

Warmest Wishes to Warren Foster on His Retirement

By Joey Rudichuk

On a bright, sunny day in June, friends, colleagues and Gwaii Trust board members and staff came together in HIGaagilda Skidegate to celebrate the retirement of board member, Warren Foster, who has represented Area E (Moresby Island) as a director or alternate for 26 years. I recently sat down with Warren to chat about the past and to hear a few stories about the Trust over the years.

A heavy-duty mechanic by trade, Warren worked in the forestry industry in Sandspit until 2008 when he joined the Ministry of Transportation, eventually becoming Maintenance and Operations Supervisor.

With an interest in supporting his community, following the standoff at Lyell Island and the signing of the South Moresby Agreement in the mid-1980's, he participated in the Residents Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC), a group of community leaders representing Masset, Port Clements, Daajing Giids, and Sandspit. The committee worked in collaboration with the Council of the Haida Nation as the "Group of Eight" to establish an accord on the Community Development Fund that had resulted from the signing of the South Moresby Agreement. As the Civic and Haida representative respectively, Warren and Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas were delegated to travel to Ottawa to make the case for the Gwaii Trust, in time receiving



Heading to Ottawa with the latest in modern technology

funds to develop a business plan through the Gwaii Trust Interim Planning Society (GTIPS), eventually leading to the establishment of the Gwaii Trust Society in 1994.

Through strong leadership and good governance, the Trust that had started with \$38.2 million in 1994 was worth approximately \$94 million by the end of 2021. From the beginning the goal was clear for all directors: to work together to promote the health and well-being of the community and to make Haida Gwaii an even better place to live. As a result Gwaii Trust has granted over \$91 million for projects, programs, travel, and education to individuals and organizations on Haida Gwaii since its inception. A lot to be proud of.

But when I asked him what was the one thing he was most proud of, he replied, "the fact that before the Trust the communities didn't work together, they didn't agree with each other. The consensus model [used by the Gwaii Trust board] has forced both cultures and all six communities to work together to a common cause, and in my opinion that's by far the largest benefit of the Trust. And it outweighs the millions of dollars that were spent."

In 2014 a friend mentioned she knew someone about to be appointed as director for Graham Island South



Group of Eight, clockwise from top left: Fran Fowler, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Giitsxaa, Frank Collison, Gerry Johnson, Warren Foster, Terry Carty, David Wilson, Marcia Crosby, Norman Dale, unidentified, and Mary Morris

who was looking for advice on the role. Warren didn't hesitate and offered his services. The new director was named Ellen Cranston, the woman who would become the love of his life, and they were married a year later.

Throughout the years Warren has been a friend, leader, and mentor to both staff and fellow board members alike, eventually gaining the moniker "The Godfather" bestowed upon him by previous Chair, James Cowpar. Sometimes he's been an admitted sparring partner, but always, he says, with the Trust's best interest at heart. When asked about what community he represents, he responds: "I'm from the community of Haida Gwaii. That's the community I'm from."



The Gwaii Trust Board in Sandspit, 2019

"Warren, your decades of commitment and dedication to the Gwaii Trust and to the people and islands of Haida Gwaii has helped shape the Trust to what it has become today. Your retirement leaves a gap that will never be fully closed, but you have helped pave the way for others as a leader, mentor, and friend. Here's to your impressive career, and we wish you all the best."

Huux Percy Crosby
Chair, Gwaii Trust Society



With Area E Alternate (now Director), Laurie Chisholm



At the retirement dinner with staff member Joey Rudichuk



At the Gwaii Trust holiday social with COO Carla Lutner and guest

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