HISTORY OF THE SECOND SIXTIES OUTDOOR CLUB

1976 TO 2016

When a club gets to the point of having no more original members, as we have, it becomes increasingly important to learn and keep alive its history.

There are now several seniors' outdoor clubs in Calgary, but Second Sixties was the first, and the movement a first in Canada. Two people were instrumental in its development. The driving force was Vilis (Bill) Skrastins (1908-1991), a Latvian who competed in cross-country events at the 1936 Olympics and introduced cross-country skiing to 50,000 children in Latvian schools. He came to Calgary in 1952 and continued to teach and compete in his sport until the age of 80. In the summer of 1975 he began discussions with Jim McDonald of the City of Calgary Parks and Recreation department to form a program to improve the health and fitness of senior citizens.

The beginnings were modest, but in October 1976 Bill was hired by the City to instruct a group out of the Confederation Park Seniors' Drop-In Centre. Seven people attended sessions in that park from 1-3 PM Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to learn the use of ski poles and run and stride up and down the brown grassy hills with them. The snow did not lay until after Christmas that year, but the program was a hit. Bill had a passion for cross-country skiing, hiking, and fishing, all of which were practiced by the club in the early days. He promoted fellowship as well, and was instrumental in having city golf courses opened for cross-country skiing in the winter.

In the new year of 1977, the City gave the group a small van and a driver for outings to Shaganappi and other city parks. When the snow came the population grew to about 35 and the van was always full. Someone would phone participants to say “you went last week, so you can’t go this week”. When winter ended no one wanted to disband, so they hiked through the summer, at first in the city and later in the mountains.

Bill, as Director of the City’s Outdoor Program for Seniors, wanted to develop outdoor clubs for seniors, acquire equipment and facilities and reach out to less advantaged seniors. There was a federal government grant program available at the time called New Horizons, which Bill began investigating in January 1977 and promoting to the seniors on the trips, to fund these goals. A February meeting was not successful in agreeing to the financial terms, although the name “Second Sixties Outdoor Club” did arise from that meeting. But in the late summer, with further encouragement from Jim McDonald of Parks and Recreation, 26 seniors voted heavily in favour of forming a club and applying for the funding. By late Sept. a Board of four officers and a budget had been formed. The grant application for $ 8209.00 was approved and the club officially established at a meeting Oct. 14, 1977.

In the next year the Board increased to twelve and 170 people paid the $1.00 membership fee. Snowshoeing, golf and golf instruction, and camp-outs appeared in 1978. Outings were on Wednesdays. Golf was Mondays and Thursdays at Shaganappi, Richmond Green, Lakeview and out-of-town courses.

The amount of interest soon spawned other clubs. The next to form, in 1979, was the Seniors’ Outdoor Club of Calgary, meeting at the

Shaganappi Club House and doing Tuesday trips. The Skrastins Outdoor Club, doing Friday trips, followed within 1-2 years, and more clubs since.

In 1979 the grant was repaid. Bill was no longer being paid by the City to be our “Technical Director”.

Transportation was always an issue in the early meeting minutes. A second city van was obtained and driven by a member. Private cars were used. For awhile they had the use of a 36 passenger bus with outside ski rack donated by the Kinsmen, called “Seniors In Motion”, and a driver. The availability of the bus and driver became less reliable and then the City cut the program from its budget. In the early 1980s the club considered buying its own bus, but chose to go with Cardinal, later First Student Canada, buses instead. In 2009 we switched to Quality Time as our bus provider. In 2015 we discontinued the practice of car-pooling, which was still done in the summer.

In the early days the club provided some ski and golf equipment for rent and housed it at the Shaganappi golf course and later the Triwood Community Hall. Bill had collected donated equipment, renting it to the public on weekends and offering it free on weekdays to seniors wanting to try the sport.

The home base for the club was briefly the Shaganappi golf course, and then the Confederation Park Centre. Pick-up sites for the bus trips have ranged from Confederation Park to the North Hill Shopping Centre to Crowchild and 53rd to our present church location in Citadel. The ABC group system for hiking was adopted in 1985. Membership age eligibility was 60 + and a motion to change it to 55+ defeated in 1985. It is now 50+. Membership has varied with a peak of 354 in 1986, when

the membership fee was $ 5.00. We are now capped at 250 plus life members.

The club crest or badge, with its vivid colours, was designed in 1979. The club name and city with two flanking wild roses to represent Alberta surround two mountain peaks, the first to symbolize the first sixties and the second lower one our second sixties; below this are trees, fields and a body of water to represent the many terrains we traverse; holding it all together are two crossed sticks, a ski pole and a hiking pole.

Socialization has always been a mainstay of the club, from small informal gatherings in the early days to more organized events now. Fitness and love of nature may have led us to join, but personal relationships keep us involved in the club. Before the website, new recruits were usually sponsored by a friend or acquaintance who was already a member. Shared interests, conversations on the bus and trails, and rotating leaders of the hiking and winter activities groups are some of the factors that lead to lasting friendships being formed.

In late 2006-7 the club celebrated its 30th Anniversary with four social functions in and out of town. Several members were instrumental in planning this and they also left us with a better awareness of the club archives and history.

Telephone used to be the means of communication about club activities. Evite and our e-mail volunteer position have taken over this role, but those without internet are still contacted by phone and mail as necessary, and the club phone line is still an important tool. The annual spring printed newsletter has become within the last year or two a series of electronic messages. Communication between less active

former members was satisfied by an Alumni branch of the club that had a President and met for social and city walk outings. It disbanded in 2009.

The period of the mid to late 2000s brought many changes due to the emerging reliance on the digital age. The method of reporting our finances, membership and accepting trip registrations was transformed. With Board support and a lot of effort, our website was launched in 2011. It has brought us more and younger members, many of whom chose to take positions within the club early in their membership. There are growing pains with any change and we still seek to develop better ways of managing the complex processes within the club, but the computer has been invaluable to our communication.

About the time that the camping and alumni groups were disappearing in 2009-10, a new City Walks Director was added to the Board. Members had been meeting informally for walks and coffee-shop stops in the city on Monday mornings and the activity was formalized. Over the years its popularity has grown, from typically less active members only, to the full spectrum of our As, Bs and Cs walking year-round.

As will be apparent from the previous discussion, the club has gone through many necessary changes through the years to its Board composition, by-laws and operating procedures. This accounting of our history has purposely left out specific names, except for the two early founders working for the City, but many are known to you and anyone is welcome to view the newsletters, minutes and membership lists or speak to someone in our historical display area. They will try to answer any questions you may have arising from this speech.

It takes a tremendous amount of commitment to problem-solve the ongoing needs of an organization such as ours and requires the participation of all members to address concerns and propose solutions. Luckily we have such an involved membership.

We may as a club no longer give golf lessons or camp or ice-fish or ice-skate, but we remain one of the few clubs that stays active through all the seasons with our founders' core sports. Many people tell us a key attraction is our multiple levels of engagement; you can exercise at your comfort level with others at your level. As we continue to evolve, we can take pride in our legacy, handed down from pioneers with such foresight forty-some years ago.

Compiled by Peggy Wilson

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