

Halifax UU church pulls together after hurricane

Hurricane Juan, which took down thousands of large trees all over Halifax in late September, did not spare the local Universalist Unitarian Church. Members arrived the morning after the storm to discover two of their six large trees uprooted. A massive 80-foot linden tree fell on the church (see photo), which is a converted 19th century home. Another tree dropped on a neighbouring house. A third tree from an adjacent backyard toppled onto the church property.



lawn, looked like a jungle,” says Scott Donovan, volunteer property manager and church member.

An impromptu work party ensued, without any need to solicit help. At first, the volunteers were shocked and dismayed by the destruction. But before long they were clearing limbs and picking up broken glass.

The tree that hit the church fell directly on a new patio that volunteers had spent the summer building, in an effort to draw people into the yard. The patio wasn’t complete, nor was it paid for. But fortunately, the project was spared major damage as the tree canopy cushioned its fall. A portion of the church roof was damaged, but the building was left structurally sound.

“I’m afraid we’re going to have to live with this massive tree propped up precariously against our building,” says Donovan. Arborists, roofing contractors and carpenters are still in short supply, since not a single street in Halifax was left unscathed by the storm. ■

“The backyard, once very orderly with lots of open space at ground level and a neatly cropped

Juan Con – eastern regional gathering goes to Halifax

Hurricane Juan and the tree that crashed onto the Halifax church came at a very inopportune moment – just five days before the congregation was set to host this fall’s cuc Eastern Regional Gathering. With out-of-town guests from as far away as Ottawa and Montreal expected, the local organizers had to react quickly.

The problems were major: two of the venues they planned to use were suddenly unavailable

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This community is ...

BY ARNY MAIZEN

- a fellowship
- of freedom and family
- a congregation
- of caring and compassion
- a sanctuary
- of sanity and serenity
- a temple
- of tranquillity
- a church of challenge,
- change,
- and the cherishing of life
- a religion
- of reflection and renewal
- an institution
- of integrity and inspiration
- my haven of hope
- our labour of love.

Arny Maizen was a relatively new member of the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship when he wrote and shared this poem at the Flower Communion Service.

Poetry Contributions

Short, spiritual poems by cuc members are invited. Please send them to poetry editor Franci Louann, floouann@telus.net, or by fax to: 604-731-0228.

**GROWING VITAL
 RELIGIOUS
 COMMUNITIES
 IN CANADA**



Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

All we are saying is give peace a chance!

That 1960s chorus is a good summary of the seven-page draft peace resolutions that are being mailed to every Unitarian congregation at the end of November, along with some background information and a discussion guide.

In May 2002, delegates to the CUC annual meeting approved a “study process” aimed at a comprehensive and updated peace policy for our denomination. Why?

Over the years, many specific resolutions related to peace had been passed at annual meetings. And following 9/11, the CUC issued many more statements, messages and religious education materials related to peace.

The time had come to develop a peace policy that fit the 21st century. After the May 2002 decision, a stalwart group of five members from the two Ottawa congregations began meeting bi-weekly; they’re our leaders in this policy process. Now it’s harvest time, and they are sharing the fruits of their labour with all of us.

I’ve had the opportunity to meet with them twice face-to-face and was so impressed to see the difference a year makes. At our first meeting they had reams and reams of material and ideas, but were looking for a place to start. This past visit, they were fine-tuning and also looking forward to having it distributed and discussed long before the May meeting. Together, we also anticipated a new, larger peace monitoring group to carry their work forward after the vote on the policy next May.

Would you like to join the discussion? Just send an email to peace@cuc.ca; it will reach the peace policy chair, Helmut Kuhn, and me.

The draft peace resolutions are on the CUC’s website at www.cuc.ca/social_responsibility. Just follow the links from there, or contact the person who receives the CUC monthly mailing for your congregation.

cuc Regional Gathering



The eastern gathering attracted 65 delegates including 15 youth, from Ottawa to Halifax.

JOHN CARSON PHOTOS

Juan Con: the eastern gathering

• continued from page one

due to storm damage. Host families were without power, or water, or both. Many of the city streets were impassable.

Should they cancel? “The thought never crossed my mind,” says Laureen van Lierop, one of the local organizers. “People had committed to airfare, since they were coming from all over the east, not just driving.” She says her main concern was food, because their original venue had catering included.



Now they had to improvise. “If we had to, we’d do barbecue and pizza,” says van Lierop. However, that wasn’t necessary. With a new venue, a backup caterer, and full support from the host families, the gathering went ahead as scheduled. Participants were contacted with the message: “Be clean when you arrive (you may not get a shower), and bring a flashlight!”

There was an unexpected benefit

from the last-minute changes: “it brought people ‘from away’ closer to our community,” says Lierop. “It helped put things in perspective.” On Saturday morning, the Halifax organizers had planned a sunrise service in Point Pleasant Park, which suffered devastating damage. Instead, they held it in the church’s backyard, next to the fallen tree.

The fall CUC regional gatherings are resource conferences for church leaders. The Halifax gathering featured five in-depth workshops and attracted 65 delegates, including about 15 youth (they quickly dubbed their meeting “Juan Con”).

The highlight, according to CUC eastern regional director Linda

Thomson, was the Saturday night coffee house. “We had a great emcee, excellent participation, and a variety of singing, instrumental music, and poetry – with both adults and youth performing.” The backdrop for the self-entertainment evening was yellow caution tape.

“We were well-fed, well-housed and well-entertained,” says Thomson. “I still don’t know how they did it.”

Two churches offer refugee sanctuary

Sanctuary: all churches have one. But for the past four months, two different Canadian congregations have offered sanctuary to three refugees fearing deportation by the federal government.

A Colombian refugee named **German** and his daughter **Doris** (their last name is confidential) have been sheltered by one of our smallest churches, in North Hatley, Quebec, since late June. First Unitarian in Ottawa, the largest congregation in the country, has protected **Samsu Mia** of Bangladesh since early July.

In both cases, church leaders had to decide secretly to offer sanctuary, then present the decision to their congregations after the refugees were inside. Both churches rallied behind the cause.

At press time, the North Hatley case had been resolved, while the Ottawa one was ongoing. Here are the details.

DORIS AND GERMAN, NORTH HATLEY

These two Colombians first came to Canada from the U.S. in 2001. Due to translation problems at their original Immigration and Refugee Board hearing, the word “guerrillas” was used to describe their persecutors in Colombia instead of “paramilitaries.” They eventually lost their claim because of the mix-up, and were scheduled to be deported to the U.S. last June. They feared for their lives if they were ever sent back to Colombia.

“Doris and German are not *economic* refugees seeking to exploit the Canadian system in order to find a good job,” says Rev. Carole Martignacco. “They *had* a decent life in Colombia,” where German owned his own masonry company. “They are political refugees, targeted for abuse because of their refusal to cooperate with a paramilitary group.”

Their arrival in North Hatley transformed the small church. “People visit, drop in, bring food, weave, knit, do their laundry, eat with them,” says Martignacco. A July press conference and rally



Above: a support rally at the North Hatley church, last summer. Below: Doris and German (left) and Samsu Mia (right).



(see photo) attracted media attention from all over Quebec, and “it’s opened the church to people who wouldn’t have come for any other reason.”

In late October, after 17 weeks in the church, Doris and German left voluntarily and went to the U.S. border where their expulsion order was carried out and they were handed over to U.S. immigration. However, the North Hatley church still sponsors the pair and has found them a home in Vermont, where they will apply for immigration to Canada.

SAMSU MIA, OTTAWA

Mr. Mia has been in Canada for eight years, working as a servant at the Bangladeshi High Commission in Ottawa.



Five years ago he fled the embassy, saying he had been physically abused and treated like a slave by his boss. However, the federal government rejected his refugee claim, saying a “personal vendetta” wasn’t a legitimate reason for his fear of persecution if he returns to Bangladesh. They ignored evidence that Mia’s son had been beaten at home as a result of his father’s actions.

When contacted about the case, Ottawa First’s response was swift. They granted Mia sanctuary, quickly renovated the old janitor’s quarters in the church basement, and then rallied volunteers. Every night they have someone stay with Mia. Others are helping him

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Across the Country

THE DALAI LAMA IS COMING

Last August, the Unitarian Church of Vancouver was aflutter with Buddhist prayer flags as the congregation wel-



comed The Venerable Achok Rinpoche, a member of the Dalai Lama's inner circle. Rinpoche was in town to make plans for a visit from his Holiness next March. He's pictured here outside ucv with Ken Wood of the church's worship committee.

FROM PAVEMENT TO PARADISE

Transformation: that's the only way to describe the evolution of the backyard at the Unitarian Church of Montreal. It used to be pavement. Now it's a community garden, a community compost depot, a neighbourhood shortcut, and a sacred space, all rolled into one. The new garden seems to make a strong statement about the congregation's values, including the children's white pine tree, a First Nations symbol of peace.

LOCK ME UP OR LET ME GO

Victoria Unitarian Betty Krawczyk was sentenced to an additional six months in jail in October for defying a court order to stop blockading a logging road on Vancouver Island. She was first arrested in May, and had been kept in jail awaiting trial. She refused to accept probation terms that would have prevented her from rejoining the logging protest in the Walbran Valley, and was imprisoned all summer as a result. Now she faces further incarceration.

NETWORKING SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Saint John chapter of the Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice helped create a new Social Justice Centre for the city – one that unites peace, environment and social justice groups in a shared meeting space. The need became obvious last spring, with widespread local protests against the Iraq war. By the summer, the group had rented a large, loft-style meeting space in an old warehouse.

Social Action



Katherine Morrison guards an old forest on the edge of Kingston in early October.

Kingston pagan takes to the trees in protest

When Katherine Morrison of Kingston heard chainsaws running amok in the woods behind her house recently, she took immediate action. She grabbed her 10-year-old's hand, ran out to the forest, and climbed a tree. Then she sent her daughter as a messenger to alert the neighbours.

The result? The housing developers temporarily halted their clearing, and a public meeting eventually forced them to preserve the older trees in the area.

Her action may have been brash and spontaneous, but Morrison felt compelled to act when she realized what was happening. Homeowners had received a notice from the "Greenwood Park" developers (no irony intended?), alerting them to a public meeting in two weeks' time. However, old hardwoods started falling the very next day on the eight-hectare development.

"I'm 48, and not so athletic any more," jokes Morrison. But she found

a tree fort platform in a large oak used by neighbourhood children, climbed up 12 feet, and refused to budge. "It was in a strategic spot," she says. "The workers couldn't clear any further without endangering my life." She stayed there until the contractor left that night, then returned the next day, and the next. Her photo appeared on the front page of the Kingston daily newspaper, and the issue took off.

By the time the public meeting rolled around, the place was packed, and the developer started making concessions. They agreed to preserve the older trees, in consultation with city staff (even though they were under no legal obligation to do so). They modified their plans

for 30-foot lots, changing them to 40-foot allowances. And they agree to turn the forested area into a park.

Morrison is a member of the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship and is involved in the local pagan/witch community. She was surprised to learn there were no city bylaws governing the destruction of mature trees on private land. It's an issue she plans to take up with the new city council. ■

Ottawa church offers sanctuary

• *continued from page three*

learn English, and to read and write.

"Our commitment is for as long as it takes," says Maureen Cassidy of the Ottawa church's sanctuary committee. She's read the refugee board judgment against Mia, and says it's sad. "We're a multicultural society, we have so many reasons to help people, and we're weaselling out of it on a technicality. I don't know why." She does believe that behind-the-scenes negotiations will eventually secure Mia's safe refuge in this country. ■

Testimony

by Rachel Collins

A river of connection flows through our community

I was raised a Unitarian and for many years, as a child, I took the church for granted. Didn't most people in the world respect each other and talk openly about values, issues, and social activism? Oops, guess not. But growing up in a faith community where these things did happen on a regular basis gave me confidence to try to change the world around me and to question authority in healthy ways.

During my teenage years, the Unitarian youth group provided a circle of open-minded friends and an important venue for channeling this energy. In retrospect, being raised a Unitarian shaped many aspects of my identity and fostered a positive and activist-oriented view of the world.

As a young adult, I stepped away from the church for a number of years. However, when personal crisis struck and I needed a faith community most, I returned. As I came to realize the importance of community, I have continued to increase my involvement in the church. My current volunteer work includes working with the youth group in Calgary, volunteering as a service consultant for the CUC Western RNG, and helping to organize workshops for the upcoming CUC conference in May.

One of the things that I appreciate most about our faith is that I feel encouraged to be myself in our congregation in a way that is often stifled in the corporate world. Our tolerance for diversity of thought and respect for one another is fundamental to who we are

collectively. As I have experimented with my spirituality and my relationship to the world, I have opened myself to the philosophies and practices of Buddhism, Goddess-centred spirituality, paganism, and creation spirituality.

I think we are at a pivotal moment in our history where we have the potential to invite and welcome increasing numbers of people into our movement – share the good news, so to speak.

A metaphor for our faith comes to mind; one that is linked to the land I call home, in Alberta.

I see a community of people walking individual sacred paths that meander through shared fields.

Fields blend into foothills. Foothills grow into mountains. A river of connection flows through it all. At times we walk alone, listening for the call of a bird or the crunch of the leaves under foot. At times we gather together, grounded by a faith community as diverse as all the seeds we harvest from the earth.

Ideas and practices may shift across the blue of an outstretched sky, like clouds shifting above the golden prairie landscape, but we are connected by the earth we share, the values we share, and the intentional community we plant and grow together. □

– Rachel Collins is a member of the Unitarian Church of Calgary. Contact her if you want to propose a workshop for the CUC annual conference and meeting: rachel_d_collins@yahoo.com.



Elizabeth Bowen

CUC President

Say Yes to the CUC when we call!

We've come so far in such a short time. I'm amazed at how much Canadian Unitarians and Universalists have accomplished since July 1, 2002, the day our relationship with the UUA changed and we became responsible for our own destiny.

Our new CUC organization is in place. Regions and RNGs, once just words in a report, now represent strong groups of congregations and members working together. All four regions held fall gatherings this year. With great success, staff and volunteers are developing and delivering programs and services to meet the needs of our congregations. Taskforces, groups and committees too numerous to list are helping convert our plan for the CUC into reality.

Last May in Winnipeg I said, "I now know what saying yes to the CUC can lead to." So do many of you, who have said "yes" when asked to work with us. Without you, we could not have come so far in such a short time. My sincere thanks to each of you!

So where do we go from here? On to a bigger and better CUC with connections flourishing among members across Canada. We'll have more congregations, more members, exciting new programs and services – and that feeling of accomplishment that always follows a job well done.

We'll continue to look outward. Our long-standing cooperation with the UUA will thrive, and we'll play a larger role in international organizations like the International Association for Religious Freedom, the UU United Nations Office, the Partner Church Council, and the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists.

That's my dream for the CUC, and I hope it's yours. Let's keep working together to make our dream come true. When asked for your help, time, advice or financial support – please say yes!

Unitarian People

NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR

Alison Nixon is the new Music Director of the North Shore Unitarian Church in West Vancouver, B.C. Alison also con-



ducts a number of other choral groups in the area including the Douglas College Choral Society, Orpheus Male Voice Choir, Nota Bene Women's Choir and SummerChor. She is an accomplished violinist and has performed with orchestras in Britain, Switzerland and Vancouver.

BLOODY PRACTICE

Kelowna Unitarian **Sterling Haynes** has just published a memoir of his medical career in B.C. and around the world. Beginning with his medical practice in the wild frontier town of Williams Lake, Haynes travelled the world as a doctor, an observer and a humanist. Stories of treating aboriginal people and white settlers in the Cariboo region join with stories of treating southern workers and Vietnam vets in Alabama. Added to this mix, travels to Central America and experiences as a British colonial officer in Africa, *Bloody Practice* makes for a thought-provoking picture of the world today. It's available from bookstores or web booksellers (ISBN 0-920576-97-4).

LET THERE BE PEACE, FRIEND

When **Lori Fox Rossi** of Lakehead Unitarian in Thunder Bay first wrote the hymn "Let There Be Peace, Friend" she was just trying to express her feelings about violence, conflict and war. But the song was performed by the cuc choir last May at the annual meeting and has taken on a life of its own, spread far and wide by UU members and musicians. "I sent this 'child' out into the world," says Rossi, "and hearing that it's being sung in far corners of the continent is like getting a postcard from a full-grown child telling mum where it's been." For details, email Rossi: lori@lorifoxrossi.com or call 807-768-0729. A choral arrangement is in the works.

Across the Country

Same-sex wedding boom in the Niagara peninsula

Since last June, when same-sex marriages became legal in Ontario, Doreen Peever has wed 52 couples. And her fellow lay chaplain in St. Catharines, John Mayer, has officiated at 30-plus same-sex unions. The wedding boom in the Niagara region is due to its proximity to the U.S. border (45 of Peever's weddings were for cross-border couples), and the fact that no one else in the region is doing them.

That's not to say these are rash ceremonies, although Peever has performed the odd wedding with only a few hour's notice. Rather, the couples usually contact her after getting a reference from the Niagara Falls, Ontario city clerk. She interviews them by email or phone, sets a date, and stipulates her one non-negotiable request: the couple must write their own wedding vows. A few days or weeks later she meets them at her house, or in a local B&B, and leads the ceremony.

She has married gay and lesbian couples from 20 U.S. states. Many of them seem to be Episcopalians, she says, but she's also had everything from atheists to Pentecostals ("In that service, I used the word 'God' more times than I had in 200 previous marriages!" she laughs).

"My church is very supportive of this," says Peever. "It's doing more for publicity and outreach than has been done in years," a theme that's probably true for many congregations in Ontario and B.C. The Unitarian Congregation of Niagara was mentioned three times on the front page of the daily paper this past summer, in reference to same-sex marriage.

In one of them, Peever invited her local Liberal MP, Walt Lastewka, a


Catholic, to attend one of her services. He declined, saying, "I don't see any reason to ... I don't push my religion and I don't want anybody to push their religion on me." (Note: Lastewka is campaigning to defeat the same-sex legislation in Parliament.)

Peever has also appeared on the radio, debating local opponents of what she's doing, and answering questions from the public on a phone-in. Although she performed many same-sex



Doreen Peever married Stephen Temperley and Vivian Matalon of Glenford, New York last July in St. Catharines, Ontario.

unions before last June (she's been a lay chaplain for 13 years), she's "delighted" to be doing it officially now.

"The couples are so grateful," says Peever. "They say things like, 'now we feel whole'." Three of them have written the St. Catharines newspaper expressing their thanks, and she has ongoing correspondence by email with several others. 

Anxiety for meaning is our faith tradition

I believe the human urge to participate in religious activities can be understood as inescapably a part of our humanness. My conclusion is *humanist* because religion emerges as part of the human drive for meaning in life; it is *religious* because it works with an understanding of faith which is exactly that: a concern for meaning in life.

Faith might be an urge for certainty (and as such, an alternative to reason), and/or it might be trust. Either way, I believe faith is only a part of something deeper: the human anxiety for meaning.

Understanding faith this way facilitates a conversation among the various world religions. If faith is a concern for meaning in life, then each of the world's religions will have evolved its own tradition of religious expression as a way of helping people deal with life issues.

The Oxford English Dictionary says that up until the early 18th century the words *meaning* and *moaning* were interchangeable in the English language. This tells us that the Enlightenment thinkers wanted to separate reason from emotion. In order to get beyond the limitations of their perspective and hear again how these two shadow each other, I offer the phrase: *meaning is moaning*.

Thus language, or rather *linguaging*, becomes not just a code by which we communicate or exchange information but rather the behavioral milieu of meaning in which we live, the actual physical medium in which we are first and then continuously exposed to meaning / moaning.

Linguaging is any word or action or gesture – singing or dancing or reciting or playing an instrument or reading poetry or painting a picture or wearing a hat (or not wearing a hat), or buying a house in this neighbourhood and not some other – any behaviour that generates or conveys or *digests* meaning, meaning in the world around you or

meaning within you. It is from our experience of meaning in language that we develop the expectation that our *lives* might be meaningful, too.



I understand ministry as an art (or a profession or a vocation) that does its work through the human linguaging experience. We help people live with their anxiety for meaning, helping them see that it can be an empowering force in their lives. In our counselling and in our visitations, in our committee participation and in our liturgies and sermons, ministers help people feel better about themselves while at the same time challenging them to respond to larger values in their lives.

I tie this consideration of faith, meaning, and linguaging to the notion of *tradition*. Since we need a sense of history to understand each sentence we hear,

meaning as moaning survives in the ongoing conversations of our lives. Participation in a religious tradition is participation in a particular conversation of faith, a conversation that continues over time – today, or the time of our lives together in this community, or the time since UU congregations were first formed, and beyond.

Hence the need for tradition. A tradition is an institutional commitment to the world. It is a collection of experiences by a variety of people conversing, linguaging, sharing their concern for meaning with each other over the generations. They cannot interact with each other without the structures to

support and encourage that interaction, and they cannot language over the centuries without participating in a specific, physical medium of one kind or another, especially the one we have for facilitating that conversation over the generations: the congregation. ■

– John Baros-Johnson is the minister of the UU Church of Halifax. This column is a synopsis of an address he gave at the 2003 CUC annual meeting, entitled, “Thoughtful Faith: Unitarian Universalism as a Faith Tradition.” No synopsis should be taken as a substitute for the original, which is available at: www.cuc.ca/ministry/sermon_series/thoughtful_faith.htm.

Get your 2004 Multifaith Calendar

One of the most successful ventures of the Multifaith Action Society, Vancouver's leading interfaith organization, has been the publication for the past 16 years of the Multifaith Calendar, which now has an annual circulation of 20,000 copies. It lists the festivals and holidays of 13 religious faiths in Canada.

The overall theme for the 2004 Calendar is “Renewing Earth's Sacred Balance,” and has been produced in con-

sultation with the David Suzuki Foundation, in which I am one of the Council of Elders.

Information is available from www.faith-commongood.net/. Individual or bulk orders for the calendar (\$15 apiece) can be placed by email to mfcalendar@pacificcoast.net.

– Rev. Phillip Hewett,
Minister Emeritus, Vancouver

The Canadian Unitarian is the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Unitarian Council. It's mailed free to all Canadian members for whom the CUC has a current address.* The Unitarian reports on newsworthy events in the denomination, including the annual conference each spring. It attempts to reflect all segments of Unitarianism and Universalism in Canada. We welcome all submissions, however, publication is based on the criteria of newsworthiness, relevance to readers, length and balance. We try to publish all letters to the editor, although they may be edited for brevity and clarity.

* Non-members can subscribe to the Unitarian for \$15 Can. or \$10 U.S. Send name, address and cheque to CUC office.

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In Memoriam

James Gibson: UU founder


An illustrious historian, public servant, member of the order of Canada, and Unitarian church founder died in late October at the age of 91.

James Gibson's final 24 hours were characteristic: he attended a concert, had lunch, walked to the Ottawa library, returned to his residence, hung up his coat and cane, sat down in a chair, closed his eyes, and died.

Gibson was widely-known in the academic world, but his career path was more diverse than that. After attending Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar he went to External Affairs, followed by nine years of service in the Prime Minister's office (in the 1940s, under Mackenzie King). He left that to teach at Carleton University, and went on to serve as its dean of arts and sciences. Eventually, in the 1960s, he helped found Brock University, in St. Catharines, Ontario.

In his new home, he also helped found the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara and served there as a lay chaplain, something his daughter Julia says taught him to be more open to people.

Gibson was named to the order of Canada in 1993. In 1996, Brock University named its library after him. And this past summer, Gibson was feted at a five-day reunion of Rhodes scholars in Oxford (he was the oldest of the 2,000 alumni who flew in for the occasion). On meeting former U.S. president Bill Clinton (who's also a Rhodes scholar), Gibson quipped, "He seemed more interested in my daughter than me."

James Gibson's St. Catharines service of remembrance was held on Nov. 7, led by Unitarian lay chaplain John Mayer, who is also a philosophy professor at Brock. 



James Gibson, in the 1960s



CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The cuc Call for Nominations will be sent to all congregations by the end of November and will be posted on www.cuc.ca (click Who's who). Nominations are invited for positions both on the cuc Board and on the Nominating Committee. To inquire, send an email to nominations@cuc.ca.

WISE & WILD!
~ A leadership symposium for UUs in Feb./Mar. 2005 ~
Endorsed by the cuc Board. Planning is now underway.
For more information, contact: lainey@telus.net