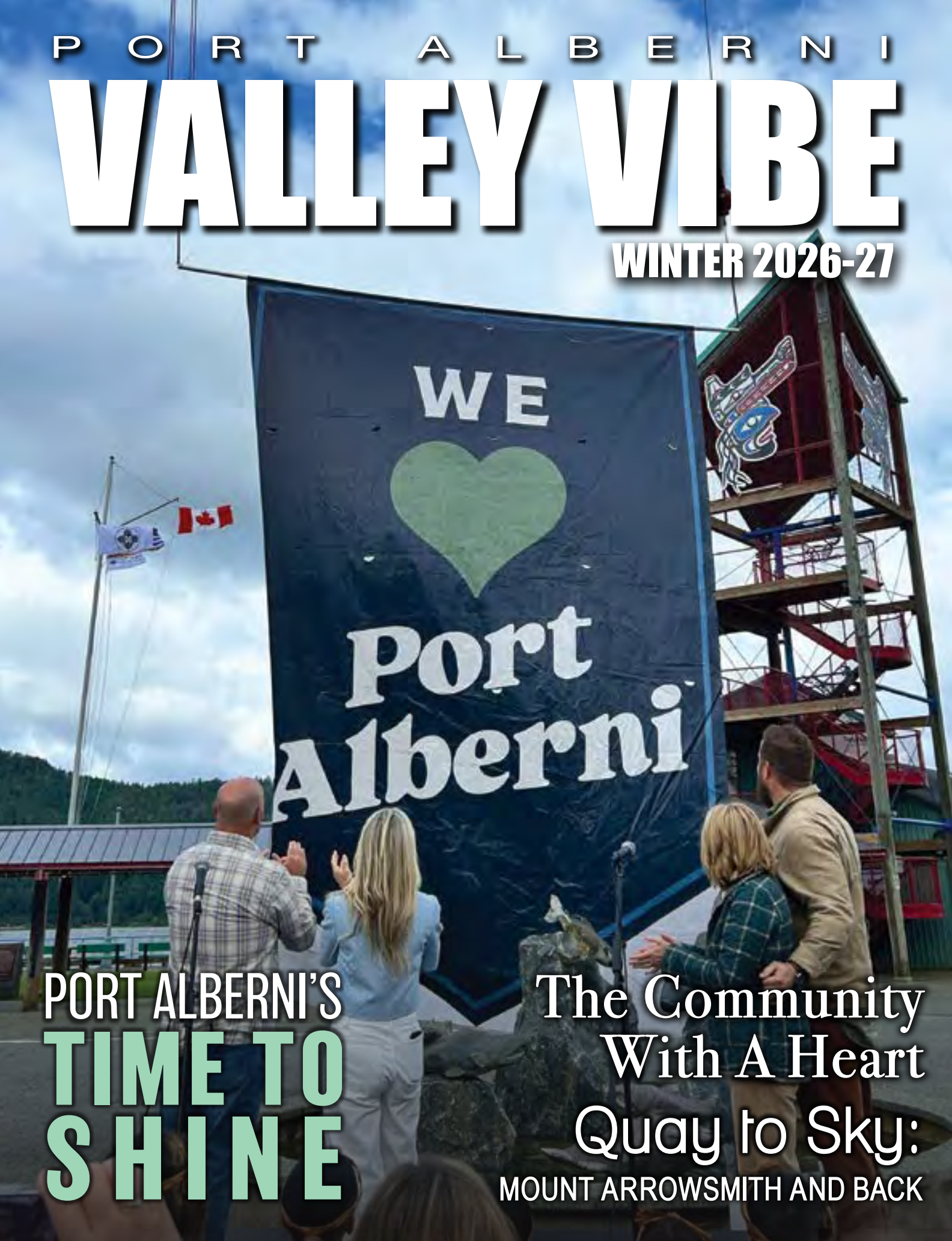
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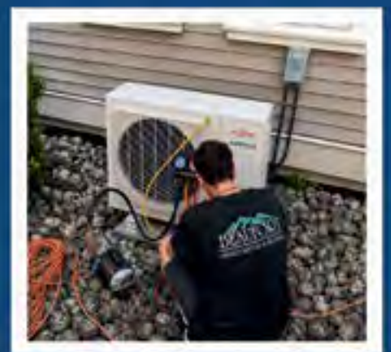


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Port Alberni's Time to Shine



PHOTO BY BRANNA POWELL



How Home Town Takeover Canada Is Helping Rewrite Our Community's Story

Article and photos by Megan Warrender

Sometimes all it takes is one opportunity to remind a community of something it may have forgotten—that its greatest strength has always been its people.

Announced on June 11th, Port Alberni found itself in the national spotlight after being selected as the very first Canadian community to star in HGTV's Home Town Takeover Canada. Chosen from more than 200 communities across the country, Port Alberni earned the opportunity after years of determination, having submitted applications to the show four separate times before finally hearing the words every resident had hoped for: "You're getting a Home Town Takeover."







Since then, production crews have spent the summer immersed in our city, transforming homes, businesses, and public spaces while capturing something even more meaningful—the incredible spirit of Port Alberni.

The idea behind Home Town Takeover began with one simple belief. Every community has a story worth telling.

When Erin and Ben Napier launched HGTV's Home Town, they weren't trying to create a renovation show filled with million-dollar homes or extravagant designs. They simply wanted people to fall in love with small towns again.

Their hometown of Laurel, Mississippi, had experienced many of the same struggles seen across North America. Once-thriving downtown businesses had closed. Young people were leaving. Historic buildings sat empty. Like many resource-based communities, Laurel had watched decades of change reshape its identity.

Rather than accepting decline as inevitable, Erin and Ben believed communities could write a different future. They began restoring historic homes, supporting local businesses, celebrating local history, and encouraging residents to rediscover pride in the place they called home. The response was overwhelming.

Not only did Laurel begin attracting tourists and new residents, but communities across the United States began asking the same question: "What if that could happen here?"

That vision eventually evolved into Home Town Takeover, where instead of transforming a single home, an entire community becomes the focus.

The show has revitalized parks, restaurants, downtown cores, gathering places, public art, small businesses, and neighbourhoods. More importantly, it has helped communities believe in themselves again.

Now, for the first time ever, that vision has crossed the border into Canada.



Why Port Alberni?

When HGTV Canada announced they were searching for the first Canadian community, applications poured in from across the country.

More than 200 communities wanted the opportunity. Port Alberni wanted it more. Port Alberni applied four separate times.

That persistence says a great deal about who we are. Port Alberni has never been a community that gives up easily.

Every application represented another opportunity to tell our story—not just our challenges, but our resilience, our people, our history, and our vision for the future. Todd Patrola, City Councillor shared his excitement on announcement day sharing what this means for Port Alberni, "Promotion and publicity to the rest of the world to let them know where we are. So get ready Port Alberni this is going to change your life, people are going to know how great Port Alberni is and want to come and see it."

Bryan and Sarah Baeumler were announced as the Canadian hosts, bringing decades of renovation experience and a genuine appreciation for small communities. Throughout the summer they became familiar faces around Port Alberni, working alongside local tradespeople, volunteers, organizations, and business owners to bring multiple transformation projects to life.

Although the television audience will eventually see the finished results this fall, those who have lived through the experience know the real story happened long before the cameras rolled.



A City Built on Industry

To understand why this moment feels so significant, you first have to understand Port Alberni's story. Long before roads connected the west coast of Vancouver Island, Indigenous peoples thrived throughout the Alberni Valley, building rich cultures centred around the Somass River and Alberni Inlet.

When industry arrived, Port Alberni quickly became one of British Columbia's great success stories. Forestry, fishing, shipping, and manufacturing created thousands of jobs. Sawmills operated around the clock. Families moved here from across Canada looking for opportunity. Local businesses flourished, schools expanded, neighbourhoods grew, and the city earned a reputation as one of Vancouver Island's busiest industrial centres.

For generations, people built good lives here. Entire families worked in the mills. Children grew up expecting they would one day do the same. It was a community built on hard work.

Like many resource towns, however, change eventually came. Global markets shifted. Industries modernized. Mills closed. Jobs disappeared. Families moved away.

In 2014, Port Alberni made national headlines after being ranked as the "worst place to live" in Canada by a national publication. For many residents, it was a painful label.

Those who actually lived here knew a different Port Alberni. The ranking may have reflected economic statistics, but it failed to capture the heart of the community. Instead of defining Port Alberni, it motivated many people to begin changing the narrative.









Over the past decade, entrepreneurs have opened new businesses. Festivals have grown. Tourism has expanded. Outdoor recreation has exploded in popularity. Community organizations have continued investing in making the valley a better place to live. Little by little, the story has been changing. Home Town Takeover simply shines a national spotlight on work that has already been happening for years.

One of the first transformation projects featured in Home Town Takeover Canada was Port Alberni's iconic Harbour Quay—a place that has long been considered the heart of the city's waterfront. Opened in 1983, Harbour Quay was created as part of a community revitalization effort to reconnect residents and visitors with the Alberni Inlet while supporting local businesses and tourism. Over the years, it has become one of Port Alberni's most recognizable gathering places, home to locally owned shops, restaurants, artisans, seasonal markets, festivals, and the vibrant Spirit Square. It also serves as a welcoming gateway for cruise ship passengers and visitors arriving to explore the Alberni Valley.

Councillor Cindy Solda is excited to see revitalization hit our Harbour Quay. Cindy says, "The Harbour Quay was feeling tired, and the City is excited to be able to allocate some funds towards the project. There were a lot of changes in the last term with the Quay to Quay pathway and now the Harbour Quay revitalization. Exciting things are happening in Port Alberni."

Framed by stunning views of the inlet and surrounding mountains, Harbour Quay has long reflected the community's entrepreneurial spirit and love for the waterfront. Its revitalization through Home Town Takeover Canada builds on more than four decades of history, ensuring this beloved destination continues to be a place where residents gather, visitors linger, and the story of Port Alberni is proudly shared.







The Big Reveal:
A Summer Port Alberni Won't Soon Forget





If June marked the beginning of an unforgettable chapter for Port Alberni, August 28, 2026 marked its celebration.

After nearly three months of filming, renovations, surprises, volunteers, construction crews and plenty of curiosity about what was happening behind closed doors, residents were finally invited to "Come See the Quay" for the Home Town Takeover Canada Big Reveal.

Harbour Quay is the same place where the community had gathered at the beginning of the summer to learn that Port Alberni had been chosen for the first-ever Canadian edition of Home Town Takeover, it once again became the gathering place. This time, however, the community wasn't there to ask what might happen. They were there to see what had happened.

Thousands of residents filled the waterfront for an afternoon of celebration, live music, children's activities, tours and the official ribbon cutting. Joining the community were Mayor Sharie Minions, Home Town Takeover Canada hosts Bryan and Sarah Baeumler, Hupacasath First Nation Chief Councillor Brandy Lauder, and Tseshaht First Nation Elected Chief Councillor Wahmeesh (Ken Watts).



There was something especially fitting about ending the summer at Harbour Quay. On June 9, the community gathered there alongside Bryan and Sarah Baeumler and original Home Town Takeover hosts Erin and Ben Napier to hear the announcement that Port Alberni had been selected. Production officially began the following day, June 10, and continued through August 28. Now, nearly 12 weeks later, the cameras were capturing one final community celebration. And there was certainly plenty to celebrate.

One of the most striking additions unveiled at Harbour Quay was a new bandshell, creating a permanent space for music, performances and community gatherings along the waterfront. The bandshell features a beautiful mural painted by local artist Olesia Matsai, bringing another piece of local creativity into the transformation.

Olesia Matsai was contacted by the production team after she took part in the community project of painting ten fire hydrants. Olesia shared, "they liked my style from the fire hydrant project and asked me to take on the bandshell mural, and I was very excited to be a part of it." The Home Town Take over gave her a vision for the mural, and Olesia got to work on the design. Drafts went back and forth between Olesia and the production team, with design and colour approvals, until they landed on the final picture. Olesia shared, "Bryan was hoping to have a jumping salmon on the mural but unfortunately it didn't get approved." Five days, and 41 hours of painting later the





mural was completed behind the new bandshell. “It was an unreal experience being behind camera, every time I showed Sarah and Bryan the artwork it was like they were seeing it for the first time. I was really nervous but the crew was very supportive.”

It didn’t sit empty for long. Local artist Madi Duncan became the first musician to perform on the new stage that afternoon, giving the space an immediate sense of what it was created for but not simply to look beautiful, but to bring people together. Madi Duncan was born and raised in the Alberni Valley and continues to call this community her home. . Madi has been playing music for over a decade. “Being chosen as the first performer for our new bandshell was quite an honour,” Madi said. “ I didn’t expect to be chosen to represent our town’s music for Home Town Take Over. And as someone with chronic illness, I don’t get to perform live much anymore, so it was very special to me in many ways. I am grateful for everyone who gave me the opportunity, and to everyone who came and listened!” Madi’s second album was just released, which will be out in 2027 so stay tuned.

That may be one of the most exciting new elements of the Harbour Quay transformation. It isn’t only about renovating what was already there. It’s about creating spaces that encourage people to stay a little longer, gather together and experience their community.

A new patio spanning the Marine Building has dramatically changed the waterfront experience, creating more space for people to sit, eat, gather and take in the views of the Alberni Inlet. The transformation continued throughout the building, where longtime local favourite The Donut Shop received a full renovation, giving new life to a business that has been part of the Harbour Quay experience since 1985. Janet Marchant, owner of the Donut Shop for the last 7 years, had nothing but positive things to say from their experience with HGTV and Home Town Take Over. Janet expressed her appreciation, “We had a wonderful experience, met a lot of great people, and are very happy with their new space.” All Mex’d Up, also located within the building, was included in the revitalization. Nic Kamma, owner of ALl Mex’d Up, was thrilled to be able to make the space his own after purchasing the business a few years ago.

While a brand-new space opened up, called The Adventure Collective, this adds another reason for locals and visitors to explore the waterfront. Pat Deakin, City of Port Alberni’s Economic Development shares, “I am thrilled to see a complete transformation of the Harbour Quay space in just three months.” Pat shares, although the City is still in the process of working out the details around what the The Adventure Collective space will look like, that the intent is to use this space to build the sector of the adventure economy in the Alberni Valley. “I am looking forward to what this space will become, it has been a dream of mine for almost 20 years to have a space like this.”

Fresh paint across the buildings at the Quay ties the transformation together, creating a brighter, more welcoming and cohesive destination. More than simply updating the appearance of Harbour Quay, these improvements help strengthen the businesses within it and create an environment where people are encouraged to stay longer, explore more and support local. Exactly the kind of ripple effect the Home Town Takeover project is designed to inspire.

A new Harbour Quay sign, painted by local artist Shayne Lloyd, adds another distinctly local element to the space. Rather than simply installing something generic, the transformation has incorporated the talents of artists who live and create here. Allowing Port Alberni’s personality to become part of the finished product. The sign was originally designed by Erin Napier with inspiration from a folk artist. With some suggestions from artist Shayne Lloyd, and a bit of back and forth to make the sign more







CITY OF PORT ALBERNI

Harbour Quay is Calling

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THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING TO ENJOY AT PORT ALBERNI'S GATHERING PLACE.





Harbour Quay is located at ʎuukʷatquu?is (Wolf Ritual Beach), a historic Tseshaht First Nation winter village where Tseshaht people held the important ʎuukʷaana, or Wolf Ritual ceremony.

In 1860, Captain Edward Stamp established Alberni Mills near the mouth of the Somass River, initiating the lumber industry in Port Alberni. Over the following decades, the harbourfront supported forestry, shipping and related industry, reflecting the working character of the community and its connection to the Alberni Inlet.

In the early 1980s, the City re-imagined the site as a public waterfront gathering place. Harbour Quay officially opened in 1984 as a visitor destination and community focal point.

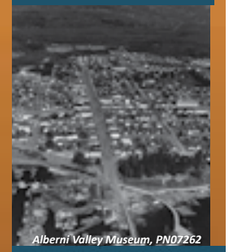
In the summer of 2026, this vital community space became the focal point of HGTV's Home Town Takeover Canada television series and was renovated for the show. Come see the new face of Harbour Quay in the heart of the Uptown District!


ʎuukʷatquu?is village, painting by the late Sterling Watts-mit

1860


Photo: Leonard Frank, PN1435

1912


Alberni Valley Museum, PN07262

1950-52


Photo: Derek Drewe, PN14530

1984


Photo: Heart of Vancouver Island

2014



complimentary with a west coast feel to Port Alberni, the final product was created. Shayne Lloyd shared his experience, "I was very grateful for the opportunity, it was a great experience working with the crew, Ben, Erin, Bryan and Sarah, and am looking forward to seeing the show air this fall."

The nearby historic train station also received a transformation of its own. One that may seem small compared to some of the larger projects, but will make a meaningful difference for years to come. When the Home Town Takeover team approached the Alberni Pacific Railway, they learned that the railway didn't really have a proper ticket booth for welcoming passengers. Instead, the team had been selling tickets from a table set up outside, exposed to the changing weather and without a permanent space to greet the many visitors coming to experience one of Port Alberni's most beloved attractions.

The Home Town Takeover team saw the need and stepped in, creating an incredible new ticket booth that gives the railway a welcoming and functional space right at the station. The new structure is more than simply a place to sell tickets—it adds to the experience of arriving at the historic railway and reflects the care being put into revitalizing the Harbour Quay area as a whole.





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Richard Spencer with the Alberni Pacific Railway shared just how meaningful the experience has been, not only for the railway but for the entire community. “This has made an investment in our community that would have taken us years to do otherwise,” Richard says.

His words capture something much bigger than a new ticket booth. For local organizations operating with limited resources, improvements like these can remain on a wish list for years while more immediate priorities take precedence. Home Town Takeover Canada created an opportunity to make some of those wishes a reality now. The new railway ticket booth is a tangible reminder of that investment—and of the lasting impact this summer will leave behind long after the cameras have gone.

And then there are the fire hydrants. Throughout the area, 10 fire hydrants were transformed into miniature works of art by selected local artists. The kind of unexpected detail that makes people stop, look and smile. Individually, they may seem like small projects. Collectively, they add colour, personality and a sense of discovery to the waterfront.

That is what placemaking can do. It takes the ordinary pieces of a community and turns them into something people notice, photograph, talk about and remember.

For weeks, residents had watched construction happening throughout the community. Volunteers stepped forward. Local tradespeople went to work. Business owners opened their doors to film crews. Residents shared their stories. Artists contributed their talents. And people from throughout the Alberni Valley became part of something none of us had experienced before. The August 28 celebration also brought the story full circle.

Perhaps why the transformation of Harbour Quay feels particularly significant. It wasn’t simply another renovation. It was an investment in a gathering place. Mayor Sharie Minions shared her excitement the day of the event, “It feels incredible. Many of the projects completed have been dreams of mine since my earliest days on council. It is incredible to see the community enjoying the space in exactly the way I had hoped they would. Such a wonderful feeling to be able to have helped bring this to fruition.”

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August 28 was also bittersweet. It was the final scheduled day of filming for Home Town Takeover Canada in Port Alberni. Mitch Burman from Toronto, the producer of Home Town Take Over, shared his experience, “Being able to spend an entire summer in Port Alberni, and to get to know the people, and learn what really makes the city tick was a great experience. My hope is that everything we did here is just what the city needed. It has all come down to the reveal day, being able to watch everyone enjoy the space we spent the summer working on.”

For almost the entire summer, seeing production vehicles, camera crews and Bryan and Sarah around town had become part of everyday life. There was an energy surrounding the community and a constant question: “What are they working on next?”

Now the renovations are complete, the ribbon has been cut and the production moves into its next stage. But Port Alberni’s work is just beginning.

The greatest measure of Home Town Takeover Canada’s success won’t be how Harbour Quay looks on television. It will be what happens here in the years after the cameras are gone.

Will more people come downtown?

Will visitors discover Harbour Quay and then explore other businesses throughout the Alberni Valley?

Will another business owner look at a newly transformed storefront and decide to invest in theirs?

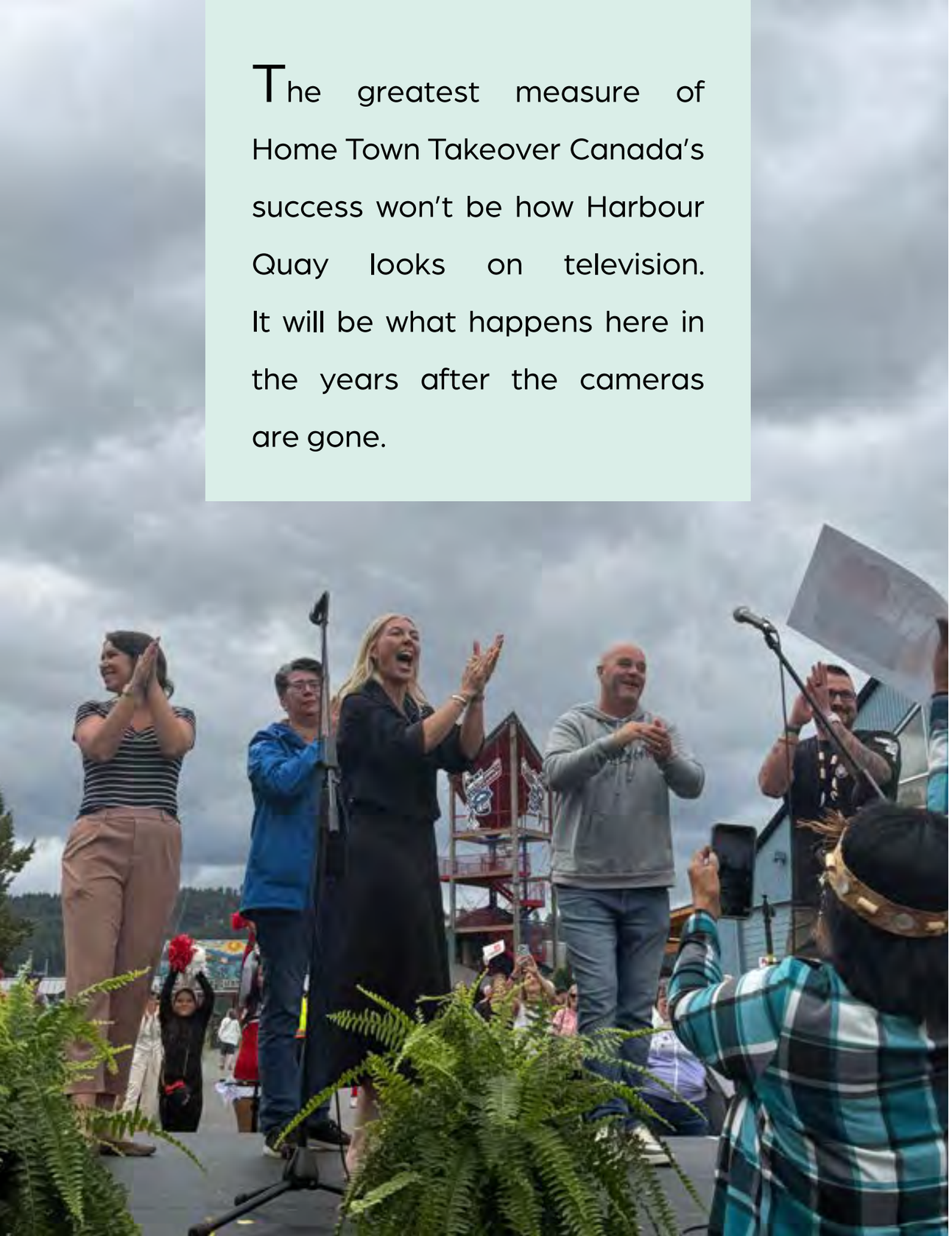
Will an artist see the murals and painted hydrants and imagine another project?

Will a young entrepreneur look around Port Alberni and see opportunity?









The greatest measure of Home Town Takeover Canada's success won't be how Harbour Quay looks on television. It will be what happens here in the years after the cameras are gone.

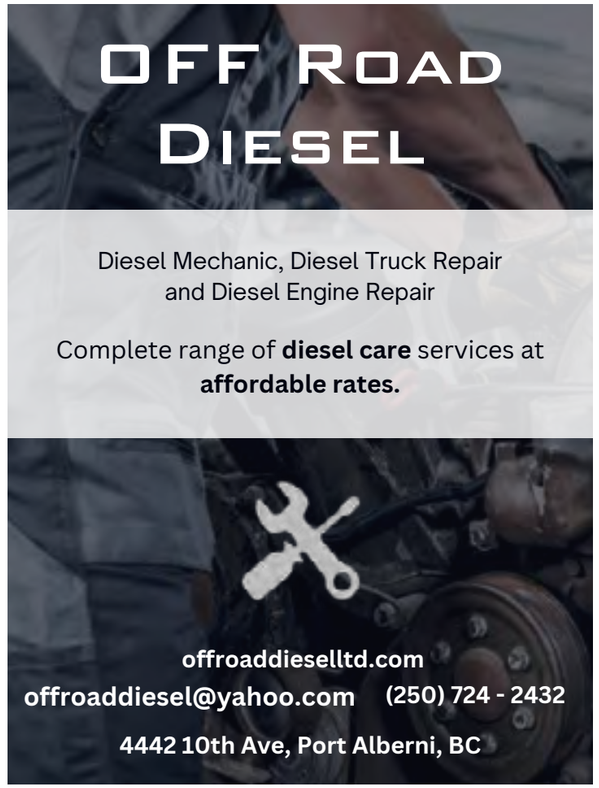
Will residents who once spoke about everything our community had lost begin talking about everything it could become?

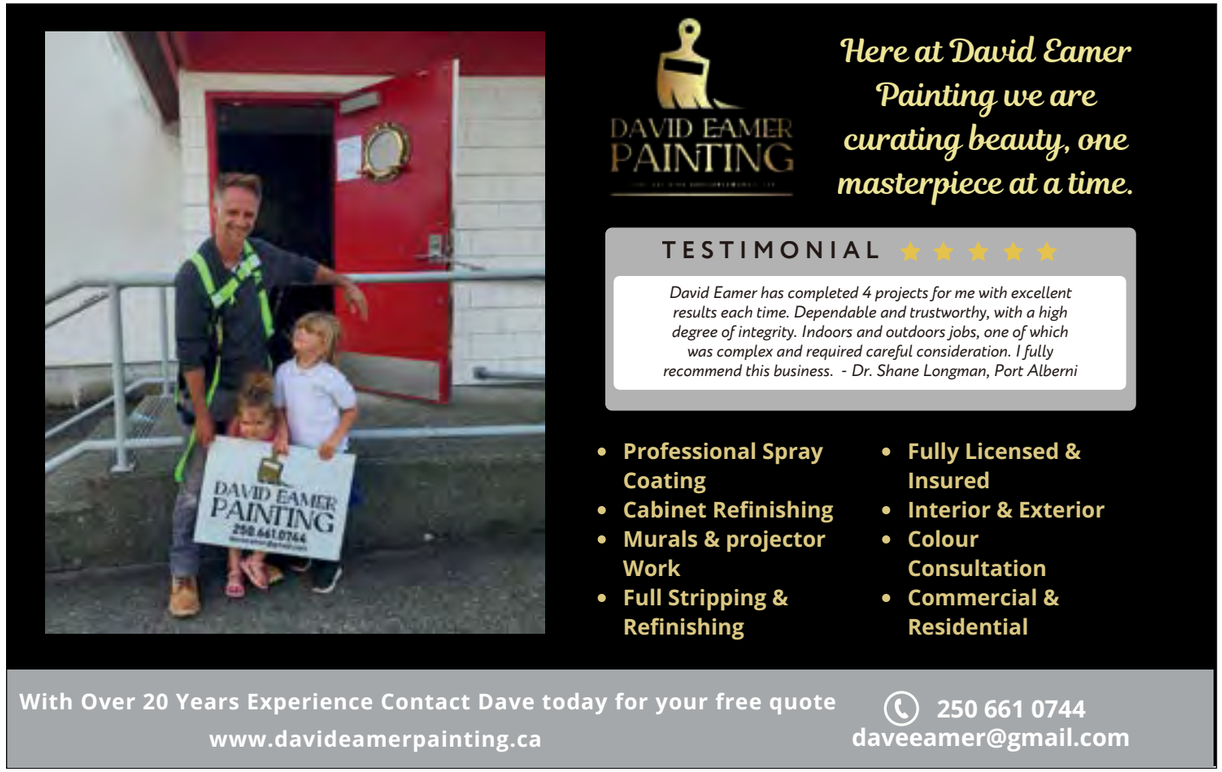
That is the ripple effect.

And standing among thousands of people at Harbour Quay on August 28, it was hard not to feel that it had already begun.

Home Town Takeover came to Port Alberni to transform homes, businesses and community spaces. But after a summer unlike any other, perhaps something much bigger has been transformed as well. The way we see our own community.

The cameras may have stopped rolling on August 28. But for Port Alberni, this story is only beginning.





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Kicking off our 25th Season at the Dawg Pound

Written by Megan Warrender with
Information and photos submitted by Alberni Valley Bulldogs

As the Alberni Valley Bulldogs look ahead to their 25th season in Port Alberni, former players, billets, volunteers and coaches reflect on the relationships that turned a hockey team into the heart of Hockey Valley.

On a Bulldogs game night, you can feel the energy before the puck ever drops. The parking lot fills, red, black and white jerseys stream toward the doors, and inside the Alberni Valley Multiplex the familiar goal horn waits for its moment. For the past 24 years, the Alberni Valley Bulldogs have given Port Alberni a reason to gather - but the story of this team has always reached far beyond the scoreboard.

The Bulldogs arrived in Port Alberni from Burnaby for the 2002-03 BCHL season. Since then, generations of players, coaches, billets, volunteers, sponsors and fans have helped build an organization woven into the identity of the Alberni Valley. The team and the Multiplex have grown side by side, creating the atmosphere now proudly known throughout the league as the Dawg Pound and helping Port Alberni earn another name: Hockey Valley.

Built by a Community

Laurie Thomson, the Bulldogs' game-day, volunteer and billet coordinator, says the organization has changed in many ways over the years. Players, coaches and owners have come and gone. Hockey systems, technology and the fan experience have all evolved. What has remained is the community's support and the pride that comes with the Bulldogs logo.

"Without the Multiplex, the team would never have come to Port Alberni," Thomson says. "With the facility came the team, and with that, the community came together. This created, as we all know, Hockey Valley."



Former captain Chase Klassen, who wore No. 27 during parts of four seasons from 2019 to 2023, remembers quickly discovering the advantage created by that community. "Playing in the Dawg Pound, I realized how much of an advantage it really was," he says, pointing to the goal horn and the fans. Hearing players from other teams say how much they disliked playing there only made him happier.

Alumnus Zeke Nicholson agrees that the building itself is only part of the story. "The Multiplex is by far the best rink in the BCHL, but it's not the building that makes it amazing," he says. "It is the people who fill it up and get so loud."

Those fans have watched hundreds of young players arrive in the Valley, wear the crest and move on to new chapters. The Bulldogs' official alumni records note that more than 80 players have advanced to NCAA Division I programs since the move to Port Alberni - an achievement that reflects both player development and the support system surrounding the team.

A Historic Run

No season captured that connection more clearly than 2022-23. The Bulldogs swept Victoria in the opening round, survived a seven-game series against Surrey and then swept Chilliwack to reach the league championship series for the first time in franchise history. The run ended against the Penticton Vees, but the banner and the memories belonged to the entire Valley.

Klassen remembers the whole season as the favourite chapter of his Bulldogs career. "Making it to the finals with such a great group of guys was all I could've asked for," he says. The players' off-ice bond, he believes, was a major reason they went so far. Even now, he remains in contact with most of the team and follows their seasons.

Nicholson remembers the home games during that playoff run and the extraordinary support in the building. For Jax Wismer, who played in Port Alberni from 2022 to 2024, one of the most unforgettable moments happened far from home ice. On the way to Penticton for Games 1 and 2 of the championship series, the team bus broke down on an Okanagan highway.

The players spent roughly four hours waiting. With little around them and not much to do, some climbed onto the top of the bus to catch the sun while others played keep-up with a soccer ball. It is a wonderfully unpolished memory from a polished playoff run - a reminder that, behind every banner, there are long roads, unexpected delays and teammates finding a way to enjoy the moment.

Wismer describes the Bulldogs in three words: "Exciting, chaotic and rowdy." He says the talented teams of those seasons helped grow the Hockey Valley identity by giving fans and the community an exciting product to rally behind.



A Home Away from Home

For the young men who come to Port Alberni, joining the Bulldogs means more than joining a hockey club. It means entering a network of people who help them navigate school, competition and life away from home.

Wismer credits Laurie and Deserray McClary with helping players settle into billet homes and supporting the team at every opportunity. He also recognizes the Multiplex staff and volunteers whose behind-the-scenes work keeps game days running smoothly, the facility in top condition and the players cared for. For high-school-aged players, he says, the teachers at Alberni District Secondary School also create a welcoming environment and accommodate the unusual demands of junior hockey.

Klassen's memories are just as personal. His billets, Tanya and Brent, welcomed him from the moment he entered their home, and he lived with them for three seasons. His grandmother also opened her table, inviting him and a teammate for dinner every Monday night.

Thomson has seen those connections last long after a player's final game. A billet family may begin by opening its home to a stranger and end up gaining another family member. Some billets have walked former players down the aisle at their weddings; others are now called grandma and grandpa by the players' children. "A player may only spend one or two seasons in Port Alberni, but the relationships they build here can last a lifetime," she says.



The People Behind the Crest

Ask who deserves recognition for building 25 seasons of Bulldogs hockey and the answer is never only one name. There are the volunteers at the doors and around the rink, billet families opening their homes, sponsors investing in the team, teachers supporting student-athletes and fans arriving night after night as the seventh player.

Still, some names return again and again. Both Klassen and Nicholson single out Jamie Amos, known simply as Amos. Nicholson calls him "the heart and soul of the Bulldogs." Klassen remembers Amos as a constant source of good energy who pumped up the team. Their friendship continued after hockey; for four summers, a group of former players met up with Amos for a meal when they returned to Port Alberni. Jamie has been with the program since the beginning and also volunteered for the Junior B Bandits prior to the arrival of the Bulldogs. When we drop the puck on September 19th, it will mark game number 1600 for Jamie!





Klassen also remembers head coach Joe Martin, assistant coach Ryan Rehill, trainer and equipment manager Scotty Crema, and former Bulldogs President David Michaud for the roles they played in the team's success and community presence. Thomson also recalls the unmistakable voice of longtime broadcaster Evan "The Hammer" Hammond, whose calls allowed listeners near and far to picture the action as though they were inside the rink.

The Bulldogs' influence can also be seen in where the people shaped by the organization go next. Port Alberni native Jim Hiller coached the Bulldogs during the 2005-06 season and was named head coach of the NHL's Los Angeles Kings in 2024 - a hometown hockey journey stretching from the Multiplex to the sport's highest level.

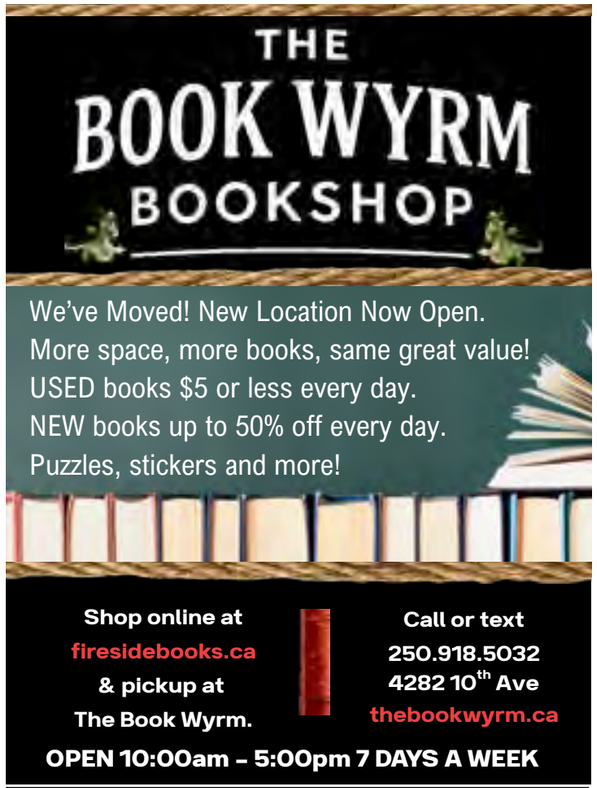
More Than Hockey

The team's community impact is measured in ordinary moments as much as historic ones: visiting elementary schools, skating with families at Winter Wonderland, working with local organizations and delivering teddy bears to seniors after the teddy bear toss. Nicholson says those events brought joy to people and made the players themselves feel connected to Port Alberni.

Rick Schievink, who joined the Bulldogs coaching staff in 2003-04, describes his own experience as one of connection, learning and eventually giving back. The organization introduced him to experienced coaches, educators and business leaders, expanding his understanding not only of the sport but of the community and business sides of junior hockey. Today, he shares what he learned with students in the ADSS Hockey Skills Academy and with players, coaches and families in minor hockey.

"The Bulldogs' impact goes far beyond hockey," Rick says. "It has helped build coaches, mentors, friendships and a culture of giving back in the Alberni Valley."

That ripple effect is part of what Hockey Valley means. It includes the Bulldogs and the Port Alberni Bombers, but it also reaches first-time skaters, minor hockey, women's and men's leagues, camps, coaches, parents and volunteers. In winter, hockey becomes one of the ways the Valley recognizes itself - proud, loud and connected.







THE NEXT 25

WE ARE GOING INTO YEAR 25 SO NOT QUITE RIGHT? ‘A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD’??

Anniversaries invite a community to look back, but they also create room to imagine what comes next. The hope voiced by both Thomson and Nicholson is simple: continued growth and, one day, a BCHL championship celebrated at home in the Valley.

Whether that championship comes this season or years from now, the Bulldogs’ legacy is already visible. It lives in the players who found confidence and opportunity, the coaches who became mentors, the billets who gained family members, the volunteers who formed lasting friendships and the fans who can place their own memories somewhere within the Bulldogs’ history

Thomson describes the Bulldogs in three words: community, pride and commitment. Those words may be the best summary of the past 24 seasons. The community gave the team a home. The crest gave players and fans something to carry with pride. And the commitment of thousands of people - on the ice, in the stands and behind the scenes - transformed a relocated hockey franchise into something that belongs unmistakably to Port Alberni.

The horn will sound many more times. New players will arrive and new memories will fill the Dawg Pound. But the foundation of Hockey Valley will remain what it has always been: people showing up for one another, season after season. VV





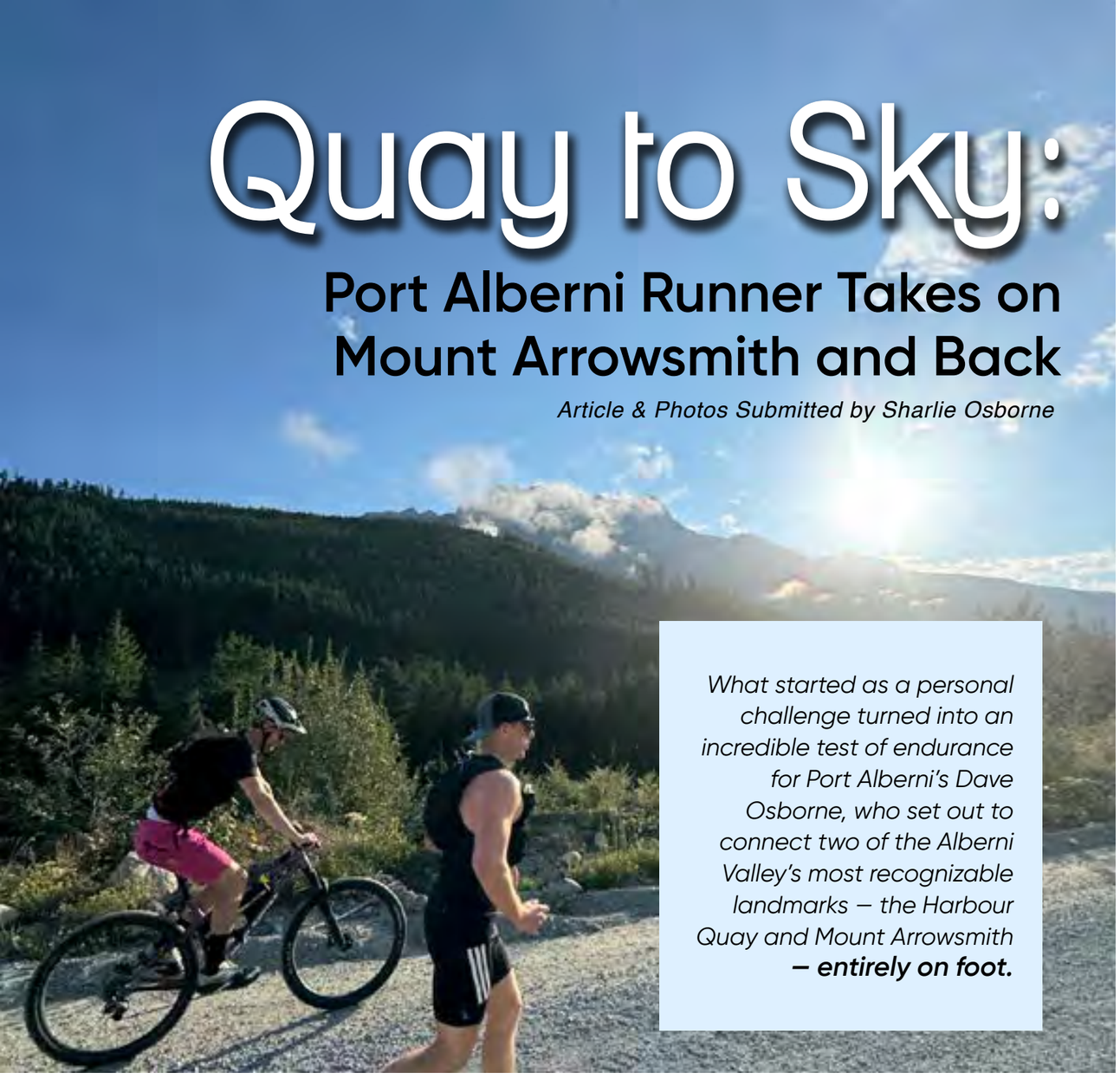




Quay to Sky:

Port Alberni Runner Takes on Mount Arrowsmith and Back

Article & Photos Submitted by Sharlie Osborne



What started as a personal challenge turned into an incredible test of endurance for Port Alberni's Dave Osborne, who set out to connect two of the Alberni Valley's most recognizable landmarks — the Harbour Quay and Mount Arrowsmith ***— entirely on foot.***

Osborne, who works in Economic Development for the City of Port Alberni, took on the challenge he called "Quay to Sky," beginning his run at the Harbour Quay before making his way out of Port Alberni and toward Mount Arrowsmith.

Starting near sea level, Dave faced the long journey toward the mountain before taking on the demanding climb to the summit of Mount Arrowsmith. Reaching the top was an accomplishment in itself, but it was only half the challenge. He still had to make his way back down the mountain and run all the way back to where he started.

Unlike a traditional race, there were no organized aid stations, course markers or crowds lining the route. Quay to Sky was a challenge Dave set for himself — one that required preparation, endurance, determination and a willingness to keep moving even when there was still a long way to go.





Although Dave was the one putting in the kilometres on foot, he had a great crew supporting him throughout the adventure. Carson Balmer, Andrew Hamilton and Holly Ouellette rode alongside him for portions of the route, providing company and encouragement along the way. When it came time to tackle Mount Arrowsmith, Carson, Andrew and Holly all hiked to the summit alongside Dave, sharing one of the toughest and most memorable parts of the challenge with him.

Dave's wife, Sharlie Osborne, took on pit-crew duties throughout the day, meeting the group along the route with food, water and supplies to help keep Dave fuelled, hydrated and moving toward his goal.

It may have been an individual running challenge, but it was backed by a pretty incredible little team.

After reaching the summit of Mount Arrowsmith, Dave began the long journey back down the mountain and toward Port Alberni. After hours on his feet, he eventually made his way back into the city and arrived exactly where the adventure had begun — the Harbour Quay.



Harbour Quay.
The summit of Mount Arrowsmith.
Harbour Quay. <u>All on foot.</u>

While it's difficult to know whether anyone has completed this exact route before, Quay to Sky wasn't about claiming a record. It was about setting an ambitious goal, pushing personal limits and seeing what was possible.

It also showcased something pretty special about the Alberni Valley. In a single challenge, Dave travelled from the waterfront in the heart of Port Alberni to the summit of one of Vancouver Island's most recognizable mountains — and then came all the way home again.

More than anything, the hope is that Quay to Sky inspires others. Not necessarily to take on the same route, but to set their own goal and see where it can take them — whether that's running their first five kilometres, hiking a mountain, getting on a bike or taking on a challenge they once thought was out of reach.

And maybe one day, someone else will decide to take on Quay to Sky themselves.

For now, Dave and the friends and family who supported him can look back on one unforgettable Alberni Valley adventure — while Dave enjoys some very well-earned rest and plenty of good food.

From the Quay to the Sky — and all the way home again. VV

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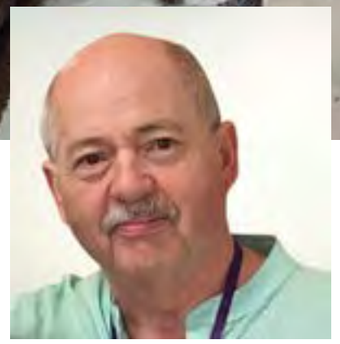
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A fictional story born from the people and places that built Vancouver Island.

They left the dead man underground because stopping production would cost too much.

That single decision haunted one man for the rest of his life.

The story you're about to read begins in the darkness of a Vancouver Island coal mine, where an electrical superintendent watches something he cannot forget. A miner is crushed between two coal cars. Everyone knows the man is dead. Yet instead of bringing him immediately to the surface, the order comes to move the body aside until the shift is over.

Coal must keep moving.

For Thomas Calder, that moment changes everything.

He has always believed that industry could build a nation without sacrificing its humanity. He believes that good leadership matters. He believes that decent managers can protect the people who work beside them while helping build a stronger Canada.

He's wrong.

Leaving the coal fields behind, Thomas moves his family west to Port Alberni, convinced he has escaped the worst of industrial life. The forests are different. The work is different. The people seem different.

The mills stand beneath open skies instead of deep underground.

Surely this place will be different.

But the Alberni Valley is growing into one of British Columbia's great industrial communities, where towering cedar, steam power, and ambition are transforming the landscape. As production grows, familiar pressures begin to emerge. Safety competes with profit. Loyalty is measured by obedience. Good people find themselves asked to make impossible choices.

Then another worker is badly injured.

Once again, the machinery waits.

Once again, production hangs in the balance. And once again, Thomas finds himself standing between the people who own the company and the people whose hands keep it running.

This time, however, he is the one expected to give the order.

Iron Men, Coal, Wood and Defiance is a work of historical fiction, but its heart is rooted in the real history of Vancouver Island's mines, mills, and labour movement. The events, industries, and struggles that shaped communities like Nanaimo, Ladysmith, Cumberland, and Port Alberni inspired this story, as did the experiences passed down through families who lived those years.

This is not a story about heroes and villains. It is a story about ordinary people trying to do the right thing inside systems that often rewarded the opposite.

It is about the quiet courage of workers who stood up for one another. It is about managers who discovered there were moments when following orders came at too great a cost. It is about communities where neighbours looked after neighbours long before government programs existed to catch people when they fell.

Most of all, it asks a timeless question. When the system you believe in demands that you abandon your conscience, what do you do?

Although Thomas Calder is fictional, many readers will recognize pieces of their own family history in his journey. Perhaps your grandfather worked in the woods. Perhaps your grandmother waited at home while the whistle marked another long shift. Perhaps stories were passed around your own dinner table about the mills, the camps, or the mines that built Vancouver Island.

History is often remembered through dates and photographs. But sometimes it is remembered through stories. If this one reminds you of someone in your own family, then perhaps it isn't fiction after all.

Read the complete story by visiting the link:

https://ronmerk.substack.com/p/iron-men-coal-wood-and-defiance

Read all Ron's Stories: https://ronmerk.substack.com





Take A Glimpse into the Nautical History of the Hupacasath First Nations

Port Alberni's nautical history dates back to time immemorial with the Hupacasath First Nations, who travelled by canoe year round, using the water as their highway. The Hupacasath peoples travelled the Inlet, rivers, and lakes in the Alberni Valley to hunt, gather, or visit friends and family. Paddling was taught at a young age; there were different styles and shapes of canoes that had different uses. A canoe intended for the ocean was fit with a carved wolf's head to break through the choppy waters and keep it out of the canoe. They would also use the wolf's head at the front of the canoe as a reference, like a needle on a compass, which they combined with landmarks, to help navigate.

The Hupacasath peoples utilised sails and paddles. The sails were made from woven cedar, and in the afternoon as the wind shifted, they sailed back up the Inlet. Paddles were often made from vine maple or yew wood, and came in different shapes and sizes. Paddles used for transport were constructed to move lots of water with a wide blade, whereas whaling paddlers were narrow so they would move through the water quietly, and war paddles had a pointy end that doubled as a weapon.

Victoria Quay offers a glimpse into the nautical history of the Hupacasath First Nations with the phenomenal Nuu-Chah-Nulth Whaling Canoe Sculpture. The sculpture was originally housed in the Royal BC Museum in Victoria, before being transferred to Port Alberni's Victoria Quay. Tim Paul, who is from the Esperanze Inlet, north of Tofino, carved this sculpture under the direction of Ben Andrews in 1975. Carved from yellow cedar, this life size sculpture serves as a tribute to the seafaring culture of local First Nations. This powerful monument depicts the strength and ferocity of the whalers who ventured into open waters with spears and a wooden canoe to hunt a grey whale. Whale hunting was a dangerous job; it is said that whalers would prepare for 9-12 months, often going up into mountain caves and fasting in preparation. The Whalers Canoe exhibit depicts 8 men on the canoe with a steersman in the back directing and the hereditary chief at the front with a harpoon ready. After the whale was speared and killed, someone would jump into the water to sew up the mouth of the whale, preventing it from sinking, before towing it back to shore. Sometimes they would take the stomach of a seal, blow it up, and use that to help keep the whale afloat. The grey whale was seen as a gift from the Creators, and the entire animal was used. The whale meat was smoked, dried, and preserved to be eaten and traded, bones were used to create weapons and tools, and the blubber was smoked or dried.

Be sure to check out the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Whaling Canoe Sculpture and the Welcome Totem Poleshext time you're at Victoria Quay. It's a beautiful representation of local First Nations history and culture for the community to enjoy.



hupačasath First Nation
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The Community With A Heart

By Heather Thomson



If you think back on what you did this summer, most of the events and activities probably have one thing in common – they wouldn't happen if it weren't for volunteers.

Alberni Valley has well over 50 active volunteer, charitable, community service, and non-profit organizations. These groups contribute to the community in every possible way. From health care to entertainment, the Alberni Valley would be a very different place without its volunteers.

"Volunteers are imperative in a small community," explains avid volunteer Chris Washington. "Groups who put on events or offer different services can't do it without volunteers because they couldn't afford to pay people for all of the positions needed."

Chris knows this firsthand. She currently sits as the chair of the Alberni Valley Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. She first stepped up to volunteer for the Chamber because she wanted to help build big ideas.

It's something she has been doing for as long as she can remember in all walks of her life. In addition to owning her own store and working with local youth, Chris and her husband, Dan Washington, spent every Labour Day weekend alongside many volunteers ensuring everyone had an enjoyable Port Alberni Salmon Festival at Clutesi Haven Marina. Although still passionate about the event, these days she joins as a volunteer on the weekend. Those years working on Salmon Fest makes her appreciate the hours of volunteer labour it takes to make the event like it successful.

"When we were organizing Salmon Fest, it was a lot of fun," she explained. "But the fewer volunteers you have, the less fun it becomes."

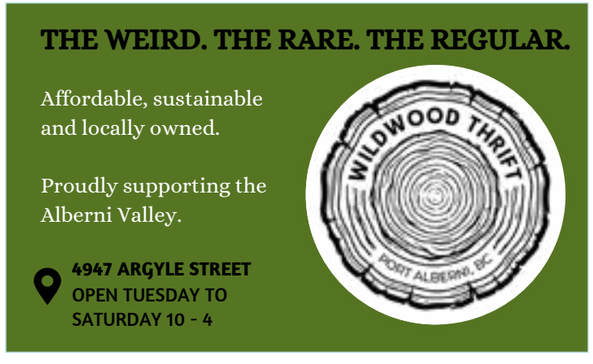
She said the key is to find something you are passionate about and then find a way to volunteer. She sees people doing this a lot around the community but acknowledges that the pool of volunteers is aging and the next generation is not stepping up to fill the gap fast enough.

"People have to remember that without volunteers a lot of the things we enjoy just won't happen," she said. "It's often hard to take the time, but it is really worth it in the end."

Kristin Kerr-Donohue is part of the next generation of volunteers who have revitalized Salmon Fest and brought it back to life at Tyee Landing. She said volunteering helps connect her to her community in a way that matters.

"It allows me to give back with purpose – It gives me a sense of belonging," she said. "It offers me a way to build connections and friendships with people I might never meet otherwise, and it makes me feel like I am helping to shape a community I want to be part of."

Kristin is the chairperson of the Port Alberni Salmon Festival Society. In that role, she gets to see volunteers





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in the community come together to enjoy the fruits of their labour while keeping a tradition alive.

Kristin also volunteers for the Emergency Support Services (ESS), where she often sees people at their darkest hour. The ESS is a team of volunteers headed up by the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District that responds when people are in crisis and need temporary support. Kristin says it means she can offer safety, security, and the tools they need to move forward.

Although two completely different roles, the common thread is that she believes the time and effort she puts in is just as valuable as any financial contribution, especially when it's something she believes in passionately.

According to Aimee Dolphin from Island Health, health care relies on volunteers for many non-clinical roles that directly support patients, families, visitors, and care teams.

"In Port Alberni, volunteers are especially valuable at West Coast General Hospital in information desks, wayfinding, emergency department support, and patient facing roles where compassion, reassurance, and connection make a real difference," she said. "Volunteers also help by sitting with patients, offering conversation during long waits, providing comfort items, and helping people feel less alone during stressful moments."

She explained that having volunteers in these roles allows clinical staff to focus on medical care while ensuring patients and families feel supported and welcomed.

Island Health offers volunteer opportunities for anyone from youth to seniors. One program that helps get younger people involved is the Step Up Youth volunteer program at WCGH and West Haven. She encourages youth to go to the volunteer section of Island Health's website to find out more information.

"Volunteers are an essential part of care teams," she added. "They create human connection in moments that can feel overwhelming or isolating for patients and families. Even small acts can significantly improve a person's care experience."

She added that volunteers also bring with them fresh energy, and these opportunities sometimes end up leading the volunteers down a pathway to future health care careers.

That brings back the importance of volunteering for something that is of great interest to you.

Colby Brown grew up by the railway, hearing the trains go by. Now he's working to make sure the next generation has the same opportunity. Colby is a certified conductor with the Alberni Pacific Railway. You can often find him during the summer months greeting tourists on the train.

"A lot of people my age want to volunteer, but it's difficult with their schedules," he said. "That's why finding something that is the right fit is important."

With less time to give, he believes that giving back to something he enjoys so much makes him feel like he is contributing in a special way to his community – a way that is different from his regular job.

"When you remove the profit incentive, it's more genuine," he explained. "You're doing it for the sake of



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doing a good job and giving back to your community – it makes our communities stronger."

Coleton Whiteraven and his wife moved to Port Alberni from Arizona because of the railway. So, when they got settled, they decided to volunteer with what they loved – trains. "Now we get to do what we love," he said. "Plus, being new to the community, it was a great way to meet people."

He said they take satisfaction in knowing that as one of the many volunteers at the train station what they are doing means they play a small part in helping the railway continue to operate in Port Alberni.

"If we don't do it, this doesn't happen," he said, pointing to the train that was quickly filling with guests ready to make the trip across town. "Instead, we're helping keep a bit of history alive."

At 80, Ian Staton says volunteering in the community keeps him active and gives him something meaningful to do. As he looks out of his ticket booth at the train station, he said the challenge is that most people his age are having to take a step back, and that means younger people will have to fill the gap they are leaving.

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"Volunteers are aging out, and we are not filling the spots as fast as we need to," he explained. "Younger people are starting to step up because they are realizing that if they want things to do in their community they need to help make them happen."

For Pam Craig, volunteering is about continuing to connect with the community. As she checks in the next guests for the train, she explains how important that is to her.

"I have a deep sense of responsibility to give back where I can," she said. "Volunteering is about helping to create livability in your community."

Although volunteering never stops, September is a particularly busy month in the Alberni Valley. Many of the events residents and visitors alike have come to love count on volunteers to make them happen. Whether it's Salmon Fest, the Alberni District Fall Fair, the Industrial Heritage Antique Truck Show, Toy Run, the Terry Fox Run, or countless other activities, volunteering is one of the greatest ways to give back to your community.

According to Mayor Sharie Minions, this is just another reason to be proud of our community. "Our culture of volunteerism is one of the reasons we are known as



the ‘community with a heart’,” she said. “We are always there to support one another, and we work together to keep our traditions and celebrations moving forward.”

She added it is one of the things she is most proud of – that volunteerism is still part of our community’s culture. “It’s about doing what we can, when we can do it, and knowing that the reward may not be immediate, but it will come,” she said. “I am grateful for our volunteers because they make our community stronger and more connected.”

Chris said volunteerism can come in many different forms, and it doesn’t have to take up a lot of time. She used the example of the Labour Day Salmon Fest. This was organized by a small group of volunteers that put in countless hours leading up to the weekend. They started planning and setting up long before people walked through the gates. But even with all their dedication, the festival would not have been possible if it hadn’t been for volunteers who came to offer their time at the event.

“It can be a big commitment or just a few hours – either way you’re making a difference,” she said. “There has to be someone leading the volunteers, but every one of them is a big part of the event’s success.”

She added that sometimes the challenge is that people just don’t know how to get started and where they can volunteer in their community. Her advice is to find something that interests you and see if there are any volunteer opportunities associated with it. It is even more fulfilling if it’s something you feel connected to, she explained.

“But sometimes people just need to be asked to step up – they are willing, they just don’t know there’s a need,” she said. “When they volunteer, they help make things happen.” She said we need volunteers or else so many events won’t happen in our community. She added that it should be obvious to give back to people and the community, but this seems to not be the case as our lives get busier. We need to get back to focusing on our sense of community.

“If we lose volunteers, we lose many of the things that make this community amazing – so if we lose volunteers our community loses,” she said. “Luckily, we live in a great place where people do offer their time.”

So, find your passion and give a little of your time when you can. From community events and sports to arts, culture, and social services and health care, many hands make light work. Volunteers are the heart of the Alberni Valley. Their contribution makes our community stronger, more connected, and more resilient.


PHOTO BY HEATHER THOMPSON

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