

Chair's Report – Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary AGM, April 11, 2013

By Jody Watson

Each of my last three Chair reports at the AGMs starts out with “well it was a busy year here at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary”. I am not going to start out that way this year.

In many ways, 2012 was a year of change - some may say upheaval - at the Sanctuary; it has also been a year of growth, a year of successes and of year of renewal.

The focus of 2012 was to find a person to lead the organization following Terry's retirement after 36 years. This proved to be a challenging and demanding task. I would like to thank and acknowledge my fellow Board members – Beth Allan and Chris Shelton – for the many, many hours of their time that they dedicated to this most important endeavour. We spent more than a few hours pouring over resumes, determining the needed skill sets in the next ED to take us forward, interviewing and evaluating several candidates, developing an ED evaluation process. Thank you both for all of your time, dedication and commitment.

During our search for the next Executive Director (ED), we were for a period of time without an ED. Thanks to a terrific effort by all of the staff and all of the Board members we weathered our way through until Barry arrived in November of last year. I spent a lot of time here during that period. And in doing so, I really got to know Coral, Renee, Scott, Betsy, June and Carlo – the amazing staff that run this place. I also got meet many of the wonderful volunteers that come here each week. I witnessed first hand the passion and dedication of our staff and volunteers, their resilience, their teamwork and their love of this place. On behalf of the Board, thank you all. You guys are the backbone of this place. I am really proud of the work that you and I am so grateful for your efforts, especially those over the past year.

During the interregnum between EDs, a tremendous amount of work happened. The Martelli House and property were added to the Sanctuary as per the 1979 Land Management Agreement and Plan with the District of Saanich. This new property and house presented a fantastic opportunity to the Sanctuary to enable our growth and expansion of programs by creating more space for staff as well as an opportunity to house another non-profit organization. Around the same time, the Naturalist's were exploring partnerships with the District of Saanich Recreation to offer a nature pre-school that would operate out of the Nature House. Barry will talk a little more about that later.

A subcommittee was struck to assess the potential use of the building and site and plans for renovating the Martelli residence into office space were developed. Fellow Board members Lehna Malmkvist, Erik Lund, Gordon Tolman and our site manager June Pretzer all pitched in to create a plan, define an appropriate budget and to successfully obtain a grant for the project. And discussions began with the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team to relocate their office to the Martelli House. And Barry will tell you more about this project in his report – it has been one of his many projects requiring a lot of his time! A massive thank you to Director Erik Lund for his leadership on this project, for managing the early stages of this project, and for his continued oversight to its completion.

Board Treasurer Maureen Butler, along with Finance Committee members Erik Lund, Brian Warburton, with great assistance from Barbara Ernesti and Betsy Rose put together our budgets to meet the demands for 2013. Thank you for your work in putting that together in time for Barry's arrival and in time for our submission to Saanich. I would also like to thank Directors Warburton, Malmkvist and Allen for all of their work on the personnel committee this year and helping to resolve some challenging issues we have faced in the last year.

We were all very happy when Barry arrived. Please join me in officially welcoming Barry Janyk, our Executive Director. Barry jumped in with both feet the day he arrived on November 14th. He quickly got up to speed and has been rather busy with managing the contractors doing the renovation on the Martelli House, assessing staff needs and rounding out the team that he needs to take us forward and gaining a better understanding of our needs and how to take us into the future as a sustainable organization. I think he has also gained an appreciation and love for the Sanctuary and the great work that is conducted here.

Since Barry arrived, he has at the request of the Board, been reviewing the operations and procedures, assessing our risk and liability, and looking into the overall operation and administration of the Sanctuary with the aim of improving our financial stability and operational efficiencies so that the Society, our staff and our volunteers can carry on the great work that gets done here long into the future. He has been very busy, works very hard for this place and has demonstrated the leadership, integrity and experience that we need as we move forward.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Councillor Susan Brice, our Saanich Council liaison, for her tremendous support to the Sanctuary over the years and in particular her support to the Board over the past year. On a personal note, I thank you for all of your advice, expertise and words of encouragement to me over the past year. Thank you.

In addition to the projects I have talked about, our dedicated staff and volunteers have continued to increase the amount of land under restoration and enhancement, continued to wage a war on the invasive species, increased participation in our many wonderful school and community programs, increased the number of volunteers and improved our administration and financial practices.

So, it wasn't a busy year here at Swan Lake. It was a really, really busy year, and so much was accomplished. I am excited to see so many new perspective Board members each wanting to contribute their time, energy and expertise to support the growth and success Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary. Thank you all.

I am proud to have been the Chair of this organization for the past four years. None were busier than the last year. I am especially proud of all that the staff, volunteers, board members, and supporters have done to enhance and improve this place, the educational programs, and the community awareness of this treasure. Thanks to all of you, and I look forward to seeing all that we can accomplish by working together over year.