

Vancouver Island/South Coast – Comox Valley



Active Comox Valley Builds Sustainable Partnerships

August 2008



By being visible at existing active events in the community and linking with new partner organizations, Active Comox Valley (ACV) is getting the word out to residents of all abilities to make healthy choices.

The ACV group has shifted its direction this year from starting up its own programs and events to instead focusing on linking with community groups that already offer active living initiatives and events.

“We found that we were actually duplicating programs so there was confusion out there,” explained ACV Coordinator Robyn Butler. *“In the past we were having events and there were too many other events going on the same day, so we weren’t getting the bodies out that we should have. It has been very successful to date because we’ve been able to increase our partnerships and ultimately increase awareness through those different channels.”*

As a result of the new partnerships, ACV is

increasing awareness of opportunities to get active among the general population and its target populations: Aboriginals, seniors, youth and people with economic or physical disadvantages.

“We’re reaching special populations. It’s a more focused approach,” Butler noted. Comox Valley’s Active Communities initiative—Active Comox Valley—is a health promotion strategy encouraging all citizens of the Comox Valley to be active every day. The ACV steering committee represents four local governments—the Comox Valley Regional District, the Town of Comox, the City of Courtenay, and the Village of Cumberland—as well as Courtenay Recreation Association, Comox Recreation Commission, Black Creek Community Association, Vancouver Island Health Authority, School District 71, and 19 Wing Comox Air Force Base.

The initiative originally got off the ground with the help of a \$35,000 grant through the Union of BC Municipalities’ Community Health Promotion Fund in 2006. Local governments in the valley have since kept ACV funding going.

“We’re highlighting our successes to date to each council,” Butler reported. *“They have all been very receptive.”*

To measure the impact of its health promotion efforts, ACV commissioned phone surveys of 2,800 valley residents in 2006 and 2008 with subsidies from BCRPA through Active Communities. Those reporting an awareness of either the 20% by 2010 challenge or the local Active Communities initiative jumped from 19% of respondents in 2006 to 25% in 2008.

To further ensure that ACV is here to stay, the committee has formed new

partnerships with community groups. These include the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee, K’omoks First Nation, Comox Valley Kids, Cycling Task Force (Bike to Work Week), Canadian Diabetes Association, Canadian Cancer Society, Comox Valley Tri-K, elementary schools, Berwick seniors’ residence, MS Society, Courtenay Osteoporosis Support Group, Heart and Stroke Foundation, CUPE Local 439, Spirit of BC committee, Ovarian Cancer Walk for Hope, Comox Valley Prescription for Health, TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) Lighthouse Beach Bash, Katimavik, and the Young Chefs on the Run program. Sponsors also include Thrifty Foods, the Comox Valley Record newspaper and The Eagle radio station.

ACV offers tools and resources (such as pedometers and the map brochures) to its partners. In addition, its partners receive exposure to their initiatives through ACV’s promotional work. One of ACV’s projects involved creating and putting up signs (six feet tall) in malls and businesses to raise awareness of the benefits of physical activity and opportunities to get active nearby. The signs contain the trail and walkway map brochures the ACV committee produced: *12 Great Places to Get Active in Comox Valley* and *Another 12 Great Places to Get Active for FREE*.

“We realized that we have so many trails out there that people might not know about,” Butler said. The mobile signs and *12 Great Places* brochures were funded through a \$5,000 Active Communities grant from the BCRPA in 2007.

“People are excited. I just got a call from a woman the other day saying there’s a great trail near her house that should be on the map,” Butler noted.

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The map brochures include six wheel-chair-accessible trails. ACV worked with its partner, the Comox Valley Accessibility Committee, to develop the maps of trails accessible to wheelchairs, strollers and scooters. In addition to businesses, the brochures were also distributed to recreation centres, visitor information centres, Welcome Wagon, Comox Valley Nursing Centre, 19 Wing Family Resource Centre, and libraries. More than 8,000 copies of the brochures have been picked up throughout the Comox Valley.

"I always have to go and re-stock. They're always running low, so it's a good thing," Butler noted. 12 Great Places was also published in the local newspaper and can be downloaded from partner websites and www.activecomox-valley.ca. This website also features ACV newsletters, links to partner organizations' websites, media coverage, and information on events, programs and resources. The website has been an effective tool for keeping the public, partners and local councils informed of ACV's activities.

ACV also continues to raise awareness of its pedometer and Spring Meltdown campaigns. The Spring Meltdown encourages participants to log at least 30 minutes of activity each day in 10-minute slots. ACV received pedometers through the ActNow BC Activity Challenge pedometer grants program. Pedometers were distributed to Spring Meltdown participants, along with incentive prizes from local businesses



based on steps logged. More than 300 valley residents participated in the Spring Meltdown this year.

ACV's pedometer program extended to a new partnership with the K'omoks First Nation. Butler provided pedometers to Band members who were training for the 10-kilometre Vancouver Sun Run this year. The 15 Band members—who dubbed themselves Band on the Run—used the pedometers and ACV maps during their training. They started off their training by walking, but some discovered they had the stamina to run on race day. *"They were astounded that from using the pedometers they were able to see the improvements in their training,"* Butler observed. *"A lot of them had never been in a fun run before so they were just so excited to actually get to that goal. The pedometers really helped with being a motivational tool."* With this new relationship established, Butler hopes to involve the K'omoks Band in other ACV campaigns.

Active Comox Valley Highlights

- Developed a logo and website: www.activecomoxvalley.ca
- Created a workplace wellness pilot program
- Held free monthly guided walks in 2006
- Produced map brochures: 12 Great Places to Get Active in the Comox Valley and Another 12 Great Places to Get Active for FREE
- Organized annual Spring Meltdown for participants to log activities for a month
- Held a free Family Fun Day in 2006 with active games, interactive workshops and healthy snacks
- Linked with organizations hosting existing active living events
- Worked with Accessibility Committee to promote accessible trails
- Received \$35,000 grant from the Union of BC Municipalities' Community Health Promotion Fund in 2006 to develop Active Comox Valley initiative
- Received \$5,000 Active Communities grants from the BC Recreation and Parks Association in 2007 (to develop signage and map brochures) and 2008 (to improve access to the Riverway Walk)
- Received \$5,000 subsidies from BCRPA through Active Communities in 2006 and 2008 to commission surveys measuring residents' physical activity levels
- Received pedometers through the ActNow BC Activity Challenge pedometer grants program
- 19 schools registered with Action Schools! BC in School District 71

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Comox Valley Info

Population: Comox: 13,139;
Courtenay: 23,911; Cumberland:
3,018 (BC Stats 2007)

- Located along the Strait of Georgia on Vancouver Island with a mild year-round climate
- Home to the K'omoks First Nation
- Awarded the distinction of Cultural Capital of Canada for 2007
- Public recreation facilities include Comox Valley Aquatic Centre, Sports Centre, Exhibition Grounds
- Mount Washington and Strathcona Provincial Park offer year-round outdoor recreation opportunities
- Major employers are 19 Wing Comox Canadian Air Force Base, St. Joseph's Hospital, School District 71 and Mount Washington Alpine Resort

www.comoxvalleychamber.com
www.discovercomoxvalley.com



Some of ACV's other partners have also made use of the pedometers. Staff and students at elementary schools, along with residents and staff at the Berwick retirement residence have clipped on pedometers. Pedometers were also distributed by ACV volunteers at community events, like the Walk for MS, and through local recreation centres. Over 1,200 free pedometers were distributed valley-wide, with more interested residents requesting them, so ACV purchased 100 more from ActNow BC at a bulk rate.

To raise awareness of more places to step out, ACV has been promoting the City of Courtenay's 10-kilometre Riverway Walk. The path along the Courtenay River provides an active transportation corridor for

commuters, as well as a free place for people of all abilities to get active. *"For Bike to Work Week, people were using it because they realized they didn't have to ride on the busy through-ways, they could go along the nice river way,"* Butler observed. *"So we're finding all different segments of the population are able to utilize it."* A \$5,000 Active Communities grant from BCRPA awarded this summer funded increasing and improving access points to the walkway.

With more people being seen out on the trails and incorporating activities into their days, the efforts of ACV and its partners will likely continue to impact healthy lifestyle choices for years to come.