

2014 AGM – Chair Report (By Erik Lund)

Welcome, members of the Society, staff, guests and welcome to our friends and volunteers including our board members who work so diligently for the benefit of the society. As the Chair of the Swan Lake Board it is my pleasure to be here and give you a report on the activities, which have dominated your Society for the past year.

I want to thank the Board for everything they have done this year. It has been a pleasure to work with you all. A special thank you also to the Executive Committee for all the extra meetings and time you have put in for the Sanctuary. Your Executive Committee is made up of Vice Chair Blaine Benson, Secretary Joan Cowley, Treasurer Maureen Butler and Past Chair Jody Watson.

This is the report of what your Society has done in the past year and what my hopes are for the future. Our vision has been to bring people and nature together, focusing on the natural world through education and restoration. Our Mission is to manage the land and provide educational programs. To do this, we need to fundraise, increase our membership, ensure the users of the facility have a good experience and at the same time maintain a high level of staff, volunteer and member satisfaction.

In 2013 over 60,000 visitors came through the nature house, 24,000 children were enrolled in our programs, over 200 volunteers contributed to the sanctuary and we to have about 400 members of the Society after the May 2014 plant sale. During 2013, we established a pre-school in partnership with Saanich Parks and Recreation, the site staff planted 250 native trees and we completed a renovation of the interior of the Martelli house.

What remains to be done is the exterior of the Martelli house and we estimate the cost will be about \$15,000. This is expected to be completed this summer. It is estimated that the Boardwalk has a life expectancy of 2 more years so we need to start work on that project soon. The sanctuary has some restricted funds for the replacement of the Boardwalk. The design used will depend upon our success in fundraising. But in any case, it is our expectation that within the next two years, the Boardwalk will be replaced with new materials. When we negotiated the agreement with Saanich Parks to establish the pre-school, we did not anticipate certain events. While establishing the pre-school fits perfectly with our vision and our mandate to educate, we probably put the cart before the horse so to speak.

In order to have a room for the pre-school, we had to relocate the site staff and the site volunteers. Saanich Parks decorated the pre-school at their expense but we bore the cost of renovating the lower portion of the 831 Ralph Street house at our cost, which is where the Site staff and volunteers ended up. It was the Board's intent to renovate the Martelli house and move the site staff there but the lease with the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team GOERT did not accommodate site staff and volunteers as expected. The Board will be reviewing this situation.

The other unforeseen problem that arose after the pre-school started was an issue about parking. It seems that in the morning when the children are dropped off for the pre-school and when they are picked up, the amount of traffic causes severe congestion in our present parking lot. This is a problem the Board and staff is working on addressing now. We seem to be the victim of our own success.

The sanctuary's portion of the revenue from the pre-school was originally negotiated at 20% of the net profit of the school, which turned out to be about \$650 per month. This year, we re-negotiated the share to be 30% of the net profit. This will bring the monthly contribution up to about \$950 and if they start an afternoon program the monthly contribution will increase to about \$1800.

This establishment of the pre-school has had a large effect on our operation in 2013 and it will continue to have until we sort out the operational problems.

During 2013, the Board had a surprise shortfall regarding fundraising. This was a shock to the Board and we realized that remedial action had to be taken immediately in order to keep the Society solvent. The Board decided to do a restructuring of the way we had been doing business in the past and to that end a new operations model was established. The Board worked with our staff and had their full cooperation. The goal was to put the Society on a firm financial footing and also improve the working conditions and satisfaction level of our Staff.

I can report, this endeavour has been successful. We are now as solvent as we have ever been and we are working on marketing plans for the future. Part of this marketing plan is the establishment of endowment funds, which is something the Society considered in the mid 1980's but did not establish. Yes, Saanich is an annual benefactor as well as BC Gaming and the Federal Government but it is not enough. It is a constant struggle to get adequate funds to repair and replace the aging structures and to pay our employees competitive wages. The Board feels it is imperative that the sanctuary establish other forms of reliable funding.

The Board recognizes that there is a people capacity for the sanctuary, therefore going forward, any increase in visitors and programming must be done with caution. That said, we can do certain marketing that does not impact on the capacity of the sanctuary and that marketing can give us the revenue to make Swan Lake the jewel in Saanich and a place of sanctuary not only for flora and fauna but for the public as well.

Your Board continues to seek Directors who have a love of the place and the skill sets needed to help the Board do its work. To that end I am happy to report that your new Board has the skill sets to move us forward.

I believe one of the reasons volunteers come forward is for the very reason I have been a volunteer for so many years. Simply put, Swan Lake provides a venue for children who would otherwise have no opportunity to be exposed to the natural world and we have the potential of lighting a spark in those young minds that will continue to burn for years to come. This spark may over time influence them to make career choices and decisions for the environment and perhaps for the world.

If you have ever seen our Naturalists at work with the children who go through our programs you will know what I mean. Since the start of this Society in 1975 with Terry Morrison at the helm, as Executive director, we have had the most wonderful Naturalists working here. I have the privilege to have been here almost at the beginning and I have known them all, some of my children and grandchildren have gone through the programs and they are the better for it. I'm sure each volunteer has their own reason for volunteering at Swan Lake and the Sanctuary continues to be a desirable place to volunteer.

Finally, I would like to thank The Municipality of Saanich for their faith in us and for their financial support. A special thank you to Councillor Susan Brice for her much appreciated guidance. Thanks also to the Federal Government for their support in assistance with the Martelli house reconstruction. The Provincial Government came through for us again through the BC Gaming grants, right at the end of the year when we were pretty cash strapped. Other grants from the Natural History Society, Thrifty foods and the Royal Bank have also contributed to our success in the past year. Lastly but not least, thank you to our members who continue to support us with your memberships, donations of time and financial contributions.

This brings to a close the Chairs report on the past year's activities. Since this is the last meeting I will Chair for the sanctuary I want to take this opportunity to publicly recognize our fantastic staff, it has been a pleasure to work with you all in the past year.

I have over the years had the experience of working with many people and I can say from the bottom of my heart, that the Swan Lake staff, are the nicest, friendliest and most dedicated people I have had the privilege to be associated with.