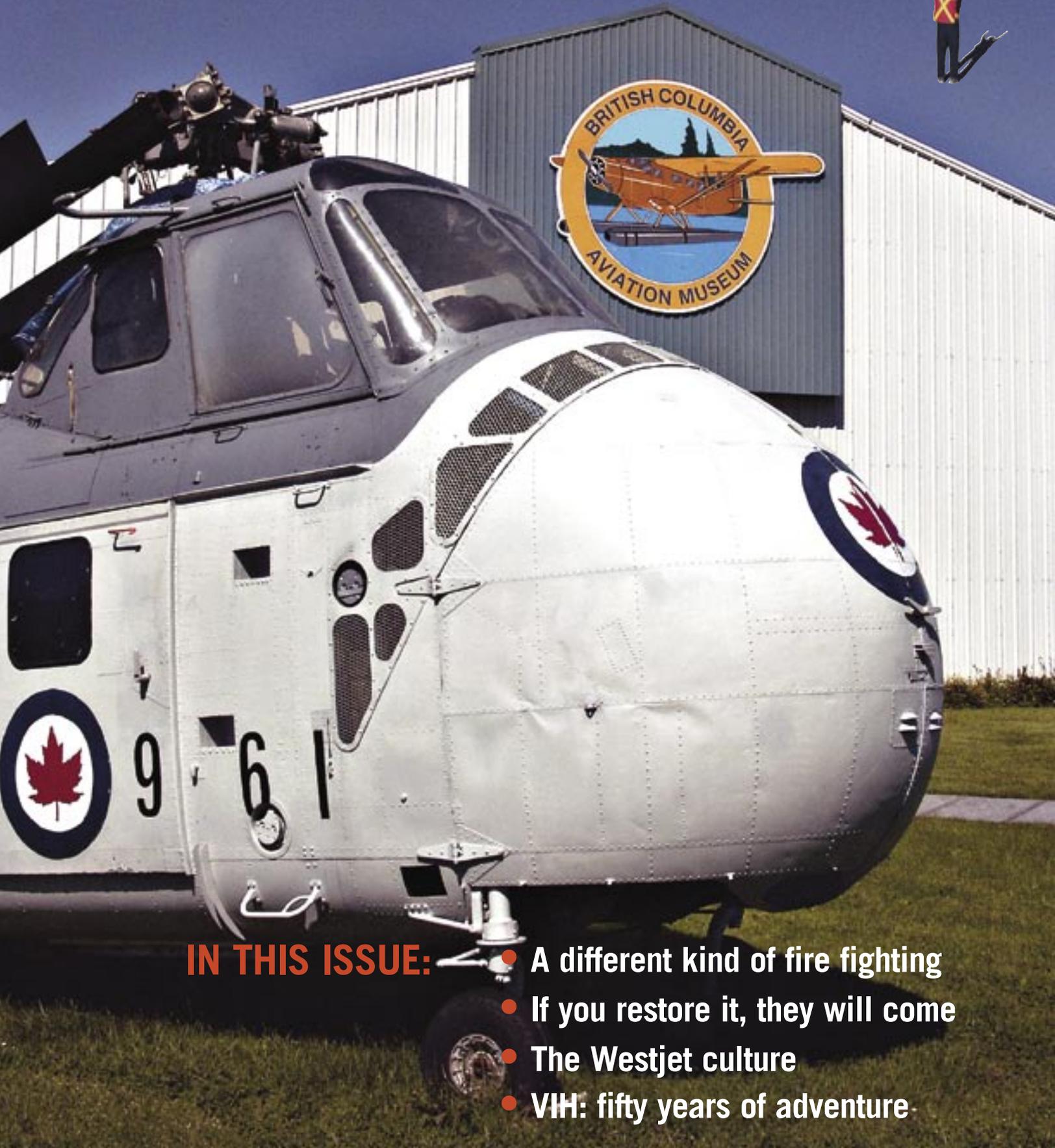




VOL. 2, NO. 1 — SPRING 2005

On Approach

NEWSLETTER OF THE VICTORIA AIRPORT AUTHORITY



IN THIS ISSUE:

- A different kind of fire fighting
- If you restore it, they will come
- The Westjet culture
- VH: fifty years of adventure

Rent going down

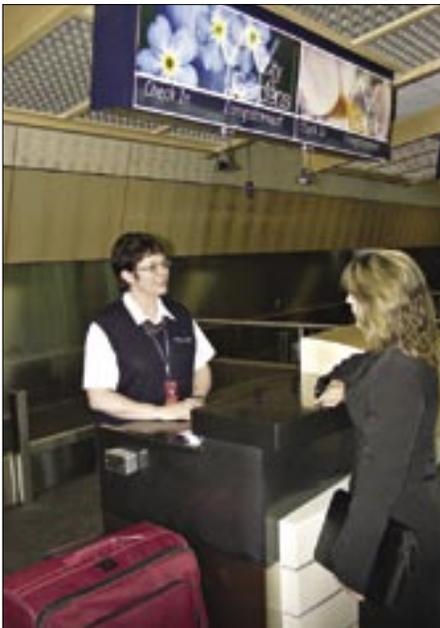
The VAA's long standing contention that its annual rent is out of line with that paid by similar sized airports across the country has brought results. On May 9, the Minister of Transport announced that a new equitable rent formula will be phased in between now and 2010.

"This is good news for our community, and the passengers who use our airport," said VAA Chair Linda Petch. "This has been a long standing and difficult problem, and we appreciate the efforts of Minister Lapierre, Minister Emerson, Transport Canada officials, and all the community leaders in Victoria who helped with this resolution. We are encouraged that Transport Canada now has a simple rent formula that will be phased in for all airports over the next four years. When the rent formula is fully imple-

mented, Victoria will be treated fairly."

"The good news is that the rent's going down," stated Richard Paquette, CEO of the Victoria International Airport. "This was achieved with a lot of help from a lot of people in this community." Paquette said that the board is committed to pass the savings on to users of the airport. "It could be to passengers directly or to airlines. We haven't dealt with that yet. It's going to be some time before we see any real savings."

Under the new formula the rent will be reduced each year for five years, beginning with \$50,000 in 2006. By 2010 the annual rent paid by the Victoria Airport will be \$400,000, instead of the \$1,800,000 required under the old formula.



Savings realized by the new rent formula will be passed on to users of the airport.

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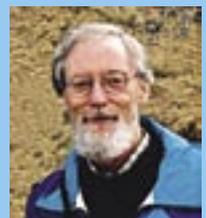
Welcome to the Spring 2005 issue of On Approach.

In this issue, we will be introducing you to a number of interesting people in the airport community. You've seen their big yellow crash trucks on the runways; now you can find out how airport firefighters spend their days. Ever wondered about the Westjet culture? I asked Karen Tuttle, manager of the local office, what makes WestJet different. She told me everything, and now I'm passing it all on to you. Elsewhere on these pages, you'll read about the BC Aviation Museum, and the fascinating people who spend time there. By the way, the museum is holding an open house on August 6, so be sure to mark that date on your calendar.

People in aviation and the companies they build are always fascinating. Based right here at the Victoria International Airport, we have Vancouver Island Helicopters, the largest privately owned helicopter charter company in Canada. Starting with a single Bell 47 and one pilot in April 1955, VIH has been in business for half a century. To help celebrate their fiftieth anniversary, we've included a brief history of the company in this issue.

Happy reading,
and safe flying,

Phil Jensen,
editor





A different kind of firefighting

Fire service crash trucks can shoot fire retardant foam a distance of 160 feet.

As an airport watcher, you've probably caught occasional glimpses of a big yellow truck rumbling down the runways. There are three of them at YYJ, but you'd have a hard time telling one from the other. Somewhat reminiscent of military combat vehicles, they are fighting machines of another kind. The 575 hp E-ONE Titan crash trucks are designed to combat aircraft related fires, and they are the special tools of the Victoria Airport Fire Service.

Located in the West Camp, the Fire Service is tucked into a quiet corner adjacent to the 443 Maritime Helicopter Squadron. From that location they can respond expeditiously to emergencies anywhere at the airport. "We have a mandate to leave the fire hall in 30 seconds, and be anywhere on the airport in three minutes," Captain Rick Robertson says. "We can do it in two minutes. We can reach the midpoint of the farthest runway in less than a minute and a half."

It's a different kind of work from the structural firefight-

ing we associate with regular municipal fire departments. Crash trucks are designed so that a single firefighter can direct a 160 foot stream of foam concentrate at a burning aircraft, and extinguish the blaze without ever leaving the driver's seat.

Unlike what you've seen in movies, the fire service never spreads foam on the runway prior to a bad landing. "These trucks are capable of dumping their load in two minutes," Rick says. "To foam a runway, we'd have to fill the truck ten times. We wait until the aircraft comes to a stop. If there's a fire, we'll deal with it.

The department has a long and varied list of activities, including responding to aircraft incidents, medical calls, wildlife control and "stand by" calls. In 2004, they responded to more than 500 separate incidents. The service can respond to off site incidents, such as fuel spills at service stations, or multi-vehicle crashes where fuel spills are a factor. Other responsibilities include driver testing and radio testing for

people who operate vehicles on the runways. This includes airport maintenance staff, security staff, aircraft fuelers, and members of the fire service itself. As Rick lists off the varied expectations of the fire service, a "bird strike" call comes in over the radio. A small plane was hit just after takeoff, and



Marc Bourassa, fire fighter; Rick Robertson, Captain; Jim Wood, firefighter.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

If you restore it, they will come



The BC Aviation Museum on Norseman Road is a treasure trove of aviation history. It contains lovingly restored aircraft such as a Bristol Bolingbroke, an Noorduyn Norseman, and an Avro Anson Mark II. But the treasure consists of much more than airplanes.

The museum attracts a variety of volunteers, some of them historical figures in their own right. Stanley James (Chick) Henderson was a flight engineer with the RAF during World War II, and earned a Distinguished Flying medal for his participation in an incredible 53 bombing operations. A naturally modest man, he's not inclined to reveal that he was a member of the legendary Dambusters Squadron, nor that he was involved in the sinking of the *Turpitz*, sister ship to the *Bismark*. Clearly, he is one of the museum's treasures.

Chick joined the museum 13 years ago, bringing his engineering skills to the restoration of historic aircraft. "That Bolingbroke was pretty much

a wreck," he says. "The next one was the Norseman. We worked on that Norseman for eight or ten years." Now 83, he's reduced his volunteer time to a few days a week. But he isn't ready to give it up completely. "You can't spend all your time just mucking about in the garden and going to lunch," Chick says.

Vern Turley is another museum treasure. He and his wife arrived from Montreal in 1992, and a year later he got involved with restoration of the Avro Anson. "It was great joining this outfit after I got here," he says. Re-building old airplanes isn't as big as a stretch as it might seem for a retired chartered accountant. Vern was a pilot in the air force during the Second World War.

"I flew mostly Ansons. I was stuck in Training Command ... much to my chagrin." Vern was still anticipating an overseas assignment, when the Americans dropped the bomb on Japan. "We were back on 'Civi Street' almost overnight," he says. "It was quite a shock."

With 15,000 pilots suddenly out of work, competition for jobs was fierce. Realizing that

there was a big demand for business skills in the post war era, Vern went back to school and became an accountant. "But I've always had an interest in working with my hands. So it was great joining this outfit, when I got out here."

With the Anson finished, he's working on a Lincoln Sport, a homebuilt aircraft popular during the twenties and thirties. With only drawings in a magazine as a guide, the job will be a different kind of challenge.

Jacqueline Frampton is the first woman to become actively involved in the organization. With a strong background in administration and marketing, she fits well into the roles of media relations and artifact management. "We're always looking for volunteers," she says. "Not only ground crew and maintenance types, but administrators, library workers,



Chick, Jacqueline, Vern.



Part of the Aviation Museum collection.

fund raisers, media people. Each of us brings our own background.”

During nine years at the museum, she’s noticed an interesting pattern. Whenever a new project begins, people interested in the particular aircraft being restored just start showing up. “The T33, the Anson, the Harvard: people show up and the group evolves,” she says. “When it takes as long as

it does to complete an aircraft the group evolves further. Some will work through to the end, while others drop out along the way. Sometimes the fellows don’t want to even finish an airplane. After all those years ... to have completed it, and it’s all over ...”

It will be interesting to see who the latest acquisition attracts. CF-THG, an old Vickers Viscount 757, was barged over from Vancouver in April. “We’re hoping to have a pad built for the Viscount and have it in place by Open House,” Jacqueline says. “People who want to work on it will just show up.”

The Museum Open House will take place on August 6 this year. The BCAM has a website at www.bcam.net.



This Vickers Viscount is the Aviation Museum’s most recent acquisition.

Firefighting

from page 3

the pilot was returning to the airport to check for damage. Firefighter Jim Wood goes out

to investigate, and returns a few minutes later with a report. An eagle was chasing two ducks, when they flew across the aircraft’s flight path. Unfortunately for the eagle, it was just far enough behind the ducks that it

hit the aircraft and died on impact. As it turned out, neither the ducks nor the plane suffered any damage. The three firefighters shake their heads at the strangeness of it all. “Never a dull moment,” someone mutters.



Firefighter Marc Bourassa (inset) stands by as a 433 Squadron Sea King is refueled.

The WestJet Culture



WestJet staffers

Wendy Hladun (left), Louise Hicking, Dina Ventura, Ali Wanless, Kelly Vincent, Jamey Harbottle, Jeff Shepard, and Karen Tuttle.

(Above) Captain Greg Hunter and Customer Service Associate Wendy Hladun wave from the cockpit.

WestJet people are passionate about their jobs. "This is the best company that anybody could ever work for," says Karen Tuttle, Victoria branch manager. With eight outgoing flights a day at YYJ, the airline has a strong local presence, and the pattern is repeated across the country. It all started less than ten years ago.

In 1996, four Calgary entrepreneurs, led by Clive Beddoe, saw an opportunity for a low fare carrier providing service to strategic points in the west. Using similar carriers in the US as a model, they launched the new passenger service with three Boeing 737-200s, providing passenger service to five cities, and a staff of 220 employees. Today WestJet operates 57 aircraft with flights to 24 Canadian and nine US cities, and a charter service to 23 destinations. By the end of June 2005, Charlottetown and San Diego will be added to the list. The company provides jobs for 4,800 people, 30 of them in greater Victoria.



"We get a lot of resumes through here," Karen says. "We've had 400 in the past three months. And those are just the people who make it through the filter." She explains that applicants are screened for some experience and computer skills. But those who make it through the filtering process are

selected on another basis. "We hire for personality and train for skills." It also seems that age is not a factor. Locally, the employee age ranges from the early twenties to almost sixty, but Karen isn't saying where she fits in on the scale. "They have an average of five years with the company," she says. "And when they leave here, they leave to do something else with WestJet: some to jobs as flight attendants, and others to higher level positions elsewhere."

One strategy the airline uses to keep costs down is specialization in one type of aircraft, the Boeing 737. But they do still move with the times. The comfortable and classy 136 passenger 700 series aircraft are being phased in, and the 125 passenger 200 series will all be gone by the end of this year. Meanwhile, the first of the 166 passenger 800 series are starting to

appear under WestJet colours. Another recent innovation on WestJet planes is the bent up wing tips. The technicians say the winglets increase performance, allowing the pilot to use lower thrust settings. This saves fuel, extends engine life, and decreases overall maintenance costs. A benefit not mentioned in the literature is that winglets look so darn sexy.

As Karen talks about WestJet, it's clear that she believes there is something very unique about her employer. Part of it, she says, is that we're all shareholders. "And we have lots of fun with our guests. It's what you would do with your own



Karen Tuttle (left) and Canwest baggage handlers Ryan Michno, Arpad Szatory, Nick Bruce, Kris Reaville, Jeff Souza

family. It's part of our culture. And even though this group has grown so much in nine years, we haven't lost the small company feel. We take our jobs seriously, but not ourselves. Clive [Beddoe] is like that, and it's like that from the top down."

Vancouver Island Helicopters: fifty years of adventure



A Kamov engaged in heli-logging.

Phil Jensen photo

April 2005 marks half a century of operation for Vancouver Island Helicopters. The largest privately held company of its kind in Canada, VIH opened for business in April, 1955 with one Bell 47 helicopter. The next month, with a scant twenty-five hours flying time to his credit, Ted Henson started the company's first season of work at Homathko River in north-western British Columbia.

As business expanded, the company founder was forced more and more into the role of management, but he continued to fill in as a pilot when needed. This is how he came to be back at Homathko River in the fall of 1957. On October 17, Ted climbed into the Bell 47 G (CF-IDX) for a five minute flight along Tatlayoko Lake. That was the last anyone ever saw of him. Witnesses report hearing a "thud" a few minutes after he left camp, but it was never determined what caused the crash. Neither his remains

nor the helicopter were ever recovered.

It started as little more than a dream a few years before. Ted had limited flying experience, no helicopter license and almost no money. Then he met Bill Boeing Jr., a Seattle based Bell dealer, and son of the founder of Boeing Aircraft. They formed a partnership and Vancouver Island Helicopters became a reality.

Ken Norie, current owner and president of VIH, sheds light on the partnership agreement. "It looks like what happened is that, in order to acquire a helicopter, Ted Henson made a deal for \$12,000 cash and 46 percent of the company." Boeing's contribution was \$18,000, plus flying lessons for his partner.

During the years following Ted's death, his wife, Lynn, carried on running the business. Then she met Alf Stringer, a founder of Okanagan Helicopters,

and they married a few years later. In 1963 Alf took over as president at VIH, a position he held until 1985. During those years, VIH helicopters became a familiar sight in the skies of western Canada. Then came heli-logging, and the beginning of a phenomenal period of growth.

The story of how the Kamov helicopter came to be used in logging is deeply rooted in Ken Norie's past. He recalls that his dad, Frank, was a logger, and they would fly in and out of logging camps during his growing years. "I was keen on flying pretty much from the time I was born," Ken says. "As soon as my dad had a helicopter I was always bugging him to put the duals in and teach me how to fly it ... before I officially started flying lessons, I could fly." Ken earned a fixed wing license on his sixteenth birthday, and a commercial license with helicopter endorsement the day he turned eighteen. A week later, on July 15, 1973, he started working for Vancouver Island Helicopters.

It was the late eighties when VIH started heli-logging with a Sikorsky S61, the civilian version of the Sea King. Ken was operations manager by this time,



Phil Jensen photo

Ken Norie, VIH Aviation Group president and CEO.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



An unusual aircraft visiting the airport in late April caused more than one driver to pull over for a closer look. When not cruising the skies above Sidney and environs, the "Bell Blimp" was tethered to a tall pole near Mills Road at the north side of the airport.

Crew Chief Ben Archer explains that the ship is owned by the Lightship Group, out of

Orlando, Florida. He says there are many practical applications for the Lightships, but advertising is the most popular usage. In this case, Bell hired the blimp for a six month period to promote their business in western Canada. It arrived here under its own power from a gig in Los Angeles. The flight consisted of several hops of 500 miles a day.

Lightship facts:

- The craft is powered by two Lycoming aircraft engines, and average cruising speed is 44 knots. Maximum ceiling is 10,000 feet, and the ship can stay aloft for 24 hours.
- Manufactured by the American Blimp Corporation, this model is the A 150. The ship is 28 feet high by 118 feet long, and it can accommodate a logo of 28 feet by 32 feet. There's seating for six passengers, plus the aircrew.

VIH from page 7

and responsible for the logging operation. However, after two or three years, the company directors decided logging didn't fit well with other aspects of the company's activities and they pulled the plug.

"I still had the belief that it was a viable business," Ken recalls. "We just needed the right people, and the right aircraft and the right mix of customers to make it work." So with a \$20,000 loan from his dad, who owned some shares in the company, Ken started a brand new company - VIH Logging. All he needed now was a suitable aircraft.

By lucky coincidence, the Kamov Helicopter company sent some of their people to a convention that Ken attended in 1991. It seemed to him that the Kamov would make a good fit for heli-logging, so he began the process of importing a Russian helicopter into Canada. The first Kamov arrived that summer. They flew the foreign machine under a series of temporary permits for the

next year and a half, when they were forced to park it until a certification program was completed. By then VIH Logging was established enough that they were able to purchase two S61s and continue logging. But it would take until 1997 to get the Russian helicopter certified for Canadian use.*

Company shares had changed hands several times over the years, and in the late 1990s Ken Norie became sole owner of VIH, acquiring all the shares through the entity of VIH Logging. Then at the end of 2000, Northern Mountain Helicopters, the second largest helicopter charter company in Canada, went into receivership.

Ken thought it would be a good idea to take over the tangible assets of the financially strapped company and they made the deal just before Christmas, doubling the size of the VIH fleet in two days. Along with the extra equipment, they took over some of the operations, including the heli-skiing at Blue River, the Prince George base, the Fort St. John base, and the Fort Liard base.

During this period, the company had continued expanding on domestic and international fronts, taking on jobs in the Sudan, China, Taiwan, South America, and other locations. And in 2003, they acquired Cougar Helicopters, a major player on the east coast, bringing them into the world of off-shore oil.

Today, the VIH Aviation Group consists of VIH Logging, Vancouver Island Helicopters, Cougar Helicopters, Western Airways, and VIH Aerospace. The large and diverse client base brings important financial stability to the volatile helicopter charter business, but how much growth is really needed? "That's a tough question," Ken Norie responds. "The way I view it: if an opportunity looks good, we should assess it. It's really finding the mix of business that works for us."

*The complete story of how the Kamov came to Canada, and other events mentioned in this article, will be told in Phil Jensen's upcoming book, *The Kamov Gamble: a history of Vancouver Island Helicopters*.

