



## Greater Victoria Hits the Highway to Health

Written in May 2007

### RECREATION WITHOUT BORDERS

Municipalities in Greater Victoria banded together in 2006 to start up a region-wide Active Communities initiative. The goal was to harmonize their strategies, avoid duplication of services and maximize resources.

*"We realized that coordinating our efforts would be better than each of us going off and doing our own individual programs,"* said Lorna Curtis, Active Communities Greater Victoria co-chair and Oak Bay Recreation Program Services Manager. *"So we pooled our resources to get a more consistent, effective message out to the public."*

The committee has representation from the municipal recreation departments in Victoria, Oak Bay, Saanich, the Saanich Peninsula (representing North Saanich, Central Saanich, Saanich Peninsula and Sidney), SEAPARC Recreation (representing Juan de Fuca and Sooke), Esquimalt and West Shore (representing View Royal, Langford, Colwood, Metchosin and the Highlands). The Vancouver Island Health Authority, YM-YWCA and Frontrunners Footwear (representing the corporate sector) have also joined the committee.

The joint work of the committee has strengthened the existing collaboration between the municipalities. Curtis noted the recreation managers had been working together previously, but this initiative brought front-line staff together from across municipal boundaries.

*"The committee has come together and they're amazing,"* Curtis said. *"Everybody sees the benefit from the grass-roots level of the staff regionally working*

*together and pooling our resources."* Each municipality is also registered individually as an Active Community, providing localized initiatives in addition to the regional programs.

*"We're promoting it in all our facilities so we're sending out a consistent message,"* Curtis said.

### HOGG LEADS THE PACK

The region's Active Communities Initiative was jump-started in April 2007 with the launch of the Highway to Health activity tracker program. Provincial and local politicians, including Minister of State for ActNow BC Gordon Hogg, led the way for a community walk along Victoria's waterfront. The event garnered public and media attention. That week, the Mayor of North Saanich logged the most steps in a challenge with Greater Victoria's 12 other mayors.

*"We're hearing more and more people talking about Highway to Health,"* Curtis said. *"Victoria is very active to begin with but this is adding a dimension of fun to it."*

A \$5,000 BCRPA Active Communities grant contributed funding towards the launch of Highway to Health. Nearly a thousand participants signed up and logged the equivalent of more than 99 million steps on the website within a month of the start of the program.

Participants track activities such as walking, running, cycling, swimming, rowing or dancing on the site ([www.stepsout.com/gv](http://www.stepsout.com/gv), with additional information and resources at [www.fitinfitness.ca](http://www.fitinfitness.ca)). The site converts the activities into an equivalent

number of steps taken so people can see their individual progress on a virtual map of Vancouver Island. The site also features pop-up fitness and nutrition tips and healthy recipe ideas, courtesy of the Vancouver Island Health Authority. It offers chances to win prizes as well, including groceries from Thrifty Foods.

Following the Highway to Health launch, the committee piloted Mile Zero Walking Clinics in the first week of May. Frontrunners walk leaders led the clinics in partnership with the recreation departments. About 20 people showed up for one of the first walking groups, and more than 50 people became involved at five different rec centres later that same month. Highway to Health is now extending into the school system to get students, teachers and parents more active. In addition, the committee is looking at creating new community walking guides and an active workplace kit.

### CORPORATE COOPERATION

The committee created a Corporate Sponsorship Opportunities flyer, offering various sponsorship options to bring the business community on-board. Sponsorships from BC Transit, Frontrunners, Thrifty Foods and Coast Capital Savings were subsequently secured. Now that the Active Communities name is more visible, Curtis has noticed more sponsors wanting to become involved.

*"We're hearing more and more, 'We want to get on board with this,'"* Curtis said.

For a number of years, BC Transit and Greater Victoria recreation centres have offered a program for people to bring in

## Vancouver Island/South Coast – Greater Victoria



their expired bus passes for free admission at regional facilities. In exchange, BC Transit provides advertising space on the back of a bus. In 2007, an Active Communities Greater Victoria ad was featured on the back of a regional bus, encouraging people to join Highway to Health.

The recreation centres also had an existing partnership with Frontrunners.

*“When they were talking about doing a walk clinic component as part of Active Communities, it seemed natural to approach us and see if we would be interested in partnering with them on that as well,”* said committee member and Frontrunners representative Andrea Carey. *“Part of [Frontrunners]’ mandate is to promote active living.”* Her advice to other Active Communities is to involve local businesses that believe in the project.

### DANGLING A CARROT

Another successful initiative is Eat Well Get Moving—a school-based program through which students track their activities and fruit or vegetable consumption on a card. Once the card is completed, it can be entered for prizes. In 2007, 8,700



students participated (6,521 elementary, 1,782 middle, 285 secondary). Different classes (414) participated and challenged each other for the prize of a class skate or swim at their local rec centre. The initiative received an \$11,275 grant from the Union of BC Municipalities Community Health Promotion Fund.

The program’s mascot is Crunchy the Carrot, who visits schools, walks/runs, parades and local community centres. According to Curtis, Crunchy is so popular he now needs an escort.



In early 2007, the committee came out with an Active Parents Pass to encourage new parents to use recreation facilities. Vancouver Island Health Authority nurses give out the passes, which offer parents five free drop-in admissions to any of the Greater Victoria recreation centres. The aim is to reduce stress, isolation and depression in early parenthood.

To further promote activity and use of recreation facilities, all the recreation facilities in the region offered \$2 drop-in admissions to the public on Move for Health Day (May 10).

The committee is also incorporating the Active Communities brand into its Taste of Recreation program. The program offered \$25 monthly passes in April for unlimited access to all drop-in programs at the recreation facilities. The normal rate for a monthly pass is \$45 to \$60.

*“It’s a way to get people active and introduce them to our facilities,”* Curtis said.

The committee is looking to pilot a Young Chefs on the Run program which would combine nutrition and healthy recipes with physical activities for youth ages 11 to 13.

## Greater Victoria Highlights

- Working regionally to plan, implement and promote active programs, services, resources and events
- Running the Highway to Health online activity tracker program
- Securing grant funds from BCRPA’s Active Communities (\$5,000) and the UBCM Community Health Promotion Fund (\$11,275)
- Forming partnerships and sponsorships with businesses in the community
- Encouraging children and youth to eat healthy through the Eat Well, Get Moving program
- Offering an Active Parents Pass to provide new parents with access to recreation opportunities
- Offering discount recreation passes in April through the Taste of Recreation program
- 38 schools registered with Action! Schools BC
- Launched [www.fitinfitness.ca](http://www.fitinfitness.ca), [www.stepsout.com/gv](http://www.stepsout.com/gv)

## Greater Victoria Info

- **Population:** 351,022 (BC Stats 2005)
- **Region:** Vancouver Island
- **About Greater Victoria:** Government is the largest employer in the Capital Regional District. The Capital Regional District operates 28 parks and 2 trails in the region. The Regional District is a federation of 13 municipalities (Central Saanich, Colwood, Esquimalt, Highlands, Langford, Metchosin, North Saanich, Oak Bay, Saanich, Sidney, Sooke, Victoria and View Royal) and 3 electoral areas (Juan de Fuca, Southern Gulf Islands, Salt Spring Island). The region has a wealth of outdoor sport and recreation opportunities on and off the water, as well as indoor recreation facilities. The area attracts many tourists.

(Source: [www.crd.bc.ca](http://www.crd.bc.ca))

## Greater Victoria Hits the Highway to Health, cont...

### TAKING MEASUREMENTS

To evaluate the program's successes, the committee plans to use BCRPA's Active Communities evaluation tools. In addition, participants will fill out a fitness and nutrition survey when they sign up for the Highway to Health website and a follow-

up survey six months later (both of which would allow the group to log the number of participants). Results will also be measured by tracking the number of hits to the site and by comparing attendance at recreation facilities over the years.

With its regional support and a hugely successful Highway to Health launch, Active Communities Greater Victoria is well on its way to increasing individuals' physical activity levels and creating healthier communities.

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## Sooke Residents Ready to Get Active

*Written in May 2007*

The Active Communities Initiative arrived at just the right time for the Sooke region on Vancouver Island. The Community Health Initiative (a partnership of community members and health and social service providers from East Sooke to Port Renfrew) released its Community Health Resource Mapping Project health and wellness survey results in 2006 at a public forum. Many citizens turned out for the event. The aim of the project was to conduct an inventory of the services that support health and wellness and provide illness care.

The survey results formed the basis of a number of recommendations, including the need to develop safe active transportation options, create safe youth recreation and gathering spaces and to develop an Active Community plan for recreation. A UBCM Community Health Promotion grant of \$35,000 funded the project.

The recommendations were shared with the community through a summary report. The report identified the diverse nature of the Sooke region, including differences

in culture, values, life stage, education, geography, opportunities and assets. The intent of the recommendations was to create public awareness about the community's health status and needs, the resources available and local priorities, with the ultimate goal of achieving better health.

Lorraine Brewster, Program Services Manager for the Sooke and Electoral Area Parks and Recreation Commission (SEAPARC) and Active Community Team Leader, then recruited an Active Community team to implement the report's recommendations.

*"The information that they got was quite unbelievable, and some things were real tie-ins to Active Communities,"* Brewster said. *"The timing was right for forming the Active Community team."* Brewster had just arrived in town in January 2007 after working with the provincial Active Communities Initiative, based out of the BCRPA office in Burnaby.

*"What I discovered when I first arrived in Sooke was that it was a tremendous community,"* Brewster said. *"There is unbelievable spirit in this community."*



After three months of on-the-ground networking, she had formed a solid team representing the Community Health Initiative, the Sooke Family Resource Society, Sooke Minor Hockey, the Canadian Cancer Society, the community school, an elementary school, SEAPARC, the District of Sooke, Sooke Trail and Road Runners and various individuals. Although SEAPARC took the lead in getting the initiative going, Brewster stressed the importance of involving everyone in building a plan to engage people in physical activity.

*“I really wanted to keep it driven by [the] community; I really wanted to hear from the community,”* she said. The Community Health Initiative survey results guided the formation of the Active Community plan to increase opportunities to participate in physical activities. The survey’s most-cited barriers were transportation issues and a lack of knowledge of what services and programs are available.

The project identified the Capital Regional District website ([www.crd.bc.ca/seaparc](http://www.crd.bc.ca/seaparc)) as a useful tool for creating awareness of available programs and services. In addition, the SEAPARC recreation guide informs readers of Active Community programs, such as the discounted Active Community Pass and the Highway to Health Activity Tracker, as well as the initiative itself.

Using the Active Communities Tool Kit, the team is now prioritizing ideas for an action plan to fill some identified gaps in the community, such as the need for safe walking paths away from the highway. Of the 1,250 households responding to

the survey, the majority of respondents reported there is a lack of room to walk or bike safely in their neighbourhoods.

### LAUNCHING IDEAS

To capitalize on Sooke’s harbour and surrounding parks, the team is looking to kick off its Active Community initiative with a day or week of activities. The team hopes to involve the Sooke community and the T’Sou-ke First Nation in longboating. The team will be applying for a grant for the event through Active Communities.

*“There is a huge assortment of people on [the team] that have come up with great ideas,”* said Active Saanich’s Team Member representing the District, council clerk Lisa Urlacher. Another suggestion from the team is to hold a health fair in spring 2008, involving the schools, parents and grandparents.

### ACTIVE BUSINESS

Active Sooke and Electoral Area (the name of the local Active Community Initiative) is also starting to engage local workplaces in its Active Business campaign. Partners include the Sooke Family Resource Center, the Odyssey Health & Fitness Centres and Sooke Cycle. The local employment centre has also shown an interest in starting a workplace wellness program. The SEAPARC Recreation Guide promotes Active Business, as does the chamber of commerce.

Urlacher has started health and wellness initiatives at the Municipal Hall. The District’s building inspection clerk Jan Stope attended a BCRPA Active Communities Active Workplace Workshop in April. District employees are being encouraged to get active during lunch hours. Pedometers were purchased and an eight-week activity challenge wrapped up in June. Of the 23 municipal staff, 22 participated in the activity challenge, forming teams and tracking their activities weekly on a points system.

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- Securing grant funds regionally from BCRPA’s Active Communities (\$5,000) and the UBCM Community Health Promotion Fund (\$11,275), and locally from UBCM (\$35,000)
- Forming partnerships and sponsorships with businesses in the community
- Encouraging children and youth to eat healthy through the Eat Well, Get Moving program
- Offering an Active Parents Pass to provide new parents with access to recreation opportunities
- Offering discount recreation passes in April through the Taste of Recreation program
- Launching an Active Business campaign to promote workplace wellness initiatives
- 18 schools registered with Action! Schools BC

## Sooke Info

- **Population:** 10,177 (BC Stats 2005)
- **Region:** Vancouver Island
- **About Sooke:** Once a resource-based economy, the District of Sooke now has a vibrant tourism sector. The community and visitors can access the West Coast Trail, the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail, the Galloping Goose Trail, a skateboard park, an arena and aquatic centre in Sooke. The Capital Regional District operates the SEAPARC Leisure Complex. Sooke is home to the T’Sou-ke First Nation.

(Source: [www.sooke.ca](http://www.sooke.ca))



## Sooke Residents Ready to Get Active, cont...

*“When you see other people doing it or other people losing weight, it makes you more motivated as well,”* Stope said. Urlacher sends reminders if points aren’t submitted, so the staff team encourages its members to keep up with the pace.

*“Some people have lost weight, some haven’t, but some have become more active,”* Stope said. *“We are trying to create awareness more than anything else.”* At the end of the challenge, the staff will have a healthy potluck lunch to celebrate their achievements. Stope and

Urlacher are also looking at bringing in a reflexologist to offer discount massages to staff. They are hoping to form a health and wellness committee to keep people from reverting back to their old habits after the challenge ends.

*“Our hearts are in the right place, it’s time that is our real problem,”* Stope said.

Sooke is also looking beyond local initiatives, with Brewster sitting on the Regional Active Communities Committee of Greater Victoria.

*“I really believe in Active Communities; I believe that this community is right for something like this,”* Brewster said. *“It’s exciting, and I think that the payoff will be huge. There are a lot of issues in this community in terms of addiction, youth and lots of issues that we need to work on, so I think that creating Active Community programs and services is going to benefit the community.”*

## Saanich Youth Super Size their Health

*Written in May 2007*

Saanich council started steering a course towards a healthier community when it made the 20% by the year 2010 physical activity commitment in 2005. Things progressed when the Active Community team, led by the District of Saanich Parks and Recreation department, kicked off the Active Saanich campaign in January 2006. In addition to running programs and events for the area, Active Saanich has since partnered with Active Communities Greater Victoria to bring in regional initiatives such as the Highway to Health activity tracker program.

### **SUPER SIZE YOUR HEALTH**

With the help of community partners, Active Saanich has been reaching out to increase awareness of the benefits of healthy, active lifestyles, particularly to children and youth.

Saanich’s Youth Health and Fitness Expo (the Super Size Your Health Fair) was

back by popular demand in spring 2007. A class of marketing students at one of the high schools came up with the idea for a teen-oriented event bringing together various schools to focus on health, nutrition and physical activity. Community partners such as School District 61, Active Saanich, Pacific Sport and local businesses helped bring the fair to life.

*“So much of the information out there is geared at adults so they wanted to do something that was user-friendly when it came to teens,”* said Charlene Parker, District of Saanich Active Cities Coordinator and Active Saanich Team Leader. Almost 2,000 youths aged 13 to 18 from schools throughout the District attended the fair in both 2006 and 2007.

*“They are quite keen on the concept of nutrition and how to eat healthier and be healthier,”* Parker added. The fair featured guest speakers, hands-on projects, and booths from more than 30 local

businesses and organizations, supplying information on physical activity and nutrition.

A part from the fair, outside of school, youth can access Game

Bikes in the Upside Teen Centre at Saanich Commonwealth Place. The stationary bikes work as controllers for video games, with the participants’ pedaling and handlebar movements represented onscreen. Saanich Recreation bought the two bikes in 2006 to get inactive young gamers moving, through a partnership with the University of Victoria.

*“They are quite popular and we like the fact that the kids actually have to do something besides sit there and play,”*

