

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FEDERAL RETIREES (FSNA)

Vancouver Island North Branch

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FEDERAL RETIREES | ASSOCIATION NATIONALE DES RETRAITÉS FÉDÉRAUX



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Representing retired employees and spouses from the Public Service of Canada, the Canadian Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Welcome back after a long, cold, and snowbound winter which still holds us in its grasp! We welcome three new members onto our Executive, Marjorie Arnold, Patricia (Paddy) O'Brien, and Doug Dunsmore. Marjorie will be on the Telephone committee which will be headed by Paddy, while Doug will be assistant benefits officer.

Our Branch membership has now reached 2,045, there are still a lot of federal retirees in our area who are eligible for membership. If you know of anyone tell him/her that we are here and actively looking after their welfare and would welcome them into the fold. Other items of local interest are in the newsletter submitted by the various Committee chairpersons who all do a great job on your behalf.

On the Regional scene the five Branch Presidents met on the 10th. January in Duncan under the chairmanship of our Regional Services Officer John Finn, the purpose of the meeting was to study and make recommendations with respect to the National By-laws, with a great deal of emphasis on the bylaw dealing with weighted voting at the annual Congress. It was agreed by the presidents that we would oppose the concept of weighted voting which allows the branches to vote based on the number of members within the branch, this method would allow the association to be dominated by the three largest branches (shades of the Canadian Senate!). We would propose one branch one vote. The chances of getting this motion through the Congress is probably slim to none, however all we can do is try.

I look forward to getting together with you at our Luncheon meeting on 11th March.

Bill McSeveney - President

CONTENTS

President's Message.....	1
Telephone Committee News	1
From the Editors Desk.....	2
RSO Report	3
Hello Phoners.....	3
Membership Update Form.....	3
Elections BC Article.....	4
Luncheon News	4
HBO Article	5-8

MEETING DATES

March 11 2009
June 10 2009
September 16 2009
December 09 2009

Telephone Committee and FSNA Members

Special thanks to the Telephone Committee for the wonderful job each of you do reminding the membership of our upcoming Luncheon/meetings. Members please see **Luncheon News** section for information on the March Luncheon/Meeting.

Paddy O'Brien is a new Director on the Executive and has taken on the job of Telephone Coordinator. She is looking forward to working with all the members of the Phone committee. Paddy can be contacted at **250-338-2313**.

Cecile Turnbull - Vice President



From the Editor's Desk

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season with family and friends. We certainly enjoyed ours other than the shoveling of all that white stuff we saw through December.

Before I say anything more I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to Bernie Guyader, the talented Assistant Editor for the work he has done setting up the newsletter during my term as editor. He has decided it is time for him to “retire “ from the newsletter team. I will be “soldiering on” doing both editor and set up. I hope I can continue the fine work Bernie has done for us.

You will note that the logo on the masthead has been updated to the new FSNA logo. I hope over the next few issues I will be able to add some new columns to the newsletter. I would again encourage all of you to provide me with your thoughts and ideas as well as any articles you feel would be useful to the members. Feel free to contact me or any of the Executive. Our co-ordinates can be found below

As many of may know, there will be a Provincial Election this year. It is scheduled for Tuesday 12 May 2009. As always the District Electoral Officers in the Comox Valley and the North Island will be looking to hire Election Officials to work as Voting Officers, Voting Clerks, Voter Registration Officers and Information Officers. Please note the article from Elections BC on Page 5.

Kevin Weighill - Editor

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A Reminder.

If you agree to attend a General Meeting Luncheon and subsequently change your mind, you must inform Barbara Schneider at (250) 703-2504. If you don't**you will be billed for the cost of the meal !!!**

Hello Phoners!

Members on the phone committee please remember.....

If you're going to be out of town prior to a general meeting and you're unable to phone the people on your list, please phone Paddy O'Brien (Tel.- 250-338-2318), so that she can re-assign those names to another phone committee member. It is important that members know about upcoming general meetings, and it is important that we know whether or not they intend to come.



Regional Services Officers Report

It has been very busy over the last few months for the BC Coastal Island Region. On November 27, thirty members of the executive from the five branches on Vancouver Island attended a one day training session in Duncan. Topics covered included the roles and responsibilities of the National Board of Directors, National Office and the branches; how each level of the organization fits into the policy and decision making process; what are the strategic goals of the FSNA over the next five years; an update on the marketing campaign currently underway; as well as it provided an opportunity for executives to meet and share best practices on a wide range of issues facing their branches. In short, it provided them with the tools they need to better carry out their responsibilities to you, the member.

The Health Benefit Officers for the fifteen branches in BC were also provided much needed training during November. We were fortunate to have Charlotte Roy, from the National Office in Ottawa, provide a one day training session, the first time in over four years, on the Public Service Health Care Plan and the Pensioners Dental Services Plan. All indications are that this training was very well received and once again it will provide one of the key members of your executive with the knowledge and tools they need to better service you.

The BC Coastal Islands Regions President meeting was held on January 10, 2009 where we discussed and developed resolutions on the FSNA By-laws that will be forwarded to the National Board of Directors for consideration at the 2009 Congress in June. Of particular importance were resolutions put forward on the autonomy of branches and the one branch - one vote verses weighted voting at Congress.

Finally, I had the pleasure of swearing in new boards of directors for the Duncan as well as the Vancouver Island North branches for 2009. These visits also gave me an opportunity to meet and speak to many of the members of the branches at the luncheons. It is hoped that over the next few months when I visit the other branches in the Region that I will meet with many of you.

John Finn - Regional Services Officer, BC Coastal Islands Region

MEMBERSHIP UP-DATE

Do we have the correct information on you as a member?

It is important to us and to you that our records are up to date. If the label on this newsletter has your INITIALS instead of your given name, we may not have all the information we need to ensure that you get all the updates from your branch or National Office.

Please fill in the following and send it to us (address on Page 1).

Surname Given names:.....

Mailing address:

City/town Postal Code Phone

Pension is from: CF PS RCMP Other I receive a survivor's benefit Yes..... No

It is important to let the branch know of any changes in the above information



Elections BC is Calling All Leaders

British Columbians will vote on May 12, 2009 in the 39th General Election and the 2009 Referendum on Electoral Reform, and the province's chief electoral officer is hoping retired public servants will be on hand to help administer the democratic electoral process.

"Retired public servants are a wealth of knowledge, skill and experience. We would like to tap into that expertise," Chief Electoral Officer Harry Neufeld said. "Elections BC needs an estimated 30,000 people all around BC for full and part-time paid work leading up to and on general voting day.

"We are appealing to public service retirees to consider one of the many short or longer-term opportunities with Elections BC."

Experienced workers are needed to perform administrative services in district electoral offices, train election staff, conduct mobile voting in hospitals and care facilities, provide assistance to voters at voting places and administer the activities to ensure smooth voting operations, both at advance voting and on General Voting Day on May 12, 2009.

For more information on the opportunities that are available and positions that you might enjoy, visit the Elections BC website www.elections.bc.ca and look under employment, or call Elec-

Luncheon News 2009

The dates for the Luncheon/Meetings for 2009 are the following Wednesdays:

March 11, June 10, September 16 (Third week) and December 09, 2009

GUEST SPEAKER FOR MARCH: Tom MacLean from Collette Vacations

A reminder that the luncheon cost is **\$15.00 per person**. This includes a hot and cold Chef's Buffet with dessert, tea, coffee, the room rental, gratuity and tax. It will be payable at the door. The door opens at 11:00 a.m. for the meet and greet.

Tickets for the **Christmas Luncheon** will be sold in advance again this year. The tickets will be available at the **June and September** meetings and after that the tickets will be available from the Executive until **November 30** with refunds available until Dec. 2. Please buy your Christmas tickets early, as we can accommodate no more than 210 members (1 room only). The cost for the tickets is \$15.00 per person. Tickets will be available by calling Cecile & Bill Turnbull @ 250-338-1857 or Barb Schneider @ 250-703-2504.

Please remember that no tickets will be sold at the door for the Christmas Luncheon. Hope to see everyone at the March meeting.

Notes from the HBO

Correction Regarding the CPP Survivor Benefit

In the last newsletter, I wrote about BC Pharmacare's income threshold. My main purpose was to encourage anyone who has experienced a sudden drop in income, say upon the death of a spouse, to request an income review rather than wait two years for the system to catch up with reality. To illustrate the dramatic change in Pharmacare benefits, I included a numeric example, which failed to show the survivor's CPP benefit. I am indebted to a kind widow receiving a survivor benefit for pointing out my omission.

Working out the CPP entitlement can seem a bit complicated. From the outset, I should note that, where the pensioner elected to begin drawing a reduced benefit prior to age 65, the first step is to determine the so-called "unreduced" pension. All subsequent calculations are based on that.

If the survivor is age 65 or older, their basic entitlement is 60% of the deceased pensioner's unreduced pension. If the survivor's age is under 65, the benefit is 37.5% plus a flat-rate amount, currently set at \$161.56. That could work out to be more or less than 60% of the deceased's pension.

If you're not confused yet, things get a bit more complicated if the survivor is receiving his or her own CPP benefit. That calculation is best left to the federal government. We can note that the combined CPP benefit cannot exceed the CPP maximum which, for 2008, was \$884.58.

I'm not sure if a numeric example would help but let's assume the pensioner who passed away had retired at age 60 and was receiving a CPP benefit of \$600 per month. Retiring 60 months "early" equates to a pension reduction of 30%. If the reduced pension is only 70% of what it would have been at 65, the unreduced amount is \$600 divided by 0.7 or about \$857. This leads to two answers for the basic entitlement. In round numbers:

- a. if the survivor is 65 or older, 60% or \$514; or
- b. if the survivor is under 65, 37.5% or \$321 plus the flat rate amount of \$162 for a grand total of \$483.

As mentioned earlier, the amount actually received could be reduced in order to cap the grand total of all CPP benefits flowing to the survivor to the regulatory maximum.

A final thought is, as we have noted before, the survivor must apply for the survivor benefit.

Veteran's Survivor Benefits

While on the subject of survivor benefits, I should mention in passing veteran's benefits: Disability Pension, Prisoner of War (POW) Compensation, Special Awards, War Veteran's Allowance, Assistance Fund and Veteran's Independence Program (VIP). To quote from the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) website:

:

““In most cases, the surviving spouse or common-law partner of a disability pensioner or a former POW receives, for one year, all the monthly benefits that were in place at the time the pensioner/POW passed away ... At the end of the one-year period, a survivor pension is paid, based on the amount of disability pension and/or POW compensation that was being paid at the time the pensioner/POW passed away.”

The VIP, or home care program, is treated slightly differently. Again, to quote from VAC:

“VIP housekeeping and/or grounds maintenance services are also available to eligible primary caregivers of those Veterans who received these VIP services at the time of their death or admission to a long-term care facility in the years since the program began in April 1981. A primary caregiver can include a spouse, common-law partner, adult child or another individual.

Only those services that the Veteran was receiving at the time of his/her death or admission to a long-term care facility may be extended to the primary caregiver ... To qualify, a primary caregiver must have a continuing need, due to health reasons, for the services to remain self-sufficient at home.”

It's Tax Time Again

The only good thing about tax time is that it coincides with spring and warmer weather. For those preparing their own returns using computer software, it looks as though this year's programs are a little smarter when it comes to handling pension income splitting. The two programs I have sampled look at both spouses' incomes and make a recommendation on the optimum split to minimize the total family tax bill. Last year, it seemed more trial and error. For those folks attempting this with paper, pencil and calculator, I guess it's still a case of trial and error.

I expect that many of our members hail from the era when one person worked full-time and the other did not. Thus, today, most of their family income is going to one person in the form of superannuation and/or RRIF payments. While I'm definitely not a tax professional, it does seem that, for them, the optimum pension split will be the maximum, or 50%.

If one spouse is still working in a high-income bracket or the pension income is relatively small, the calculation will be different. The high-income folks can afford to consult a real professional or spend \$40 on a computer program.

Those without a home computer might want to prevail upon a son, daughter or friend using a computer tax program since those programs do not limit the number of returns for incomes under \$25,000. For that matter, they do not limit trial runs at any income level. Alternatively, one can investigate the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program to determine whether there is a clinic nearby. Information on the program is contained in the following section.

Some tax professionals do mention possible adverse effects of splitting on non-refundable tax credits, notably medical expenses, which are best claimed by the lower income spouse. It usually turns out that the tax savings from pension splitting outweigh any decline in the medical expense benefit but that's something to check.

Speaking of medical expenses, when is a health insurance premium not a health insurance premium? Why, for tax purposes, when it's paid to the provincial government, of course. Just to note that BC Medical Services Plan (BC MSP) premiums cannot be claimed as a medical expense on your tax return. On the other hand, all of your private and public-private premiums should be allowable, as are your so-called co-payments to the PSHCP and PDSP. So it is important to keep track of what you claimed and what you were (not) reimbursed.

One final thought concerns Old Age Security (OAS) "clawback". Usually pension splitting is beneficial in driving the pensioner below the OAS clawback threshold, currently set at \$64,718, above which one is obliged to repay part of the benefit and/or see the monthly allowance decline the following year. If splitting raises the recipient spouse above this threshold, that's something to consider. Once again I would guess that folks in this income bracket probably seek professional help or use a tax program in preparing their tax returns.

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP)

Income Guidelines for Qualification:

- Single: total income not exceeding \$25,000
- Married: Combined total income of \$30,000 or less
- One adult with a child: \$30,000 or less
- Each additional dependant: Add \$2,000 per dependant to the above limits
- Investment income: less than: \$1,000 in above totals.

If you meet these guidelines and do not have a complex return involving, say, rental income, self-employment, bankruptcy or an estate, you can contact the following organizations for assistance in preparing your income tax returns:

Volunteer Tax Preparation Clinics - Comox, BC

Organization Name:	Lions' Club
Contact Person:	Marielle Mott
Phone Number:	(250) 339-7543
Location:	1729 Comox Avenue
City/Municipality and Province:	Comox, BC
Clinic Dates and Times:	March 3 to April 30, 2009 Tuesday 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Clinic Type:	With appointment and drop off.
Type of Client:	For all

Volunteer Tax Preparation Clinics - Courtenay, BC

Organization Name:	North Island Womens' Services Society
Contact Person:	Maureen J Hoffart
Phone Number:	(250) 338-1133
Location:	450D Eighth Street
City/Municipality and Province:	Courtenay, BC
Email:	NIWSS5@shawbiz.ca
Clinic Dates and Times:	Year-round Monday to Friday
Clinic Type:	With appointment and drop off.
Type of Client:	For all

Volunteer Tax Preparation Clinics - Parksville, BC

Organization Name: District 69 Society of Organized Services
Contact Person: Reneé Caulder
Phone Number: (250) 248-2093
Location: 245 W Hirst Avenue
City/Municipality and Province: Parksville, BC
Email: coordinator@sosd69.com
Clinic Dates and Times: March 2 to April 30, 2009
Monday
9:45 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.
Thursday
1:00 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.
Clinic Type: With appointment and drop off.
Type of Client: For all

Volunteer Tax Preparation Clinics - Port Hardy, BC

Organization Name: The Salvation Army
Contact Person: Diane Hutchinson
Phone Number: (250) 949-8125
Location: 8635 Granville Street
City/Municipality and Province: Port Hardy, BC
Email: salvationarmymtwaddington@gmail.com
Clinic Dates and Times: Year-round
Clinic Type: With appointment and drop off.
Type of Client: For all

Note: These were the sites listed on Service Canada's website as this article was being prepared. In the past, there have been more clinics than these in the Comox valley and Campbell River areas. Those with computers can check the following web link for more up-to-date information <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/volunteer/>; those without can call 1-800-959-8281.

What Your HBOs Are Here For

I know that's bad grammar but I did want to remind everyone that your FSNA Health Benefits Officers (HBOs) are here to get answers to your questions on health benefits and, in the absence of anyone else, benefits in general. We're also here to assist people who may be having problems with getting benefits to which they feel entitled. If we don't have immediate answers, we can draw upon the resources of FSNA's national office. In extreme cases, we can ask them to intervene on our behalf. So, if you have a question or a problem with pensioner's benefits, don't hesitate to call either myself or our newly appointed Assistant HBO:

Doug Dunsmore
Assistant HBO