

The Probian

June 2024

PROBUS CLUB OF PERTH - Fellowship - Friendship - Fun

Our year end meeting and lunch at the River House Winery, on the banks of the Tay River in Bolingbroke, was a resounding success very much down to our wonderful volunteers on the Social, Speaker and AV committees - thank you all! Thank you to those who stepped forward to volunteer to be VP. But we are in very much need for help with communications. Specifically a web/communications to members manager to take over from Colin Stephenson and a newsletter editor. I am just a June fill-in... So please consider stepping forward to assisting our club, thank you.

Susan Freeman, (Past President.)

President's Message:



Gail McAdam, President

Ring the bell!! The gang's all here. We have reached capacity of 205 paid members, in Probus Perth!! All other new members will go on a waiting list, until a space opens.

As President, the support I received this year, from our Management team, Committee Chairs with their volunteers, AV team, Coffee team, Greeter and you the members, has been tremendous, and I appreciate it. We ended our monthly General Meetings at the River House in Bolingbrook and what a gathering that was. 115 members attended. We were awed by the presentation of Thanh Campbell.

Now that June has arrived and summer activities are taking over, remember to look at your Social Events package. I am looking forward to seeing many of you at Mamma Mia! on July 25. Wishing you all a happy, healthy summer filled with the joy of family and friends together.

Gail McAdam (President)



George Braithwaite

PERSONAL PROFILE - George Braithwaite

George started life in Victoria on the 9th of June 1938 first living in the rural wilds near Cowichan Lake on Vancouver Island, then moving with his family to Victoria until the end of WW2. His Dad worked for the CNR and Mum kept the home fires alight.

He enjoyed his school years, and appreciated his teachers for their professionalism and dedication. In reflection, he feels their non-academic life lessons were the most memorable ones.

After High School, he was accepted into a Naval Officer training program. The academic program included a purely naval component in navigation, offshore training under sail, and basic naval engineering. The highlight of his time as a cadet was training at sea, and sailing to some exotic places like the Far East, Hawaii, and Australia. They learned how real naval officers functioned, while also living the less exotic life of the ordinary sailor. You can imagine that he and the other young, inexperienced cadets had some exciting off-shore adventures along the way, confronting life in downtown ports like Manila, or Singapore! Two years later, George was one of 40 to graduate from a class of 120.

George served in the Navy for 34 years; about 20 of those were spent at sea. He had two sea commands, served at the Royal Navy Staff College in Greenwich, and inevitably in NDHQ.

George and his wife met when they were kids, she was 13 and he was 16. They later married and raised three children. His family had the great privilege of regular travel because of his frequent career postings from coast to coast and the UK. They also travelled to Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Turkey.

Life after the Navy was very different: George was involved with municipal politics, a conservation authority, a police service board and had a 20-year involvement in social services in Ontario; specifically, the developmental services sector.

As a retiree, George found great satisfaction in the variety of opportunities and challenges inherent in civilian life. He felt his involvement in municipal politics was a worthwhile experience. While the challenges associated with his involvement in the Developmental Services Sector was a revelation into the political machinations of the provincial bureaucracy and its complex relations with volunteer organizations across Ontario.

Yvonne Powell



June meeting at the River House Winery, Bolingbroke.

June Speaker - Thanh Campbell



Thanh Campbell

Our year end Probus speaker, Thanh Campbell, was a resounding hit. With infectious enthusiasm, and incredible positive energy, he presented his personal story of Orphan #32 - a story that began in Saigon at the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, and is still unfolding here in Canada.

His story deals with resilience, overcoming the odds, and the power of ordinary individuals.

Two-year-old Thanh was on the last flight from Saigon before Saigon fell to the Communists - one of 57 war orphans rescued by Operation Babylift. In the upheaval created as the war moved closer to the south, many children were orphaned or abandoned. In April 1975, Saigon faced the inevitability of the Communist occupation of Saigon. Orphan children faced a grim future: be killed, or be left to their own devices. A plea went out to the world for help: to bring these children to safe countries for adoption. Go Vac Orphanage in Saigon became a gathering place for these orphans.

The situation in Saigon was dire. An American Military Lockheed Galaxy loaded with orphans headed to the US, had just crash landed after take-off at the Saigon Airport. It was suspected to have been shot down. Only 175 of the 313 passengers survived. Canada agreed to try rescuing the survivors, but only documented orphans. (They wanted no possibility of parents coming to reclaim their children after the war.) There was an additional problem: there were no planes left at the Saigon Airport.

Luckily, the people in Saigon connected with a Canadian Airforce Hercules C130 plane in Hong Kong. The Hercules flew to Saigon, under very dangerous conditions. Working against time, the Orphanage rounded up 87 children, aged three months to nine years.

The Hercules had no seats, so the children were placed in banana boxes and orange crates, one or two to a box, with the boxes duck-taped to the floor of the plane! Their journey took them first to Hong Kong, then to Vancouver. Once in Canada, they completed their journey to Toronto on a regular CP Air flight. But this flight was far from normal for the “regular” passengers. They were handed Vietnamese orphans to care for on the flight!

In Toronto the children were placed in Surrey Place Centre awaiting adoption. Each night, after lights out, caregivers experienced a very touching scene. The older children moved the younger ones to the centre of the room, creating an “island” surrounded and protected by the beds of the older ones. Then they shared bits of food that they had squirrelled away during the day.

On April 18, 1975, Thanh was adopted by Reverend William Campbell and his wife Maureen. He was the youngest of six children who came from mixed backgrounds. Although he was two, he was so malnourished he looked like a baby. So began his new life as part of a caring family in Cambridge, Ontario.

In his teens, Thanh began searching for information about his Vietnamese past. He had an adoption certificate and two copies of a birth certificate - one in Vietnamese, and one in English. Then he learned the documents might not even be his. To get him out of the country in that turbulent time, identification papers had to accompany each child - even if the child and the papers weren't a match. Eventually, Thanh was able to not only piece together the complicated threads of his past, but also reunite with some of his Vietnamese family. His public speaking talent was the key, along with the media coverage and interviews that followed. His adoption journey garnered a lot of interest, sympathy, and curiosity. The media coverage ensured his story reached a very broad audience.

The first breakthrough came with a random phone call from Trent Kilnor in Sarnia - a fellow passenger on Operation Babylift. Further connections followed rapidly, which led to a Reunion Gala in Hamilton for those connected with the historic flight. An online article about the gala led to a journalist in Vietnam reprinting and publishing the article in Vietnamese. This, in turn, led to discovering Thanh had family in Vietnam. He had been placed in the orphanage to be cared for while his family dealt with the war. His family had never stopped searching for him, and they still had his original birth certificate - identical to Thanh's photo copy. A DNA test confirmed that he and his dad, Mr. Nguyen Minh Thanh were an exact match. Thanh now has two families, divided by an ocean. In June 2009 he finally reunited with his Vietnamese family, landing at Tan Son Nat Airport in Saigon, but not in a Hercules C130.

Sharing his story is Thanh's way of making a difference. His message is one of hope and perseverance. His accomplishments reflect his belief that each person is "awesome" and "amazing," and that we should "go show the world through our acts of kindness." Thank you, Thanh, for your inspiring presentation.

Yvonne Powell

New Members:



Barb Mingie, Bob Mingie, Tineke Doornbosch, Dan Woods, Christien Kilburn, Paul Joyce, Isabel Joyce and President Gail

Probud Executive, President's Year-end lunch:



End of Year President's Pot-Luck Luncheon for Probud Executive & Partners