



Michelle Stafford serves up some tasty hotdogs during the 20th anniversary celebration of the Burnside Gorge Community Association. **Photograph by: Lyle Stafford, Times Colonist.**

## 'The little community that could' Mayor joins celebrations in Burnside Gorge

By Jeff Bell, Times Colonist August 21, 2011

Two decades of service to the community has been celebrated in the Burnside Gorge neighbourhood.

The festivities were for the Burnside Gorge Community Association, which opened its doors in 1991. At the outset, the lone staff member - Dean Fortin, now the mayor of Victoria - ran the show out of a cloakroom at the former Burnside Elementary School.

Since then, the association has moved into the purpose-built Burnside Gorge Community Centre on Cecelia Road, which was completed in 2007. Funding for the \$5.4-million centre next to Cecelia Ravine included \$1 million each from the federal and provincial governments, \$2.4 million from the city and \$800,000 from community efforts.

"It's just down the street and it's a far cry from a cloakroom," said the centre's Kim Perkins.

The association now manages the Burnside school site, used for offices and event rentals in the years since it was closed as a school in 2006.

Association staff has grown in 20 years to more than 45 who provide services in many areas.

"We've got a pretty broad range of services now," Perkins said. "It started out as child care and recreation as the main focuses, and today we have family support, we have a youth centre, a family centre and we do special events."

Also offered is a "family self-sufficiency" program that provides basic financial education, and a program that helps with parenting skills and other needs for families with children at-risk of going into government care. Some programs attract clientele from around the region, not just in Burnside Gorge, Perkins said.

Special events organized at the centre include the annual Gorge Waterway Cleanup (Sept. 17), the Selkirk Waterfront Festival and the Community Christmas Dinner.

The association evolved from the vision of caring residents, Perkins said.

"It began when community members saw a need for things that the community was missing, one of those being child care. From that, an association and a volunteer board of directors were formed."

Guests at the anniversary event were treated to a barbecue, along with children's activities. Fortin, who was among the speakers, said the celebration was well-deserved.

"It's an amazing community, often referred to as an urban neighbourhood, that provides some fantastic services," he said of the Burnside Gorge area. "A lot of what is done is the responsibility of some really great people - staff, volunteers, board members."

Fortin said the main point of his speech was simply to thank those who made the growth of the association and the establishment of the community centre possible. He pointed out that programs run at the centre have gained wide renown, and staff members have been invited to give a presentation on the centre's family program in England. Current executive director Suzanne Cole will lead the trip overseas.

"Here in your own backyard, people are earning international acclaim for the programming that they're doing," Fortin said. "This really is the little community that could."

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