

THE | PROFESSIONAL

Professional Employees Association | Volume 46 Issue 4

BC's Union for Professionals

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As we come to the end of a year that has certainly made its mark, I'd like to thank all of our members for their work during this continually challenging pandemic and its ever-changing demands. Regardless of the type of work you do, you've probably experienced change and some ups and downs.

As a working parent of three young children, it was quite the experience to suddenly facilitate home learning while also delivering on work priorities, all under one roof. Needless to say, 2020 has been filled with a variety of emotions. There have been times where it has been isolating and overwhelming, and also times of clarity and peace of mind. No matter what your experience has been, please know that if you need help from your union, we are here for you.

My thanks and appreciation go out to PEA staff and to the member volunteers who continue to find creative ways to stay engaged and active in our union. From the delivery of our educational webinars, to committee work, organizing chapter AGMs, and delivering member support, these efforts do not go unnoticed. And for those of you who have been working tirelessly on the front line and in our communities, thank you.

All of the Zoom meetings have taken me back to my childhood, and I can't seem to stop the Brady Bunch theme from running through my head (Here's the story of a lovely lady . . .). Although you've probably had your fill of online meetings, I'm proud of the efficient

transition we have all made to working remotely where possible.

Union priorities for the next six months include:

1. Member support during Covid 19
2. Collective bargaining preparation
3. 2021 virtual PEA Convention
4. Education planning and delivery
5. Chapter support
6. Members' and staff well-being

I would also like to thank the 1,100 members who completed our annual member survey with Stratcom in October and November. Overall, I am pleased to see that 85 per cent of members are satisfied with the PEA. Our executive will be reviewing the report and sharing more results in 2021.

Many of our PEA programs will remain online in 2021, including our upcoming PEA Convention on April 29 and 30. We're accepting applications to attend until January 8, 2021, and I'm looking forward to seeing you all virtually.

It's going to be a very different holiday season this year, but I hope that, regardless of how you spend your time, you get a chance to rest, reflect and recuperate with friends and family inside your bubble. Have a safe and happy holiday break.

Shawna

CONVENTION

APRIL 29 & 30
2021
VIRTUAL

Apply to attend by January 8, 2021

March 1, 2021
Resolution Deadline

March 1, 2021
Table Officer nomination bio deadline

Find out more at
pea.org/convention

THE PROFESSIONAL

Editor Jordana Whetter
Copy Editor Leslie Kenny
Cover Image Jeff Topham

Publications Mailing Agreement 40902044
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
Professional Employees Association
505-1207 Douglas Street
Victoria, BC V8W 2E7



KING OF THE BEES

BC's PROVINCIAL APIARIST PROTECTS POLLINATORS FROM THREATS LIKE THE ASIAN GIANT HORNET

WORDS JESSICA WOOLLARD

PHOTOS JEFF TOPHAM

When a Nanaimo beekeeper spotted large wasp-like creatures pestering his honeybee colonies in August 2019, Paul van Westendorp arrived on scene to investigate.

Van Westendorp, BC's provincial apiarist, worked with scientists in Japan to quickly identify the assailants as the Asian giant hornet. As the largest hornet species on the planet, it's an insect that doesn't belong in this part of the world.

With the intruding species identified—and dubbed “murder hornet” by the media—van Westendorp began working at his office and research centre in Abbotsford, part of the Ministry of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Branch. He needed to track the hornets, find their nest and prevent them from producing “mated offspring that could set the stage for subsequent nests in 2020,” he says.

Climactically, van Westendorp explains, the Asian giant hornet (*Vespa mandarinia*), could survive on the West Coast. Its survival would depend on other challenges, such as prey, fauna and competitors. But, he adds, “we believe this particular species could manage to establish itself in BC.”

The Asian giant hornet poses a risk to humans, too, which led the media to bestow upon it its murderous sobriquet. It demonstrates aggressive behaviour when defending its nests, which are most often built on the ground, leading to a few dozen deaths in Japan every year. But, as van Westendorp points out in the hornet's defense, being stung by other insects of the Hymenoptera order—bees, wasps, hornets and ants—can also cause death in certain circumstances.

Species in that order of Hymenoptera—the honeybees and other pollinators van Westendorp has devoted his career to protecting—are severely threatened by the Asian giant hornet. According to the Washington State Department of Agriculture, a small group of Asian giant hornets can kill a honeybee hive in a few hours. If the invasive hornet were to establish itself in BC, honeybee and pollinator colonies would be at serious risk. The detrimental impacts on agriculture and food production would be equally severe.

As soon as the Nanaimo hornets were identified as the Asian giant hornet, van Westendorp worked with the beekeeping community to map sightings and zero in on their focal point. Within 24 hours, they located the nest in a downtown park and eradicated it, along with approximately 200 hornets and their queen.

“This is a success story that is quite extraordinary,” van Westendorp says. “I cannot place enough credit and appreciation onto the Nanaimo beekeepers. It was not only the first confirmed sighting of the Asian giant hornet in North America, but was also, at the time, the only confirmed eradication of a nest in North America.”

Since August 2019, other Asian giant hornets have been spotted in the region—one in the Fraser Valley, several in

Washington state and two possible sightings in the Cowichan Valley.

Prior to these sightings, van Westendorp had been considering retiring after more than 40 years in the field. But, when presented with the unexpected discovery of the Asian giant hornet in Nanaimo, he says, “this was something I could not walk away from.”

Nectar for the soul

Van Westendorp recalls the day 60 years ago when bees and beekeeping entered his purview. It was on a third-grade school trip in his native Holland.

“It was a beautiful, hot summer day,” says van Westendorp. “The teacher brought us to a local beekeeper who had a couple of beehives. He opened up these colonies, and I still remember seeing these hundreds if not thousands of bees walking around in the sunshine. The scent of the wax and the honey captivated me. I still remember it as if it happened yesterday.”

Within a few years, van Westendorp started keeping bees of his own. He immigrated to Canada to attend the University of British Columbia, where he earned a bachelor of sci-



ence degree with a focus in agricultural sciences, and specifically entomology, allowing him to study bees and other insects and their relationship to humans, nature and other organisms.

Frequently, the work of entomologists becomes focused on how to “control and destroy pests and diseases in crops,” explains van Westendorp. “I have always preferred the positive side of things, by promoting the cultivation and support of honeybees and other pollinators.”

After graduating from UBC, van Westendorp took a position as an apiculture research technician at Beaver Lodge, the Agriculture Canada research station near the Peace River in Alberta.

“There are legendary honey crops in the Peace River,” van Westendorp says. “You’re talking one of the best honey producing areas in the world, with harvests of 350 pounds of honey per colony per season. There are not many areas in the world where that can be produced.”

He recalls one particularly strong colony of honeybees that produced 427 pounds of honey in a single season. “We had to measure every pound. It was hard work, but very reward-



ing. These were honeybees that were part of a large-scale breeding program to select stock that performed well.”

Tropical bees—journey to Uganda

After two and a half years at Beaver Lake, van Westendorp accepted a position in Kampala, Uganda, in the mid-1980s, only a few years after the overthrow of the country’s genocidal despot, Idi Amin.





Van Westendorp led an apiculture development program to educate beekeepers on how to improve management techniques for their hives. The program was run by CARE, a humanitarian agency that sponsors international development projects.

He, in turn, learned about beekeeping in the tropics. The honeybees that operate in tropical environments belong to the same species—*Apis mellifera*—as those in North America, he explains. “But the sub-species we dealt with in Africa, *Apis mellifera scutellata*, is totally different in its behaviour and mannerism.”

He notes that the “killer bees” that made their way to the United States in the 1990s are descendants of these East

African bees. Like the Asian giant hornet, they were given their moniker because of their highly defensive behaviour.

Save the bees

After Uganda, van Westendorp became the provincial apiarist of Alberta in 1987. Two years later, he was offered the provincial apiarist position in British Columbia, and he’s been in the role ever since. Likewise, he’s been in the PEA since 1990 and has served as a local rep for much of his career.

As provincial apiarist, van Westendorp oversees statistics and the provincial beekeeper registry, which includes approximately 3,000 beekeepers, most of whom are hobby beekeepers concentrated in the Fraser Valley and southern Vancouver Island.

He runs the laboratory that conducts research and diagnostics related to honeybees and pollinators and manages the province's expansive education program for beekeepers.

In the last decade, van Westendorp has observed an increase in beekeepers and in the level of public support for honeybees and pollinators. This is thanks in part to media coverage about the impact of declining bee populations on agriculture and to "save the bee" campaigns.

When he entered the industry, bees and pollinators were taken for granted, van Westendorp says. "At the time, they were thought to be guaranteed to be here at all times. Now we have learned there's no guarantee at all."

Honeybees are essential to agriculture; they are the most important pollinator of food crops.

Put another way, van Westendorp says, "honeybees particularly, and pollinators in general, are the spark plugs of flowering plants and agriculture. If we don't have the spark plugs, nothing will grow."

He gives the example of blueberries in the Fraser Valley. "Blueberries are worth multiple millions of dollars a year. But we cannot produce these crops if bees are not around. Blueberries, raspberries, apples, pears, cherries. All these flowering crops are dependent on bees."

He adds, "The importance of bees is not a luxury. Deep down we know that without bees we are in trouble."

Pollinator Pop Quiz

Queens of the colonies

Q: What does a worker bee do?

A: Approximately 95 per cent of colonies are made up of female worker bees. They gather nectar, care for the queen bee and her larvae, produce honey and guard the hive, stinging when necessary. Male bees, called drones, make up the other five per cent of the colony. They are short-lived, and their only function is to reproduce with the queen.

Superorganism

Q: How many bees live in a hive?

A: The bees in a hive are called a colony and usually average around 30,000. The population of the colony changes over the course of the year, expanding during the summer and declining in the fall, as food supplies diminish. The colony contracts to survive the winter.

Pollinator perpetrators

Q: Has any invasive species threatened honeybees in BC before the Asian giant hornet?

A: In September 1990, the varroa mite (*Varroa destructor*), arrived in BC. An external parasitic mite, it attacks and feeds on honeybees. Known as one of the most destructive exotic pests in the world, this invader has changed standards of beekeeping in BC, requiring close monitoring of developing bee brood (eggs, larvae and pupae) for signs of the varroa mite.



PROVIDE STRONG SUPPORT FOR UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

THIS OP-ED WAS PUBLISHED IN THE
TIMES COLONIST ON MAY 21, 2020

PHOTO AARON LUTSCH

A commentary by the leaders of the five on-campus unions at the University of Victoria. They are Sheryl Karras, chapter chair of the Professional Employees Association; Lynne Marks, president of the Faculty Association; Greg Melnechuk, president of CUPE Local 4163; Kirk Mercer, president of CUPE Local 951; and Byron Spiers, president of CUPE Local 917.

COVID-19 has been the largest shock to the Canadian economy and society since the Great Depression and the post-secondary sector has been particularly hard hit due to unexpected declines in revenue, stalled research, and increased costs associated with the move to online teaching.

The federal government recently announced much needed financial supports for students, as summer jobs and co-op opportunities have evaporated. However, institutions of higher education also face difficult times as massive declines are expected in international student enrolment — a key source of funding for colleges and universities and a means to subsidize domestic students.

As part of the broader public sector, post-secondary institutions do not qualify for wage subsidies from the federal government. This means that they now face lower revenues and increased costs.

With no new funding being provided by either level of government, colleges and universities face difficult decisions around spending cuts in order to balance their budgets, as required by law. This is the opposite of what is needed in the higher education sector.

Not only will budget cuts, including possible layoffs, undercut B.C.'s economic recovery, but it will also leave post-secondary institutions unprepared for the surge in domestic enrolment that typically occurs during recessions as those who can't find work seek the additional credentials they will need to compete in a dismal job market.

Colleges and universities not only provide education, they also provide social meaning and cohesion in very difficult times.

Having young, otherwise unemployed people in the post-secondary system enables them to remain socially integrated and reduces the risk of a populist backlash in response to the hardships of the pandemic — a backlash which we are already seeing in both Europe and the United States.

Historically, Canadian governments emerging out of major social disruptions such as the Second World War have made substantial investments in higher education as a crucial means to develop a more educated workforce, and thus a stronger economy.

While B.C. has increased its per capita enrolment in higher education over recent decades, it still lags behind Ontario and Quebec.

The current crisis provides an opportunity to invest in the further education sought by British Columbians and in this way build a stronger, more diversified economy that will be less vulnerable to future economic disruptions.





At this juncture, a strong government commitment to colleges and universities would ensure that our post-secondary institutions do not add to already high unemployment levels through potential layoffs.

Instead, it would allow them to play a major role in strengthening B.C.'s health sector, both through research and the training of much-needed health care workers. More generally, a robust post-secondary sector will be crucial to rebuild B.C.'s economy and to provide hope and opportunity for the many young people who have few other options.

We are well aware that there are many demands on government funding at this time.

Given expected near-term increases in domestic enrolments and the gradual resumption of international enrolments, colleges and universities should only need temporary support to get them through this crisis.

This funding could take the form of emergency transfers, government loans, or permission for institutions to borrow for the next few years.

Such support would reduce the pain that workers and students are facing and pay major dividends for the future of all British Columbians.

CELEBRATING OUR STAFF

MARIANNA AZOURI MARKS 20 YEARS WITH THE PEA

WORDS JORDANA WHETTER

PHOTO AARON LUTSCH

Marianna Azouri, the PEA's membership assistant, is celebrating her 20-year anniversary with the PEA this year.

In her first role with the PEA, Marianna worked as a part-time administrative assistant providing support to the Government Licensed Professional and PEA executive committees. At the time, the PEA had an office in Burnaby with four staff and a head office with five staff on Wharf Street, in Victoria, right by Harbour Air.

Marianna remembers her interview like it was yesterday and shares that she was nervous because she had never worked for a union before. But she left the Victoria office feeling really positive and excited.

"I remember walking up the stairs to the Wharf Street office and feeling so nervous but also talking myself into positive thinking. When the executive director at the time showed me around and introduced me to everyone, I became excited, and when I left, I really hoped that I would get the job."

Twenty years later, Marianna is now the longest serving of the PEA's current staff members. Executive Director Scott McCannell says she is the Association's organizational historian, known for her dedication to providing outstanding member services. Melissa Doyle, secretary-treasurer on the PEA executive, echoes Scott's sentiment.

"You can tell how much Marianna cares about our members and their families by the details she remembers about them and the ideas she has for how to improve member services, including our award programs."

When asked how her job has changed, Marianna shares that, although her responsibilities have changed over time, she has continued to stay involved with membership administration and with the awards program. Thankfully, technology has meant that she no longer has to do as much manual labour as 20 years ago. Back then, she used to print off 3,000 personalized envelopes before folding and stuffing the quarterly newsletter by hand and sending it in boxes to the post office.

"We also used to complete multi-part carbonless union-leave forms on this very large typewriter (I'm sure it's in a museum somewhere), and if you messed up, you had to start all over again," she laughs. "Thanks to advances in technology we're doing member applications online. It's like night and day compared to how we did it 20 years ago."



"I was also on the PEA staff bargaining committee with Tony Bute when we negotiated our very first collective agreement with the Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union of Canada," she says. "Since I was still very new, it was exciting to see first-hand how the negotiations took place and to learn about the work of the PEA and the role of our labour relations officer (called staff officers at the time)."

A lot has changed for Marianna personally as well. As the mother of four children, she has always been dedicated to her family, but never more so than when one of her boys was diagnosed with leukemia.

"I had been on maternity leave for about a month when our son was diagnosed," Marianna shares. "On a two-day notice we moved our whole family to Ronald McDonald House, which is next to BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver. For the first two months we managed the fear and emotional rollercoaster purely on adrenaline and lack of sleep."

It's been two years since her son received any treatment, and he is doing well. His diagnosis taught Marianna to reprioritize and find perspective on what is meaningful in life.

"Each day is a gift, and we have the opportunity to be our best selves by trying to do better every day. I'm trying in both my personal and professional life to do just that."

It's this resilience that makes Marianna such an amazing co-worker. Her favourite part of the job has always been helping members and maintaining the PEA's database—something she prides herself on.

"I'm proud of where I work and who I work with. I have cultivated some great relationships with staff and PEA members," she says. "I do hope to be here for another 20 years—unless I win the lottery."

2020 SCHOLARSHIP AND BURSARY WINNERS

For 27 years the PEA has been giving scholarships and bursaries to PEA members and their families. This year, the PEA Awards Committee was pleased to give ten scholarships to PEA members and their relatives who are profiled here.

In addition, nine bursaries were awarded to the following members: Jin Gan, Joshua Dedora, Kristina Stewart, Ryan Emberley, Lauren Petersen, Nicole Boulet, Megan Nicholls, Cecilia Rose, and Clinton Thomas.

Applications for the 2021 scholarship and bursary awards will reopen in the spring. For more details visit www.pea.org/bursaries



"This scholarship will help me maintain my studies and complete my practicum as I work towards my goal of becoming a registered clinical counsellor through City University of Seattle."

Miranda Harvey

"I currently attend the University of Northern British Columbia and I am pursuing a career in dentistry. This scholarship will enable me to continue my focus on my studies."

Alexia Bankowski

"My future education and career goals include graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering, working towards becoming a professional engineer, and being able to work around the world and help make other less fortunate countries more efficient."

Pablo Villegas

"I have recently been accepted to Simon Fraser University's School of Communication and this scholarship will allow me to achieve my education goals."

Gareth Mount



"This year I was accepted to Canisius College in Buffalo, New York, where I will play division one college lacrosse, which has been my long time dream."

Keegan Kozack



"This fall I began my formal education at Camosun College as a university transfer student. I am taking the pre-requisite course needed for entrance into the dental hygiene program, which has been my longtime goal."

Bruna Hutchinson





"As a fourth-year biology student attending the University of British Columbia Okanagan this scholarship will help me continue to focus my academic efforts on ecology and conservation."

Sophia Reimer



"As a fourth-year nursing student at University of British Columbia Okanagan, I plan on pursuing further education within the medical field through the nurse practitioner program or medical school."

Kal Taye

"I am a second-year student in the software engineering program at Florida Gulf Coast University. My goal post-graduation is to create and lead a software design company that focuses on providing technical assistance to small businesses."

Emily Susan McCue

"This scholarship will help pay for some of the costs for attending Okanagan College to become an aircraft maintenance technician."

Kohl Chambers



PEA UPDATES

OPERATIONS UPDATE

The PEA office in Victoria remains closed and a future reopening in 2021 will be assessed based on the status of the pandemic. All services continue to be provided remotely and virtually where possible.

We wish Labour Relations Officer Sam Montgomery all the best on her 2021 paternity leave.

EXECUTIVE CHANGES

We would like to extend a warm welcome to Ashley Machum as the new ORL representative to the PEA Executive. Thank you also to departing executive members James Laitinen (ORL) and Sam Davis (GLP) for their contributions and service.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Executive spent two days in virtual strategic planning in October. The 2021/2022 PEA strategic plan will be finalized and confirmed in 2021 and then made available to members.

MEMBER SURVEY

Thank you to the 1,100 members who participated in our annual member survey, which was conducted by Stratcom. The results will be used in the PEA's strategic planning and chapter communications planning processes. Results of the survey will be available in the next edition of this magazine.

BUDGET 2021

The next budget review will be in January 2021. The finalized budget for 2021 will be presented to members in the spring along with the annual financial report from 2020.

CONGRATULATIONS

We wish Sam Davis all the best with his retirement from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources & Rural Development this past November. Sam has given a lot in his roles as chapter chair for the GLP for the past four years and as a longtime local rep and member of the PEA Executive, and in his work as the Indigenous Relations Liaison, BC Timber Sales for the Cariboo-Chilcotin.

If you would like to acknowledge a retiring PEA member, please email jwhetter@pea.org

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A collection of stylized, hand-drawn snowflakes in a dark blue color, hanging from thin vertical lines at the top of the page. The snowflakes vary in size and complexity, with some having multiple points and intricate internal patterns.

*Wishing you a very
happy and healthy
holiday season*

P|E|A

BC's Union for Professionals

PUBLICATIONS MAILING AGREEMENT 40902044