design, advocacy and construction, Crowchild and Stoney Trail advocacy and upgrades, street parking projects, pedestrian overpass design, lots and lots of writing articles and correspondence and community, City and construction company engagement. It became a passion, yes for my own interests but a passion for the wellbeing of our community which really took over as priority one.

What I was learning and experiencing converged for me both a SACA volunteer and Shell manager in finance operations and project leadership roles and allowed me to contribute to both realms. In both spheres of influence, I broadened my experience with regard to financial and governance applications and controls, staff management, people engagement, project management, advocacy, government relations and effective presentation, conflict resolution, board and director role development and business planning. Community service in Scenic Acres led to similar work in other volunteer organizations; in Fort McMurray and back to Scenic Acres with broadening personal development; through a corporate career and transition to retirement with continued life purpose.

SACA Volunteering

Why do I tell you my story? Because it could be your story too! The SACA Board experience gives you opportunity to develop skills and experience, apply learnings across multiple areas of influence with broadening into new opportunities. It is an applicable experience for young professionals developing their vocations and mature individuals to continue applying their experience.

SACA currently has a small board, six people and as a result, most of us are handling multiple roles and committees and frankly overloaded. Specific Business Plan results can't be achieved because we just don't have the manpower resourcing to complete them. SACA directors have specific portfolios with a results-focus. Initiative and creativity are 'must' attributes but they must translate into commitment; community betterment is a 'must' motive and personal agendas are not tolerated. A director term is two years; board meetings are monthly but depending on portfolios a director would have other regular meetings. If the director's role for whatever reason becomes too intensive for one individual, then they are not expected to do it all. In those cases, work could be deferred to another business planning year and/or the work shared with other volunteers within a committee. If you are still unsure you could commit to the Board but still want to volunteer, you can join a committee where meetings are more flexible and you are focused on a specific task. Currently, SACA has committees for LEAF, Community Development, Community/Social Engagement and other committees are struck as needed to support community plans (Canada 150 Committee for example that worked through 2016/2017).

The SACA Board and Committees are only sustainable and can only stay vibrant if we have sufficient numbers, competencies and experience as well as succession. At this stage of my life, I am more than willing to be a mentor and share my experiences and so are other board members. If you are interested in any of this work, email me at scenicboard@shaw.ca.

SACA Update on Re-launch

The Province announced Phase One re-launch plans in early June that included outdoor facilities allowed to open, governed by strict compliance requirements. Community centres were expected to be permitted to open in Phase Three which had an undetermined timing (likely fall). The Province surprised everyone on June 9 and allowed opening of recreational and community facilities.

I attended a community association President's meeting that week and no one was ready to open based on 1. the complex and evolving provincial and health regulations (multiple regulations for community association based on facilities and service offerings), 2. the additional costs associated with administration and maintenance (recording attendees, verifying attendee health, distancing and cohort grouping, regular and intensive cleaning requirements) and 3. the association and personal liability risks involved.

There are lots of rules and regulations that must to be followed in order to open and would include additional staffing and supplies costs and potential new financial risks for the SACA entity and director-volunteers personally. Our insurance provider has decided mid-term to add an exclusion clause to not cover COVID-19-related claims. The SACA Board determined earlier in June that we could not open until we fully understood all the requirements and the risks we would be taking in a world that is increasingly litigious; again, this cautious approach is commonly agreed across all community associations. We therefore, unfortunately did not proceed with some longer term outdoor and indoor rental opportunities that wanted to commence almost immediately. We have sought legal advice on this whole situation and received the lawyer's report this week so we will review it and make decisions regarding what actions we need to take to ensure safe and compliant re-launch of our facilities with mitigated risk.

SACA facilities remain closed. As I mentioned last month, we still have fixed costs and no regular source of revenues so we are maintaining operations with existing (and depleting) financial reserves. We would love to open our facilities and feel the pressure to do so and satisfy the pent-up resident demand. If we were to open now meeting the regulatory procedures, we would have to do so at much less capacity and higher costs, so some events and services we normally provide would not be economically feasible to execute. In other cases, the layout of our facilities would prevent us from complying with the regulations. When we can safely and carefully open, we will.

The SACA Board continues to meet and work on a number of other initiatives associated with our Business Plan as well as the core activities we must perform in order to sustain our mandate and operations. Ruth is painting the interior of our facility; long overdue and saving us money by not hiring a contractor to do it.

This would be a great time to renew your SACA membership. This can be done via our website and by this response you show your support of SACA.

Hope to see you on Canada Day, participating in or cheering on the Drive-By Parade!

If you need help that SACA can provide, or can offer help please contact the office at 403-547-9589 or scenicacresca@shaw.ca; we are monitoring messages and will respond.

Please monitor and continue to take care of yourselves, your loved ones and act for those who you see vulnerable,

Jim Palmer
President, Scenic Acres Community Association
scenicboard@shaw.ca