

HOW DO YOU GET THERE FROM HERE?

...a presentation on demographics by Jeremy Milsom

Report by Jonathan Chilvers

On Tuesday, February 5, Jeremy Milsom, owner of the Salt Spring Inn, Sailing Club member, and formerly aerobatic pilot of a WWII single-engine trainer, gave a most interesting talk to 29 members at the Clubhouse.

His subject was how the Club could approach long term planning in view of the unique and changing demographics of the island. Our focus is necessarily narrow, since one has to be a Salt Spring resident to be a Club member.

Various organizations have studied our island demographics, Jeremy pointed out, including the Salt Spring Foundation and The Chamber of Commerce. It seems clear, his handout detailed, that our island population skews increasingly older: in the past 15 years the total population has grown by 13.5%, but the 60 to 79 year old age group grew by 80%, while the 30 to 59 year old working group shrank by 8%.

David Wood commented that we might take a sanguine view of these statistics, which appear to be a good match with the Club's current membership, which is close to full target strength.

But Jeremy argues that the Club (and any other business) must for its long-term survival learn to recognize, understand and pay court to younger generations like the much vaunted Millennials: when the Boomer Bulge, of which many—perhaps most—Club members form part, has passed through the snake, who will succeed them? How do we attract them? What is our succession plan? What cross mentoring opportunities, for example, are waiting for us to invent, or discover, and apply? Two basic business rules, says Jeremy, are "Diversify your market base" and "Diversify your product base".

We have a strong membership right now...generally at or close to our target maximum of 200 members. We are all aware of our significant strengths: talented and enthusiastic members, first rate docks, a solid little clubhouse, strong camaraderie, and competitive fees thanks in large part to a culture of volunteerism. We need to capitalize on these and other opportunities to ensure that the Club future is strong with an active membership keeping up to our target membership numbers.

The question was raised as to whether the Club has a full and detailed understanding of its own demographics. Commodore Casey de Jong replied that work has begun on this and is still an ongoing project and a most important planning step.

Jeremy suggested two websites that might be of further interest to Club members with an interest in the demographics of Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands:
www.opportunitysaltspring.ca and www.sustainableislands.ca.

Another planning step would certainly be a clear, understandable, agreed-upon statement of the Club's goals and objectives—what marketing people so often like to call a Mission Statement. The present writer of this report is reminded of Alice in Wonderland:

Alice was a little startled at seeing the Cheshire cat sitting on the branch of a tree a few yards off. "Cheshire puss" she began rather timidly, "would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a great deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where ..." said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"...as long as I get somewhere," said Alice by way of explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

Or to put it in more nautical terms: if we want to programme a successful voyage into our chart plotter, being clear on the desired destination is certainly no less important than understanding all the waypoints, hazards, buoys, beacons, currents, and weather that we will meet along the route. To know how we get there from here, we need to clearly define where 'there' is.

Commodore Casey, in thanking the guest speaker, emphasized that long term planning is vital to the Club's continued success and that understanding market demographics is an important part of that process.