

B.C. PAGE

SPRING 1979

Tim Roark, Editor

R.L. 70



CONGRATULATIONS
to **Kelvin Higo** on his recent
appointment as Senior Public
Health Inspector for the
Richmond Health Department



CONGRATULATIONS

Fred Alcock, (right), Chief Public Health Inspector at Kelowna was presented with a fly fishing rod & tackle Thursday in recognition of his 30 years of service in the public health field. Making the presentation was Tim Roark President of the BC Branch of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors. A number of guests were on hand at the special evening to recognize the achievements of Mr. Alcock, who retires this year after serving as Chief Inspector for the South Okanagan Health Unit since 1966 and had been with the unit since 1948.

Courier Photo



Nick Potter, PHI checks the level of gravel above a septic line on property. CONT'D ON PAGE 2

THE INSPECTOR

Nick Potter sees it all

Nick Potter sees the worst of everything. He sees the rotted and unfit food in the back of a restaurant. He sees the larvae and insects that gather inside of food packages. And, he sees the sewer and sludge oozing its way over the front lawn of a private home.

The list is long for what Nick, one of the local health inspectors, tends to in a day. While complaints or "problem" areas take up the smallest portion of his time, they still are a regular occurrence.

His job is to try to prevent these things from happening in the future, thus ensuring the public safety. While it's nearly impossible to keep tabs on everyone all the time, Potter says that the Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadow areas are "under control." On one time isolated cases, depending on the severity, a warning is usually issued to the place of business. For repeat offenders charges can be laid under the Health Act.

While these regular visits to all the various markets, restaurants and other food outlet spots may seem unnecessary, they are all designed to protect the consumer. So when you purchase and consume food from a public place you have the peace of mind to know that the people preparing it have been checked in their procedures. Potter's job is to ensure the food is being handled the right way, stored the right way, and prepared the proper way for safe, human consumption. Since restaurants and super markets are out to win their customers back and not poison them the usual reason for violations is ignorance on the part of these handling the food.

To ensure that operators have cleaned up an act he originally found in violation, Potter must resort to unannounced visits.

A restaurant is warned of improper storage of chickens which will cause them to spoil. They were sitting in room temperature, an absolute no-no, says Potter who is continually reading and briefing himself up on the customs of a very involved profession.

On the Wednesday he finds the business at fault. He tells them to correct it and the following Monday he comes back to check.

He relates that "on occasion" some businesses may feel that the inspector "won't be back for a long time now", so returns again shortly afterwards without notice.

It sounds as though he is pest, but Nick stresses that he is only doing it for the safety of the

public and the preservation of acceptable conduct in the businesses — which — ultimately brings the customer back. Most of them realize this, Potter says.

So, while he does carry the power to lay charges — something he would prefer to avoid "because P.R. (public relations) is a big thing" — Potter is actually on both sides of the fence. He's enforcing the regulations for the benefit of everyone — the producer and the consumer.

But, like we mentioned earlier, this is only a small portion of the job description. The lengthy list, in general terms because "something new is always cropping up", includes disease vectors, environmental pollution, standards in housing and public accommodation, occupational health and safety industrial hazards, environmental planning, health education and enforcement, water supplies and waste disposal and public recreational facilities. Since Potter is one of just two public health inspectors for this area, it's obvious and spare time is at a premium.

"We're always busy", he says, from his office desk in the Central Fraser Valley Health Unit. While he admits the job is "stressful" at times he has no second thoughts about his decision six years ago to become an inspector.

Living in Prince George at the time, Potter recalls that then, like now "I was very much aware and concerned about the environment . . . and I thought I could do something."

He went through two years of training at the British Columbia Institute of Technology and returned to the north where he began his work for a three-year session before arriving in this area.

Potter allows "it's a very exciting profession."

Not because he plans it that way, though. Routine days are out of the question, he says. "Every single day is different."

The only thing he knows is that when he arrives first thing in the morning he'll be answering complaints and inquiries from the general public. This goes on from his 8:30 a.m. starting date until 10 a.m.

From then he follows through on the complaints and then often does what takes up more than 50 percent of his time — the inspection of private sewage disposals. While this may appear routine, a sewage inspection is always different, unpredictable and usually messy.

The day we visited Nick there wasn't one of these on his

schedule, but he related the partial procedure on what would be a typical sewage disposal inspection. He checks the soil to ensure that it is pourous, checks to see the proper materials are being used, checks to see the septic tank is level, and checks to see the gravel is of the correct depth. Those who don't pass the test are usually trying to cut costs, says Potter but in the end "they wouldn't save any money anyways". He pointed out that what would happen if he didn't correct an uneven septic tank or one with "too much gravel piled on top" there'd be sewer waste seeping onto someone's backyard or a sewer system would "get clogged up due to lack of air."

On a shelf inside Nick's office is an unusual collection of jars and bottles that prompted a visitor to question their purpose.

Potter had collected over the past few months. Some unhealthy evidence that would turn any soft stomach.

One is a bottle of ketchup. Looked innocent enough. Then Nick unscrewed the top of the full bottle to reveal an insect larvae had formed. While pointing out that the store in question has been warned, he says that he's going to let the larvae "grow up so I can see what it is." The assortment of jars all contain similar little creatures that would make anyone itchy.

A grained cereal with a pile of sawtooth grain beetles. Bits of crackers with some other tiny bug roaming around.

Both of these came about, says Nick, in private homes where the bugs are quite common. The best remedy, says Potter, is to cover up all grain foods in airtight containers.

As he traversed a government car through Haney towards a business in Hammond, a pair of mud-caked, working boots were noticed resting on the floor. Potter who was equipped in a casual suit without the jacket along with wallabies explained that "we've always got to look presentable to the public." So, when he's hopping from the water and mud of a backyard to the carpeted floor of a restaurant he finds himself having to adjust.

And, naturally, the job of finding things to be cleaned up is a messy one. He tells us of one instance where a building inspector with the municipality wouldn't enter the basement of a home because the stench was so bad. Nick went into that home, just like every other one that has appeared on his list.

What's the secret? he was asked.

"You learn not to breathe."



CONGRATULATIONS

are extended to **Don Ife** formerly a Lieutenant Commander with the Canadian Armed Forces who earlier this year was promoted to **Senior Public Health Inspector** with the Capital Regional District in Victoria.

1979 DUES ARE NOW PAYABLE

Please forward to:

Dave Nelson, Treasurer

BC Branch, CIPHI

224 James Road

Port Moody, BC

V3H 2S4

BULLETIN

The BC Ministry of Health is currently under reorganization and many major changes are expected within the Ministry.

We are informed that effective March 1st, 1979 Dr. K.I.G. Benson will become the M.H.O. for the Upper Island Health Unit in Courtenay.

It has also been learned that Dr. G.H. Bonham will be leaving his position as Chief Medical Health Officer with the City of Vancouver in the new year to take on a new position as Senior Assistant Deputy Minister of Health with the Province in Victoria effective March 1st, 1979.

B.C. EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A number of vacancies are presently available or will be opening shortly for PHIs within the BC Ministry of Health and City of Vancouver Health Dept. Interested PHIs should contact:

Mr. A. Hindley, Senior Consultant,
Division of Public Health Inspection
B.C. Ministry of Health, Victoria
Phone 387-1484

&

Mr. D. Morgan, Director
Division of Public Health Inspection
Vancouver City Health Department
Phone: 736-2033

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION WAS JUST PASSED AT THE 23rd ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE BC FEDERATION IN VANCOUVER

WHEREAS the Pollution Control Branch of the Provincial Government has failed to licence Cominco Ltd. to require the Company to report its pollution of the Columbia River; and

WHEREAS the Pollution Control Branch has not been effective in controlling the pollution of the Columbia and other rivers and bodies of water in our province; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this convention call on the government to establish a new pollution control authority with the power to prosecute polluters:

- (a) by imposing stringent enforcement mechanisms on executives of corporations who pollute, and
- (b) by imposing ongoing financial penalties on corporations which exceed any savings which would result from continuation of such pollution; and, finally,
- (c) by requiring that corporations make every reasonable effort to control pollution in all forms.

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If you have any news or photos of interest please forward them to KALVIN HIGO, c/o Richmond Health Dept., 6911 No.3 Road, Richmond, BC,V6Y 2C1

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