



THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

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TIMES COLONIST CHRISTMAS FUND

A clean turnaround at Our Place

Bob Sellmer found himself in need after a work injury

JEFF BELL
Times Colonist

Bob Sellmer has found a family at Our Place.

The 56-year-old, who fell on hard times after a work injury, is on staff as a dishwasher at the Pandora Avenue social agency.

"I've been working here now for two years," he said. "I'm a steady employee now."

An accident kept Sellmer from working as a commercial painter and he found himself needing the services that places such as Our Place provide.

The organization serves more than 1,600 meals a day to people in vulnerable groups such as the working poor or those who are homeless. It also provides showers and clothing, along with counselling and 45 units of transitional housing.

Sellmer said he started frequenting Our Place as a volunteer and got to know the people there before eventually applying for a job. Employment did a lot for him and his self-esteem, Sellmer said. "It was a real turnaround, for sure."

Our Place will receive a boost thanks to financial support from the 2016 Times Colonist Christmas Fund. The fundraising effort has been an enduring part of Greater Victoria's holiday season since it began 60 years ago in 1956 as the 500 Fund — a reference to helping the region's 500 neediest families.

Two other community organizations, the Salvation Army and the Mustard Seed, will once again help distribute the money collected for the Christmas Fund.

Support for Our Place makes a difference in many lives, said Sellmer, who came west from the Toronto area about 20 years ago



Bob Sellmer has been working as a dishwasher at Our Place for the past two years. "It's hard to describe what goes on unless you spend a day here," Sellmer says, urging people to volunteer. ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

and has no family ties here. He said the close-knit atmosphere at Our Place has meant a lot to him.

He urged others to do what he did and get involved with Our Place.

"If you can, come in volunteer and see what goes on," he said. "That's the big thing I try to tell people."

"It's hard to describe what goes on unless you spend a day here."

Grant McKenzie said Sellmer has left his mark on Our Place, creating a mural in the games area.

"It's a beautiful big, big mural of an outdoor scene," said McKenzie, Our Place's director of communications. "He's a really talented artist."

McKenzie said Sellmer has been involved in Our Place art shows, and was one of the participants in the facility's entry at this year's TD Art Gallery Paint-In on Moss Street.

Donations are now being collected for the Christmas Fund, which last year gave close \$320,000 to help those in need. jvbelle@timescolonist.com



Three ways to give

Since 1956, this newspaper has collected money to benefit the less fortunate. Last year, through the Christmas Fund, we raised and distributed about \$320,000, and we hope to beat that total this year.

We work with the Salvation Army and the Mustard Seed, which handle the disbursement of most of the funds, and also provide financial help to Our Place.

To donate, go online to: timescolonist.com/donate. You will be directed to a Canada Helps donation form; once you make your donation, a tax receipt will be provided immediately.

Or mail a cheque, payable to the **Times Colonist Christmas Fund Society**, to the Times Colonist Christmas Fund, 2621 Douglas St., Victoria, V8T 4M2.

You can use your credit card by phoning 250-995-4438 between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., Monday through Friday. Outside those hours, messages will be accepted.

FROM PAGE A1: NANAIMO POLITICS

'An impossible situation,' councillor says of turmoil

With two years left in their four-year terms, some doubt whether rift can be healed

CINDY E. HARNETT
and BILL CLEVERLEY
Times Colonist

Nanaimo Coun. Wendy Pratt said Tuesday she is not convinced that council members, who have two years left in their four-year terms, will be able to heal the rift between them.

The leak of a 2015 email written by Mayor Bill McKay caused more turmoil for council this week.

"This is just an impossible situation. It makes us look horrible, and I am embarrassed to be a part of it," Pratt said.

"In my opinion, it is not fixable, but you know what, people change. So who am I to say whether or not others would be willing to look at it and fix it," she said.

"For two years, we haven't been able to fix it."

Coun. Ian Thorpe said the release of the email left McKay and the councillors "embarrassed" and in "general shock and amazement."

"We've been trying the last two years to improve relationships and all this does is open up the acrimony and make us look dysfunctional," he said.

Thorpe said that while the mayor might have shown poor judgment in putting his thoughts in writing, he is more concerned about the privacy breach.

"I was extremely taken aback and disappointed in the comments that were made, but I'm much more disappointed this was made public," he said. "The context was that the mayor's conversation or thoughts were part of a mediation process in which all councillors were asked to take part."

Coun. Diane Brennan called for calm, saying council needs to



Mayor Bill McKay at Nanaimo council meeting. He says the relationships among councillors are as bad as they were when he initiated the mediation process. CITY OF NANAIMO

start concentrating on the business of the city.

"Too much time is spent on personal arguments and the people's business does not get accomplished," Brennan said.

Coun. Jerry Hong did not want to comment on the letter, saying he wanted first to hear from the city regarding its confidentiality.

He noted the age of the email and said it does not signal the start of more dysfunction.

"I think this is just stuff that hasn't been cleared up and, hopefully, we can clear all these things up and move forward," Hong said.

McKay said the relationships among councillors are as bad as they were when he initiated the mediation process.

"The discourse on council has been exactly the same for two years," he said. "None of us had

any choice in who was elected to council and the fact that any one of us may not like someone on council, that doesn't matter. We were elected to look after the best interests of our community."

The council has discretionary spending of up to \$1.3 billion over four years, he said.

"We certainly cannot let our feelings over another elected representative to enter into our decision making and it was clear to me early in our term that relationship issues were going to get in the way of sound governance — that's why I initiated this process," McKay said.

He said that months ago, he asked Community Minister Peter Fassbender to intervene.

"I would have loved for him to do that a year ago, but he was loathe to do so," McKay said.

Fassbender's office said Tuesday that Nanaimo council must collectively request help if the minister is to step in.

"There is no role for the minister, ministry staff or the inspector of municipalities in this matter," said spokeswoman Megan Harris.

"Should mayor and council collectively decide to formally request assistance from the ministry respecting any matters which may be affecting the council's ability to move forward, the ministry would consider what support or guidance might be available."

In March, seven of Nanaimo's eight city councillors — Jim Kipp, Bill Bestwick, Bill Yoachim, Gord Fuller, Thorpe, Hong and Pratt — called for the mayor's resignation, saying his attendance record and treatment of chief administrative officer Tracy Samra had forced their hand.

Last week, the RCMP said individuals outside the Nanaimo RCMP will look into a complaint from Nanaimo City Hall regarding McKay.

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Tim McGrath and Robert Fuller address Nanaimo council on Monday night. CITY OF NANAIMO WEBSITE

What mayor said in email to mediator

Nanaimo Mayor Bill McKay expressed his opinions about councillors to a mediator the city hired to help its elected officials find ways to work together.

McKay sent the email in March 2015 to lawyer Heather MacKenzie, founder of the Integrity Group, which advertises that it can resolve workplace conflicts.

A copy was sent to Ted Swabey, the city's chief administrative officer at the time.

The mayor said in the email that he hoped the mediation process would lead to respect between councillors, respectful debate, better attendance and preparation, and awareness about the implications of sharing via electronic mail and social media.

McKay suggested intensive interviews, evaluation and education with a final session that would establish codes of conduct, expectations around sharing complaints via electronic mail and social media, and offer "solid legal advice to members."

"To date," McKay wrote, "some councillors have disregarded all advice given and continue to speak openly about how they hate others, they push hard to convince others on council to hate other members, and

conspire to disgrace other members and the mayor at every opportunity.

"Getting buy-in from the majority in an attempt to garner ownership of a code of conduct and established guidelines on decorum will be difficult, but not impossible."

McKay said Tuesday that a significant portion of the mediation work was completed, but after Swabey left "that work was discontinued."

The city had a budget of \$20,000 for the work, but Integrity Group billed \$50,000.

Nanaimo's current chief administrative officer, Tracy Samra, told councillors Monday that the city has not paid Integrity Group the \$50,000.

"We need to be able to verify that those services were indeed provided and that there was something in place that authorized those services to be delivered," she said.

Samra said MacKenzie had not billed the city for a year, but within 24 hours of learning her contract with the city had been terminated, invoices covering 12 months were delivered by McKay to the city's chief financial officer.

— Times Colonist