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One thing about airports is that they are true gateways to the community. Those in larger centres often have several terminals serving commercial traffic. At YYJ, we have the one commercial terminal, plus two lesser known arrival and departure points. Visitors to the area, travelling on private aircraft, arrive at the Fixed Base Operation (YYJ/FBO) in the East Camp. Visitors of distinction, such as royalty and high government officials, arrive and depart from 443 Maritime Helicopter Squadron in the West Camp. These are highly secure events, attended by dignitaries and members of the press. We’ve enjoyed three of these special events during 2009. Remember them with us in the article, Distinguished Visitors: Royalty and Fire.

Airport security can be aggravating and even intimidating, but it’s a well-established fact-of-life in the 21st century. Manager of Screening Operations Malcolm Brailsford remarks that no one is exempt from regulations. “I’m the manager of security, and I’m subject to screening,” he says. To find out more about security requirements and methods, see Airport Security: the Human Side.

How do you sum up a career? We tried to do just that in an interview with Danita Ouellette, one of the last employees from pre-computer, pre-airport authority days. It is a bitter sweet look at a 30 year career that demanded the best she had to give. “That airport is like my child,” she says. “Now it’s time to let it go.” To find out more about what motivated Danita over the years, be sure to read Airplanes and Ice Cream.

Happy flying,

Phil Jensen, editor, On Approach
Airport News

McTavish Interchange Update

The Government of Canada ($10.5 million), the Province of British Columbia ($10.5 million) and the Victoria Airport Authority ($3 million) are all funding partners for the $24 million Highway 17 / McTavish Road Interchange to improve road safety and transportation efficiency for local residents, visitors and motorists travelling along Highway 17. Construction started November 30, 2009 and is scheduled for completion March 31, 2011.

Victoria Airport Authority supports the community

VAA has given funding of $5,000 to the Greater Victoria Development Agency for the purpose of promoting Greater Victoria as a place to invest and do business.

Sasha Angus, Economic Development Officer with the GVDA said, “The Victoria Airport Authority is a tremendous partner in promoting Greater Victoria. Their efforts ... are helping to drive both tourism and technology in the region. With their support, the GVDA will continue to ensure that our region remains a vibrant place to live, work and invest.”

“The GVDA makes a significant impact in our community by helping to attract investment and positive economic activity,” said Christine Stoneman, VAA Chair. “The Airport Authority was pleased to make this financial contribution and will continue to support the many businesses in our region through effective transportation options and key partnerships.”

First Nations and the VAA

The Victoria Airport Authority has donated $5,000 to the Tsawout First Nation to assist in the rebuilding of their longhouse, destroyed by fire July 17, 2009. Tsawout Chief Allan Claxton accepted the donation in a meeting with VAA President and CEO, Richard Paquette.

Runway Extension Project Update

The Victoria Airport Authority continues to discuss with the Province and the Federal Government to be partners in construction of the extension of Victoria International Airport’s main runway. The extension will permit non-stop flights to Europe, and will offer the community significant economic stimulus in terms of tourism, jobs and tax revenue for governments.

New Flights

WestJet is now providing scheduled direct flights to Honolulu. This is the first scheduled flight between Victoria and Honolulu since 2006. They are also offering direct service to Puerto Vallarta and Cancun, Mexico. WestJet continues to fly non-stop from Victoria to Las Vegas.

Air Transat is offering charter flights to the same Mexico destinations, with CanJet providing aircraft and crews.
Airplanes and Ice Cream

Danita Ouellette remembers her childhood in Richmond as a happy time. Danita’s siblings were much older, so she grew up as an only child. “I was an aunt by the time I was four years old,” she remarks. One of her favourite childhood memories involves airplanes. Ice cream is part of it too. “We’d go to the South Terminal at the Vancouver Airport. It was the main terminal there in the ‘60s, and they sold the best soft ice cream in the world.” That tradition of going to the airport for ice cream and airplane watching created a mental association that may have played a role in Danita’s adult life. At the very least, airports have always made her feel good.

This year Danita retired from her long term position as Manager Corporate Services at Victoria International Airport. “If anybody asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, that wasn’t it,” she says. “I wanted to be a flight attendant. But I was too short. Most of the time at the airport, I had my head down at my desk. It was the non-romantic, non-sexy, most disinteresting part of the airport.”

Danita had intended to continue in her job for another two years. But when her husband, Paul, retired at the end of July, a new vision began to emerge. She’d been at YYJ for 25 years and felt it was time to move in another direction. But there’s no denying that it’s a bitter sweet parting. “That airport is like my child,” she says. “I’ve watched it grow for so many years. Now it’s time to let it go.”

Actually, Danita’s airport career started before she came to work in Victoria. It was 1978. She was living in Sandspit in the Queen Charlottes, married to a logger and raising a young family. The clerk at the airport became ill, and they hired her to fill in on a temporary basis. The clerk passed away, and she replaced him. Then the airport manager became ill, and Danita started doing his job as well, jumping on a treadmill that wouldn’t stop for 30 years.

In November 1984, she took a temporary job at the Victoria airport. In those days there was no Airport Authority, so her employer was Transport Canada. She remembers finding the new situation intimidating. But she was soon promoted to the position of Administration Supervisor, so she must have made a good impression. Her job title would change many times over the years, but it always reflected that she was someone who could be depended on.

“I started the new job on Victoria Day in ‘85. The first expansion was underway. We changed from the 1964 version of the building to the 85/86 version of the building. Prior to that, you collected your baggage outside. People lined up outside to check in for the 747 Wardair flights to Hawaii. The terminal was chock-a-block full. We had no computers. We recorded everything on ledger sheets. Month end reports took all night.”

The treadmill had gained speed. From where Danita stood, it was looking more like a rat race. She lived in Ladner at one point in the ‘80s, and commuted daily from Vancouver to Victoria via Time Air. She says, “If I missed the last flight home to Vancouver, I just stayed and worked all night. There was always way more to do than would fit in a normal workday.”

In those days, Transport Canada frequently implemented staffing...
freezes. “People left, and you couldn’t replace them. We’d be down to skeleton crews, and it never slowed down. In 1997, we started the change over to an Airport Authority, and it got worse. I spent pretty much 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the airport. It had to be done. It was a grueling process, and it sure as hell didn’t come with a neat, easy-to-follow, set of directions. Thankfully, I was able to pass on what I learned to many of the airports who transferred after us. The process was humongous.”

After the transfer was completed, Richard Paquette arrived on the scene as President and CEO of the Victoria Airport Authority. He remarks on how very important Danita has been to the smooth running of the airport. “She’s had a wonderful career here,” he says. “She’s been so important to the airport, and to its transfer from the Federal Government to the Airport Authority. After the VAA was established and I arrived here ... I relied on her in so many ways.”

Danita recalls that things improved notably after Richard arrived. She appreciated the positive influence he brought to the operation. But she was still the one who knew the airport inside out. “Imagine it over the whole gamut. It’s everything. You name it, I did it. I was responsible for all the finance, all the human resources, all the risk management. Unless you’ve been there for 25 years, you don’t get experience in all those areas. From the time I first walked through the door then, and the staff has stabilized. It’s the beginning of a new era now. Randy Bogle has now taken on the financial part of Danita’s job, and Debbie Hansen will take on the balance of her Corporate Services role. Danita can safely leave, finally assured that it isn’t all going to fall apart.

For some people retirement can be a difficult time. For Danita, it is more a time of ambiguity. “I don’t identify myself with my job,” she says. “When I was working, I lost my identity. Now that I’m retired, I’m getting it back. That wasn’t me.” On the other hand: “When you put your heart and soul into something for so many years ... My team has become a part of my family, and they have been amazing people to work with. I will truly miss them. I’ve worked at airports for 31 years. Once an airport bum, always an airport bum. You can’t stay away from it. It gets in your blood.”

Danita has always hit the ground running, dealing with whatever they threw at her. Now she has time to reflect, time to pick and choose. It’s a welcome cooling off period, after all the treadmill years. “We have six weeks in the Caribbean, starting in January 2010, and a Mediterranean cruise in November 2010. Now is the time to actually spend time with my hubby, our kids, our grandchildren and my dog, Gilligan.” So the immediate future is mapped out. After that who knows? Maybe a nice drive, and an ice cream cone.
Airport Security: the Human Side

Airline passengers have always been interested in flying safety. But as recently as the turn of the century, the concept of airport security was a barely familiar concept to the general public. Then came September 11, 2001 and everything changed. Here in Canada, the CATSA uniform is now a familiar presence at airports. But CATSA’s mandate and how the organization operates is less well known.

The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority operates under the authority of the Minister of Transport, and is responsible for security screening at airports in Canada. Their general scope of responsibility encompasses four areas: 1. Pre-board Screening (PBS), the screening of passengers, their carry-on baggage and their personal belongings; 2. Hold Baggage Screening (HBS), the screening of checked baggage; 3. Non-Passenger Screening (NPS), the screening of non-passengers (e.g. airport employees, flight crews); and 4. Restricted Area Identity Cards (RAIC), the administration of access control to airport restricted areas through biometric identifiers.

Private security companies bid on contracts to carry out the screening operations under CATSA authority. At Victoria International Airport, CATSA is represented by Garda, a company with operations across Canada and the USA, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

Malcolm Brailsford, Garda Manager of Screening Operations, BC West is in charge of screening at Victoria, Nanaimo, Comox, Campbell River and Sandspit. He came to the job eight years ago with admirable credentials: a 25 year career in the RAF, culminating with the rank of Warrant Officer First Class. This was followed by 11 years working in casino security. While in the RAF, he served in a string of diplomatic postings in London, Washington, DC, Singapore, Holland and Germany. “I call it luxury postings,” Malcolm says. Call it what you will, the work prepared him to deal with a wide variety of people in stressful situations, an excellent background for what he does today.

“The main challenge in this job is customer service,” he says. “People are getting used to the regulations. But some of them are anxious, before they come through the door. We have to do our job. At the same time, we want to reduce their anxiety level. That’s one of the outstanding qualities of the staff we have.

Malcolm came into the job eight years ago with 24 staff members. Since then, Victoria Airport and the job have both grown. Today, he manages a total of 165 pre-board screening staff: 95 in Victoria and 70 in the other four airports. “The standard we’ve got is to keep all operations on a par,” he says. “Things are dealt with consistently at all of them.”

Eves Devries has worked pre-board screening at Victoria Airport, since July 1989. With 20 years on the job, she’s the longest serving employee in the operation. She’s worked for several security contractors during those years. When a new contractor comes on the scene, it’s to their benefit to keep as many existing staff as possible. “It’s because we’re certified,” Eves says, pointing out that they’re
required to undergo CATSA training and certification every year.

There are four specific tasks in pre-board screening, and staff circulate through them every 20 minutes. This maintains an optimal level of alertness. They rotate from the greeting position at the door, where they check boarding passes and direct passengers to one of the screening lines. The second position is loading baggage on the belt. In the third position, security staff monitor the screen itself, watching for anything unusual or suspicious in the baggage. The final position is the wand, where they check for metallic objects on the person of the passenger.

Eves has seen it all. “It can be hard work, and it can be weird at times. We see everything on the screen - from intimate personal items to the kitchen sink.” It’s not just a figure of speech. Someone brought an actual kitchen sink through screening in his carry-on baggage.” Sometimes the people are hard to deal with,” she says. “But the majority are a pleasure to deal with.”

We’re nearly a decade into increased security regulations, and some people are confused about what they can actually carry onto a plane. It’s pretty clear that all weapons are barred. And that sharp objects not intended as weapons, things like scissors and pen knives are taboo. But what about coffee, soft drinks, shampoo and hand lotion? You are not allowed to carry beverages through security, but they may be purchased in the secure holding area and brought onto the aircraft. It’s permissible to bring a travel mug or water bottle through, if it’s empty. Liquids and jells, such as shampoo and hand lotion, must be in containers no larger than 100 mls, and they must all fit into a one litre baggie. “It’s the same all across Canada,” Eves says. “We’re all on the same page. Some people are nervous; some find it scary. But we’re told by passengers that this is the best airport, and the most friendly.”

Malcolm explains, “We don’t make the regulations; we follow the regulations. I’m the Screening Operations Manager and I’m still subject to screening. We look at what might be a threat to aviation. It’s not necessarily the individual item you are carrying. It’s what it could be, combined with what someone else might be carrying. We have a very serious job, and we do it with care and compassion. We are firm, fair and friendly.”

When Malcolm started his job at Victoria International Airport, pre-board screening operated out of an old interrogation room outside the main terminal. “It was about eight by ten, and there was no window,” he says. Eight years later, he’s still enthusiastic. “Our relationship with VAA is outstanding. We are all one big team to make this a happy and friendly operation. I’m happy to be a member of this airport group.”

Staff numbers at Victoria have almost quadrupled in eight years, and there are more than seven members with 16 plus years service. At 20 years and counting, Eves is the most senior serving screener in BC. Why does she do it? “Working with the public was part of my growing up. Our family had a drug store in Vancouver, and I helped out as a girl. I worked at the bookstore in Vancouver airport for a while too. And I’ve always liked the airplanes.”

Eves feels protective of passengers going through security. “Some are nervous, and some find it scary. We’re there to help them and keep them safe.” And flying in Canada is safe. In her two decades of working airport security, Eves has encountered nothing more threatening than replica guns and forgotten knives. Passengers carrying these items are offered choices. They can return the item to their car, send it through as checked baggage, or they can abandon it. They just can’t carry it on the aircraft. “We’ve had miserable ones, but the majority of people are cooperative,” Eves says. If the person refuses to cooperate, a supervisor may step in. Sometimes a new face makes the difference. And there is always an RCMP officer nearby.

Considering the times, it seems that all is secure at Victoria International Airport. But Eves does have her secrets to keep. “I remember the cat lady,” she says. “I remember Mr. Bow Tie. But I can’t tell you about them, because they might read this.”

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CATSA screener Eves Devries checks a boarding pass.
Landon Underwood, 10, and Jessica Underwood, 7, present the Japanese Royals with a bouquet of flowers.
Emperor and Empress of Japan

Emperor Akihito of Japan was still Crown Prince the first time he visited Victoria. On that visit, he ate his first hot dog ever, and took his first airplane ride. So soon after the war, there were no Japanese-Canadians available to greet him, as the entire population of 270 people had been sent to internment camps after the attack on Pearl Harbour. Things are different now. On his visit in July 2009, Emperor Akihito and his wife, the Empress Michiko, were greeted and admired by thousands of enthusiastic Canadians, including nearly 3000 people of Japanese ancestry.

Press members and attendants wait for the Emperor and Empress of Japan outside the entrance to 433 Maritime Helicopter Squadron hangar.

Empress Michiko shaking hands with Mayor Larry Cross of Sidney. Mayor Alice Finall of North Saanich stands to his right. Chief Bruce Underwood of Pauquachin First Nation and his wife Lila are on the left side of the photo.

The police motorcycle escort does a last minute check of their equipment.

The Japanese royal couple descend from the aircraft into a sunny Victoria day.
Moving ahead to the early morning of October 30, a crowd of dignitaries and press gathered at the 433 Maritime Helicopter Squadron hangar to meet the Olympic Flame. Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson carried the flame from the aircraft in a wind-proof lantern. Torch attendants Aronhiaies Herne and Dina Oulette received it from Robertson, and carried it into the hangar, where it was greeted with enthusiasm by the crowd.
Charles, Prince of Wales and Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall arrived a few days later on Friday, November 6. The Royal Couple arrived at 443 Squadron at Victoria International Airport, where they were greeted by dignitaries and members of the press, then whisked off to the legislature for an official welcome. They left our city on November 9 to continue their Canada tour. It was Camilla’s first official visit as the Duchess of Cornwall.
Reay Creek Restoration

Since 1997, when the Victoria Airport Authority took over responsibility for the airport from Transport Canada, it has worked diligently to correct environmental damage from past poor industrial practices. In the middle years of the century, the 40s, 50s and 60s, safe environmental practices received little or no consideration. For example, airport hangar drains were connected to the storm sewer system. Toxic material, washed from the hangar floors, would flow down the drains, mix with storm water and find its way into Reay Creek, eventually turning it into a dead industrial sewer.

As society in general became more aware of responsible industrial practices, things began to change. In 1991 and 1992, the airport disconnected airport hangar floor drains from the storm water system and connected them to the sanitary sewage system. This mitigated the problem, by diverting the toxic materials away from the waterways. But nothing would be done to correct the damage until after 1997, after the VAA assumed control of the airport.

VAA undertook the work of cleaning up the creek, under the authority of the Department of Fisheries. They hired a consultant biologist to guide and manage the restoration and provide progress reports for the DFO and the Airport Authority Board. They consulted with and briefed environmental stakeholders: Peninsula Streams, Sidney Anglers Society, the District of North Saanich and the Town of Sidney.

After a series of studies and evaluations to determine the extent of contamination, VAA began a three phase approach to clean up the creek. The work began in 2006 and finished last summer. Each year, they worked on one of the three reaches, removing contaminated sediments in the creek bed and contaminated soils on the banks. They replaced the contaminated banks with clean soils and planted native flora: ferns, rose hips, dogwood and grass. The contaminated sediments were replaced with gravel to support spawning salmon.

“We’ve done the right thing,” says airport representative Terry Stewart. “We’re proud of the work we’ve done. The board has been very supportive of all environmental initiatives and restoration projects.”

The secret reaches of Reay Creek are now clean and capable of supporting spawning salmon.