

Governor General visits local icon - Kinsol Trestle impresses Canada's head of state, who applauds volunteer efforts

By Sarah Simpson, Citizen News September 28, 2011

"Wow, this is something."

The Kinsol Trestle has that effect on people, even high-ranking officials. David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, and his wife Sharon, braved heavy rain to pay a special visit the Kinsol Trestle Tuesday morning. The Governor General said he and his wife had a lot of interest and enthusiasm in the Kinsol Trestle, as they are patrons of what he termed a "great Canadian project" - the Trans Canada Trail, of which the trestle is a part.

Johnston told the soggy crowd that had gathered to meet him that the effort to restore the massive span to its original glory was an example of volunteerism at its best. He hoped the rest of Canada has taken note and will put forth a similar effort when it comes to completing the Trans Canada Trail on schedule.

"We are just so proud of what you people have done and it's an inspiration, of course, for the whole entire country, to get this thing entirely finished by 2017 or before."

Despite driving rain, Cowichan Valley Regional District Chair Gerry Giles, key preservationist Gordon Macdonald of Macdonald & Lawrence Timber Framing, CVRD parks and trails manager Brian Farquhar, historian T.W. Paterson and a host of other delegates and politicians joined the Governor General and his wife in a walk across the trestle's deck. Once their crossing was made, the rain ceased, the sun broke out from behind the clouds, and a rainbow appeared.

"The rainbow is Jack Peake," someone from the crowd suggested. Peake was at the CVRD's helm at the beginning of the efforts to save the trestle and despite retiring from politics, has been integral in the project's completion. In introducing Peake to Johnston, Giles lauded the former CVRD board chair's unwavering commitment to the effort and his ability to raise funds.

"Bravo," the Governor General said while shaking Peake's hand.

"What a delight. Are your talents available to the rest of the country?"

"Any time, any place," Peake replied.

Giles took the break in the rain as an opportunity to present Johnston and his wife with their own piece of the trestle.

"That comes from our heart with very genuine thanks for being here today and for sharing this very important piece of the Cowichan Valley with us," Giles said.

"Isn't this wonderful," Johnston replied, while looking at the plaque made from salvaged parts of the trestle.

"We'll treasure this."

"It's very unique," Sharon Johnston agreed.

Later, Peake said he was thrilled to have the acknowledgement but hasn't lost sight of the bigger picture. "It was a major project for my political life and for the Governor General to come and recognize its value and importance, to me, is just one more proof of the pudding that we did a good thing," Peake said.

"If nobody ever even looked at me and said 'thanks,' it wouldn't have even mattered. To be able to leave this world at some time and to be able to know that you left some good things behind that you were involved in," is what matters most.