



# THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

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Gordon McDonald is a recovering addict who has lived in Our Place housing since 2007. His unofficial duty as lobby ambassador gives him a front-row seat to the community giving season, and he's concerned. "This year it's down." ADRIAN LAM, TIMES COLONIST

## The 'lobby ambassador' reaches out at Our Place

SARAH PETRESCU  
Times Colonist

Anyone who walks into Our Place Society on Pandora Avenue will likely meet Gordie McDonald, whether they are dropping off a donation or seeking help in hard times.

"I like to hang out in the lobby, chat with people, joke around," said the 62-year-old.

A recovering addict who has lived in Our Place housing since 2007, McDonald said his unofficial lobby duty serves a greater purpose.

Some days, just being around people quiets the urge to use drugs or the dark thoughts of loneliness, he said. On others, he might be the listening ear that someone needs.

"A girl in the lobby a few weeks ago told me she was struggling to quit drugs. I gave her my number and wrote 24-7 on it. I said, 'Make sure you call,'" McDonald said. "Sometimes you need someone who's been there, who understands what it's like."

Grant McKenzie, Our Place's communications director, said McDonald has been dubbed the "lobby ambassador."

McDonald knows the value of

having someone to speak with.

"I'll admit, I've been really low lately," he said, adding that he's been having bad dreams for the past three months. "I wake up in a sweat, scared I'm going to die."

McDonald is a former crack and heroin addict. He marked his third year clean in July, with a special meat loaf from the Our Place kitchen.

He said knowing the friends he has made through Our Place would miss him if he died helps keep him from using drugs again. "When I went into the hospital a while back, a lot of people were asking about me. I didn't realize people missed or knew me."

McDonald has struggled with drug use since he was a boy, first using acid when he was 10, growing up in Montreal. He moved to Victoria with his sister's family in 1979 to look for work. He landed a job as a janitor at Glengarry Hospital for \$7.10 an hour — a job he held for more than 20 years.

McDonald said he used drugs occasionally during his working years. When his mother died in 1997, he went downhill fast.

"She was my best friend in the world," he said. "We talked on the phone every morning."

He spent some time at the Eric Martin mental-health facility and on disability assistance. He started to use drugs more frequently, spent time on the streets and for a stint lived at the notorious Holiday Court motel on Hillside, helping in drug deals.

McDonald continued to use for several years while living at Our Place, until one day he told his support worker: "I can't live like this anymore."

"He said, 'I knew you were going to say that,'" McDonald said. "He could see it in my eyes: I wanted to change."

He went through detox and has managed to stay clean with the help of support at Our Place.

McDonald credits Our Place with saving his life, one day in the lobby at a time. "If I wasn't here in the lobby, I'd be out using. I'd be dead," he said. "This is a safe place with no judgment."

McDonald said the lobby has also given him a front row seat to the community giving season, and he's concerned.

"This year it's down. Not as many people are coming in as usual. I know it's hard out there, but people here really need help."

McKenzie confirmed McDon-



### HOW TO DONATE

Since 1956, this newspaper has collected money to benefit the less fortunate. Last year, through the Christmas Fund, we raised and distributed about \$320,000, and we hope to beat that total this year.

We work with the Salvation Army and the Mustard Seed, which handle the disbursement of most of the funds, and also provide financial help to Our Place.

To donate, go online to: [timescolonist.com/donate](http://timescolonist.com/donate). You will be directed to a Canada Helps donation form; once you make your donation, a tax receipt will be provided immediately.

Mail a cheque, payable to the Times Colonist Christmas Fund Society, to the Times Colonist Christmas Fund, 2621 Douglas St., Victoria, V8T 4M2.

You can use your credit card by phoning 250-995-4438 between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m., Monday through Friday. Outside those hours, messages will be accepted.

aid's observation and said while cash donations are down this year, so are donations of items such as socks and winter clothing.

"We really need men's winter clothing," he said. "Socks, underwear, scarves, jackets and rain gear. It's supposed to be a difficult winter."

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## Ex-nurse appeals assault verdict

LOUISE DICKSON  
Times Colonist

A former Victoria licensed practical nurse sentenced to six months in jail for assaulting three elderly residents of the Selkirk Seniors Village is appealing his conviction.

James Edward Christie was convicted in July of three counts of assault. Provincial court Judge Lisa Mrozinski found Christie struck and used uninvited and unnecessary force against the three patients, who were bedridden and in advanced states of dementia, in April and May 2015.

On Nov. 9, Mrozinski sentenced Christie to six months in jail followed by 18 months of probation.

"You struck at the private parts of two of the victims, causing them obvious pain. You caused the third victim to moan when you pressed your torso into her face, which you had covered with a blanket," Mrozinski said.

"These acts were intentional, cruel and, quite frankly, sadistic in their nature. The residents you assaulted were the most vulnerable of an otherwise vulnerable population."

The next day, Christie's lawyer, Geof Simair, filed a notice of appeal against the conviction and the sentence. Christie was released from the Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre on Nov. 16.

Simair is asking the Appeal Court to set aside the guilty verdict and enter an acquittal, or to order a new trial. Failing that, he is asking that the jail sentence be converted to a conditional sentence of between 12 and 18 months.

In the two-page notice, Simair said the conviction was unreasonable and not supported by the evidence. He said the judge erred in applying the standard of proof where witness credibility was a key issue, and erred in failing to weigh or consider Christie's evidence.

The judge also erred in refusing to order a conditional sentence, he said, adding that the sentence was harsh and excessive.

Christie, 25, had no previous criminal record. His nursing licence has been suspended and he is taking a degree in business. [ldickson@timescolonist.com](mailto:ldickson@timescolonist.com)

## The Rumbles grow, along with The Grumbles



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*News item: A U.S. navy plan to expand its fleet of EA-18G jets at Whidbey Island could mean Victorians will be hearing more of The Rumbles.*

The Rumbles from the U.S. are increasing, literally and figuratively.

The ones we have grown used to, sort of, over the past eight years sound like rolling thunder, or a big truck lumbering past, or the beginning of an earthquake, or God bowling.

When The Rumbles first began to draw notice back in 2008, Victorians of a certain generation just assumed them to be the brown

acid from Woodstock coming back for a visit, so would put on some Pink Floyd and go lie down until the noise went away.

But when the periodic perturbations persisted, puzzled people began looking for another source, which turned to be the Growlers — aircraft whose electronic-attack arsenal is used to jam the enemy's radar and otherwise mess up its communications — at the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station near the mouth of Puget Sound.

The timing (the planes were introduced in 2008) was consistent with when we began hearing The Rumbles, and the location (50 kilometres southeast of Victoria, across the open water) matched the areas — Oak Bay, the east side of the Saanich Peninsula — where they were most commonly heard. Atmospherics were blamed for carrying the noise of jet engines powering up and practising take-offs and landings.

The Rumbles have continued, off and on, ever since. So have The Grumbles from those who are put off by the noise. Vancouver Islanders might be more accepting

of the disturbances were they the sound of orcas breaching or puppies being born or Justin Trudeau ripping his shirt off, but that's not the case. The Rumbles are not only the sound of planes but of U.S. electronic-warfare jets, which is some kind of Trumpian trifecta for those whose internal air raid sirens are triggered by any combination of A) Uncle Sam B) ominous Big Brother technology and C) the military.

Right now, Canadian alarm systems are particularly sensitive because of the other Rumbles heard from 'Merica, the figurative ones that got really loud Nov. 8. Post-election headlines across the Great White-Knuckled North posed the fearful question What Does It Mean to Us?

"Can Canada escape Donald Trump's NAFTA crosshairs unscathed?" asked Global. "Is Donald Trump's victory emboldening hate-mongers in Canada?" wondered the *Globe and Mail*. "Canada roadkill under Trump?" quavered the *Toronto Sun*. (The *Times Colonist*, hyper-local as always, weighed in with "Vic West

boy wins trip to Esquimalt.")

Right off the hop we heard that Trump's Trade Police want to go after Canada over softwood lumber again. Really? Didn't we already lose that one? Learning that the Americans want to refight the softwood lumber war is like being the Confederacy and hearing the Union wants a rematch at Gettysburg.

Then John Manley, the head of the Business Council of Canada, began freaking out aloud about what will happen (hint: it's bad) if American corporations do as Trump wants and take home the \$27 billion they have parked in Canadian financial institutions. Legitimate fear but jeez, John, did you have to remind them? It's like standing in a dark alley and declaring: "I hope nobody takes all these hundreds I have stuffed in my wallet."

On and on the worries go: NATO, security, beef exports. Our oil and gas industry fusses that Trump's desire to ramp up exploration in the U.S. is a competitive threat to drilling in Canada, while our enviros fear climate change

will be relegated to the bottom of the presidential priority list, sandwiched somewhere between International Women's Day and Cinco de Mayo.

Even if the White House doesn't specifically target Canada, our economies are linked. (Just look at the Black Friday phenomenon, where Canadian retailers have been forced to ape an American shopping blitz built around the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, a day off that we don't get.) Our butt is tied to their piano. If it goes over the cliff, we follow like Wile E. Coyote.

"Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant," Pierre Trudeau told the U.S. in 1969. "No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."

Right now, we're not so sure about the "friendly and even-tempered" bit. So, as always, Canadians squirm at the ominous Rumbles from the south, whether they come from Whidbey Island or Washington, D.C.



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