

The Canoe, the Commodore, and a Staff Captain who Isn't: Notes from Opening Sunday

by Lawrence Stuart

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Opening day Sunday was not, it has to be said, a promising afternoon for a marine parade. The SE breeze was creeping toward fifteen knots, the sea state in the harbour rather surly. The beautiful azure skies and balmy temperatures of Friday and Saturday had reverted to typical North Pacific type: cool, damp, and leaden gray. Sails were flapping, boats were bobbing, making their way almost reluctantly past the Commodore. Well, I thought, at least it isn't pouring rain. And then, into this rather unruly scene came what was for me the highlight of the sail past. I saw Tim Harvey and his two young sons, Xander and James, smartly paddling their 18' Sea Clipper canoe into the eye of the wind and the lumpy harbour chop. As I watched them go by, it occurred to me that they embodied the essential spirit of SISC. A plucky, indomitable, free spirit, as proudly unconventional as it is competent and capable.

After the sail past came the salute to the Commodore. The members assembled along the dock catwalk as Roy Marlatt was piped ashore by piper Rod Macdonald. Led by the piper and the Commodore, the assembled members walked up the hill and into to the grateful warmth of our lovely, quirky clubhouse, itself a structure [steeped in local islands history](#).

Upon entering the clubhouse, members were greeted by warm smiles and a welcoming glass of mimosa. Following the toast to the Commodore, a fine spread of comestible delights, scones, jam, and tea among them, was laid out by a team of club volunteers: Betsy Johnson, Karen and Kim Laidlaw, Karen Pedersen, David Wood, Peter Brouwer and Bob Jones all made contributions essential to the afternoon's success.

This group of volunteers was brought together by Suzanne Ambers at the last minute. In a conversation I had with her, Suzanne explained to me that she had returned from her winter retreat in sunnier climes only 5 days prior to the event. "Silk Questo called me to say that no event was planned after the sail past," she said, "I was worried that one of my favourite events of the year wasn't going to happen." The problem, Suzanne explained, is the lack of a staff captain. With this crucial Board position unfilled, the task of organizing the event, if it were to happen at all, fell to Suzanne and the aforementioned group of volunteers she quickly pulled together.

COVID, as we all know, has been hard on many aspects of community life. The social life of the Club is no exception to this rule. Suzanne expressed to me her concerns regarding reanimating what is for her, as it is for many others, one of the most gratifying aspects of Club life. So much of what makes the Club unique, she told me, is rooted in social activities. These activities, all organized and hosted by Club volunteers, are crucial to what Suzanne called the Club's "homespun" spirit. This spirit depends upon a passing

of a generational torch. Older members are stepping back from some of the organizational heavy lifting. Newer members, particularly those of us who, like me, joined during the dark days of COVID, may lack a familiarity with the social calendar. We also may lack some of the organizational contacts necessary to pull these events off.

This is, of course, the problem of institutional memory, a problem experienced by many organizations facing a generational change. Such a transition is not easy at the best of times. The social isolation forced upon us by COVID has further complicated the problem. During our conversation, Suzanne and I mooted a few ideas for coping with this challenge: some kind of formalized mentorship, or, more informally, the role of senior member sponsors in helping new members tune into the DIY social spirit of the Club. We both agreed it will be challenging, and we also agreed that the unique spirit of our Club, whether in canoe or clubhouse, is worth nourishing and growing.

Do you love the social life? Are you an organizer? [A link to the job description for Staff Captain here.](#) Maybe you could be next...