



40
YEARS

Pender Islands
Health Centre

Where Caring and Community Come Together



Built by the Community, for the Community
The History of the Pender Islands Health Centre





May 30, 1981 opening of the Pender Islands Health Centre, named in memory of Bishop Michael Coleman. Mary Coleman seated far right.

Built by the Community, for the Community: The History of the Pender Islands Health Centre

Extracted from the Pender Post, October & November 2020

Written & researched by Kathleen Lightman, Pender Islands Health Care Society

A Story of Community Determination and Generosity

“You’d better bring him in. Do you need the ambulance, or can you manage on your own?” Driving through the dense black Pender night and scanning the roads for deer, I felt the fear and the cold keeping me alert. The golden light from the emergency treatment room appeared through the trees, and a doctor who had left his warm home in the early hours of the morning was already there to meet us. As a result, my husband is alive today.

This is my experience, but anyone who has ever called our clinic in an illness or emergency can relate to the relief and gratitude felt on the approach to those doors. Yet, just 40 years ago none of this existed. There was no clinic, no emergency treatment room, no ambulance, and only one doctor, trying to retire with no one to succeed him.

How the clinic came to be is a fascinating story of Pender community members and their determination and generosity. It tells of their willingness to fight for, pay for, donate their labour for, and build a medical care facility to own, expand, take on the responsibility for, and then operate and maintain for the lasting benefit of the community, for decades.

Chapter 1: The Early Years

Bishop Michael Coleman, the man for whom our medical centre is named, came to Pender having been Canon of Christ Church Cathedral in Victoria. He served as Vicar on North and South Pender Islands from 1960 to 1969.

He had a dream to build a doctor’s office and small waiting room to attract a resident physician to serve the people of the Penders. After his death in 1969 a fund for this

purpose was set up in his name, but the dream did not become reality until 1981. When the clinic that Pender residents built was finally opened that year, we all became owner-operators of a community health centre with space for resident doctors and their staff to run their independent practices and deliver the quality care we still receive on our home island. How had we survived without it, and how did it all come to be?

Prior to our clinic's establishment, medical care was provided in interesting ways. Throughout the long years of effort to bring the clinic to fruition, visiting doctors saw patients in the homes of local residents who generously provided space for that purpose.

Dr. Rogers' arrival buys time to build a clinic

Luckily, in 1969 Dr. Homer Rogers and his wife Jean—persuaded by Vern Roddick—arrived from Barbados and set up a practice in their home at the end of McKinnon Road. It was said that if you could make it through the geese to the house, you could get to see the doctor.

Jean was a qualified X-ray technician who assisted Homer in the practice. In the absence of an island pharmacy, Jean set up a makeshift dispensary on a table in the only room in their home that could accommodate it. Dr. Rogers, causing no end of merriment, used to hand prescriptions to his patients, telling them to “go see the woman in my bedroom”.



Jean and Dr. Homer Rogers at his retirement in 1979. He would be the last doctor to practice out of his own home.

In the early 1970s, Connie Auchterlonie, a young nurse from Vancouver who had married a local boy who wouldn't stay in the city, was hired to assist Homer and Jean. She recalls that Dr. Rogers didn't see patients every day but they were essentially always on call.

There was no ambulance, but an old wire stretcher was kept at Peter Carter's lumber yard that served for emergencies. The ferry transported patients to Saanich Peninsula Hospital. Connie was thankful that there were quite a few retired nurses on the island who could be counted on to help when needed. She also appreciated Dr. Rogers' great sense of humour.

Sparked by the arrival of Dr. Rogers, a committee was formed—with L. J. Armstrong as chair, Helen Grimmer as Vice Chair, Marion Sketch as Secretary, and with George Ross-Smith, Herbert Spalding and Alex Mackinnon as members, along with Mrs. Mary Coleman—to administer the fund that had kept the dream alive. The plan was to build a small clinic named for the Bishop on land adjacent to the golf course. Unfortunately, this could not be achieved and the plan lay dormant until 1977.

In 1977, Dr. Rogers felt it was time to reduce his workload and ease into retirement, but no doctors were willing to practice out of their own or someone else's home. Without a clinic we could not attract a resident physician; the income stream in a small community was too unreliable, and the additional cost to a doctor of providing or building office space was prohibitive. In 1978, unwilling to do without a clinic any longer, the Pender Lions Club formed a committee to approach the CRD and the Province to pursue assistance in building a facility that would enable Pender to attract physicians to serve the community, and to further what had become the island's collective dream.



Connie Auchterlonie joined the team of Dr. & Jean Rogers in the 1970s. They were essentially always on call.

Over the next year and a half, the Lions' committee, comprising Stew Ward, Gordon Wallace and President Stan Carey who led the negotiations, continued to meet increasingly complex funding requirements set by the Province and the CRD, only to suffer disappointments and roadblocks. Yet, they carried on. When the government was approached for financial assistance, neither the CRD nor BC would fund what they considered to be an office for a private doctor, yet—Catch 22—when asked to fund seniors' housing, paradoxically, they refused because the Penders did not have a resident doctor.

However, the need for medical care was recognized, and the matter was referred to the Minister of Health. He made it clear that any help from the Province would depend on the islanders supplying the land, the plans, the materials, the labour, the equipment and the furnishings. The residents were to own, oversee and maintain the clinic, the cost of which was to be covered by rents from doctors who were to run their own practices. No operational or maintenance costs could be covered by any level of government.

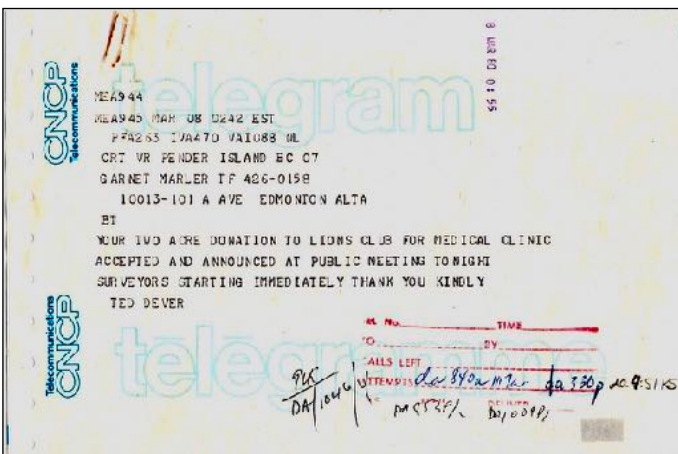
...any help from the Province would depend on islanders supplying land, the plans, the materials, the labour, the equipment and the furnishings. No operational or maintenance costs could be covered...

The Lions agreed to purchase the land, but could not secure approval for the preferred site where the Community Hall was later built. Three families came forward kindly offering to donate parcels. A property owned by Garnet and Elsie Marler was chosen as the most centrally located and appropriate to the needs.

Concurrent with all these long funding negotiations, in a space of six months in 1979 the Lions managed to establish the volunteer Ambulance Service, followed in 1980 by the Home Maker Services.

Later, when the Pender Islands Health Care Society was formed and took responsibility for the Health Centre from the Lions, Pender women formed an Auxiliary,—later to become Nu-to-Yu—to fundraise for the clinic’s equipment and furniture. Its contributions have never ceased.

Even after the receipt of funds from BC in 1979, years of work still lay ahead. Luckily, Dr. Rogers refused to abandon us without a physician and agreed to stay until a replacement could be found.



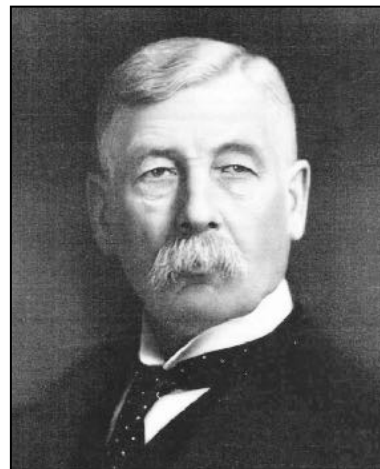
March 1980 telegram to the Marlers accepting their donation of land opposite the school for a clinic.

1880s to 1981: Our Early Health Care Providers

Historically, attracting any type of medical staff in the island has always been problematic. The record of medical care on the Penders begins with a rowboat and a midwife named Mrs. Bennett, who traveled by her own muscle power from Mayne Island to welcome new lives to the island. She probably would have appreciated our current chiropractic and physiotherapy services had they been available then.

Our first doctors attended from Saltspring Island. The first physician to settle in the Gulf Islands was Dr. Gerald Baker, who practised on Saltspring from 1897 to 1904, and whose practice also included the Penders, Mayne and Saturna. In 1904 he left the Gulf Islands for the Yukon.

That same year, Dr. Lionel Beech arrived on Salt Spring and continued to serve the Outer Gulf Islands, at times rowing himself to emergency calls. With only a rowboat as our first water ambulance, it must have taken the better part of a painful day to get a patient to hospital in Victoria. In 1911, Dr. Beech’s son Alan, also a physician, took over his practice to relieve his father, but left in 1914 to serve with the Royal Canadian Medical Corps during World War I.



From London to India to Manitoba to the Gulf Islands, Dr. Lionel Beech provided medical and surgical care to patients throughout a long and distinguished career.

Arriving in 1969, Dr. Rogers was not our first *resident* physician, but service from a resident doctor had by no means been continuous over the 45 years that preceded him. Dr. Ross Fraser arrived in 1914, and practiced on the Penders for five years until 1919. After a hiatus of six years, Dr. W. McKay, who by all reports was held in great affection by Penderites, made his home in Port Washington and delivered medical care to the community from 1925 until his death in 1940. (A memorial tree in his honour thrives to this day in the Pender Cemetery.) No more delivering babies in rowboats, as Neptune Grimmer had been!

Dr. Richard Gibson overlapped with Dr. McKay from 1930 until 1933, then from 1940 to 1948 we were again without a resident doctor. Dr. A.H. Aldridge and Dr. E. Riddell both retired here and, although not in active practice, were

available for emergencies when the island was without a local doctor. The noted Dr. Alan Beech, who had assisted his physician father on Salt Spring until he left for World War I, returned to us, establishing his home in Port Washington, where he practiced for the next three years until illness forced him to retire in 1951.



Dr. Augustus and Mary Aldridge settled on S. Pender before WWI. After serving in the war, they bought land on N. Pender near the canal. The good doctor retired to woodworking and boat-building while Mary took up farming. Both could be counted on to help out in times of emergency or need.

For the next 18 years, being again without a doctor, we sought assistance from off island, and were served by many medical practitioners from Ganges.

In 1950, two young doctors, David Boyes and John Ankenmen, set up their first practice in Ganges and served the Southern Gulf Islands. This was before the Medical Services Plan. They were paid to do clinics on the outer islands, which they visited in the 30-foot gillnetter 'Crackerjack' rigged with a little cabin. In real emergencies they flew in a small 'Seabee' plane from Ganges.

On one trip their engine quit and, going too slowly to glide in, they nosedived in to the sea. They floated for a long time before being seen and towed to shore by a fish boat. Miraculously, they were only bruised and carried on. Well-tested by their island experiences, both went on to distinguished careers.

Dr. Ankenman became head of Urologic Sciences at the UBC Health Sciences Hospital and Dr. Boyes served as director of the Cancer Control Agency of BC, respected as a world authority on cervical cancer. He held the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia.

From 1969 the Penders enjoyed the care of Dr. Rogers who in 1978, as you may recall, was now waiting to entrust his Pender patients to a new physician so he could retire. At the suggestion of architect Ladi Holovsky, Dr. Donald Sutherland arrived on South Pender, willing to deliver medical care here if there were a central clinic.

Working with CUSO as the Malawi District Medical Officer, he was the only doctor serving a population of 300,000 with only four hospitals. He went on to attend the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and obtained a Masters in Community Health in 1978. His experience in rural medicine was to be invaluable in setting up the Pender clinic.

In January 1979, in anticipation of the clinic, Dr. Sutherland joined Dr. Rogers in his practice. Finally, after the Lions sought the assistance of our MLA, who was in charge of BC Lottery funds, the BC Minister of Health, Hon. Hugh Curtis, announced in April 1979 that the government would grant \$85,000 from those funds to assist with the construction of the new medical centre. With a new doctor now in place on the island and the promise of a new clinic, Dr. Rogers, who had served us for nine years, would be able to retire upon its completion.



Dr. Sutherland joined Dr. Rogers' practice in 1979, in anticipation that a new health centre would soon be built.

Jean Rogers, however, did not retire. During her 40 years on the Penders, Jean was instrumental in founding the clinic, but also in the work involved in the operation of many of the services we take for granted today: the Library, where she became 'Gran Jean the story-teller' while Helen Lemon-Moore mimed the action (perhaps Helen's first big break in theatre); she served on the board of the Health Centre; began an adult daycare group with music therapist Mary Reher; launched Meals to Wheels; formed the first chapter of the Pender Cancer Society; participated in the Kids Club; and volunteered at the Nu-to-Yu. In 1999 she was one of five people to receive the Caring Canadian Award from the Governor General, who called her "the guardian angel who established the Pender Island Care Bears to visit people who are sick, elderly, isolated or alone".

When Dr. Rogers retired, the bedroom pharmacy was also retired, but his nurse Connie continued to use her skills to design the clinic's pharmacy where, in the absence of a pharmacist, she did the dispensing. She assisted Dr. Sutherland, took on the lab work, gave injections and eventually managed the doctors' practices at the clinic.

Health Centre Planning Begins in Earnest

With two doctors practicing in 1979, community members were busy accepting \$60,000 in donations, and planning and building our clinic.

Bishop Michael Coleman's (*photo #1 on p.6*) dream was in good hands, and his widow Mary remained actively involved. Architect Ladi Holovsky, who along with others gave his services *pro bono*, described the scene:

"With Dr. Sutherland closely involved, the Lions' Stan Carey oversaw Ladi's design of the building (*photo #2, a rendering by Bill Robson*) and associated design work donated by a group of local professionals, as well as the project in its entirety. Jim Waters supplied the meeting space and the drinks at his Pender Lodge. Hardy Ruckheim was the building contractor/construction foreman who organized the hard-working crew of volunteer labour that included Vern Roddick, Bill Norton, Andre Pelletier, among many others. (*photo #3*)."

On May 30, 1981 the new Health Centre opened...

Ladi reported that "after the framing was completed, Hardy hired skilled tradespeople to complete it. The following donated their labour, charging only the cost of materials: Louis Hammer, carpentry and cabinetry; Jim Mollison, cabinet maker; Graham Thorn, plumbing and mechanical; Terry MacDonald and Danny Martin (for whom our ball-park was named), drywall; Jens Jensen and Einer Eggerholme (of Einer's Hill fame), concrete floors; Bruce Grimmer, septic; and Horst Klein, electrical." Equally important and not to be forgotten are the women who took on extra chores at home while their partners worked on the building. At the roof-raising party, Stan Carey was reported to say: "It has often been said that the average age of the Penders is 'deceased'", but that "he would match his group of volunteers against any group anyway, regardless of their age". (*Photo #4*)

On May 30, 1981, the new Health Care Centre opened, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony (*photo #5*). The new clinic (*photo #6*) had two doctors' offices and examining rooms, an emergency treatment room for Dr. Sutherland, a waiting room, a pharmacy, and offices for a physiotherapist, an optometrist, a dentist, and an office shared by Home Support and Public Health.

The Pender Island Health Care Society assumed responsibility for the Centre's operation and its volunteer board continues in that role today.

Long-time residents will recognize the people in this story, and many newer ones will recognize the family names of friends and neighbours.

New Penderites have continued to be welcomed to the island and they, too, contributed to the community. Through their generosity the clinic has expanded both its space and services to become much admired by other Gulf Islands communities.

This is hardly the end of our story. Our next chapter describes our journey from 1981 to the present day. As we go through this pandemic, we gratefully acknowledge risks and extra work of our treasured practitioners, staff and administration, who stand every day as our first line of defence.

...continued on p. 7

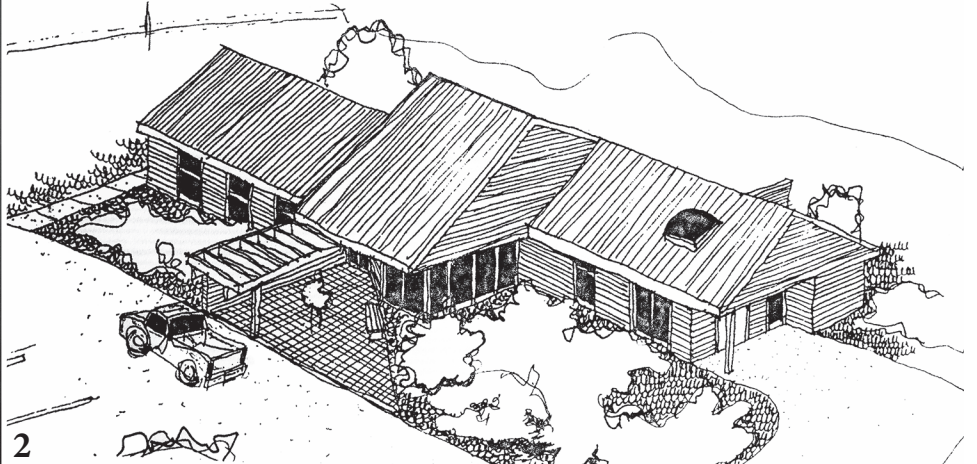


Bishop Coleman would not live to see his dream for a clinic become reality, but his wife Mary would be at the opening of the "Bishop Coleman Memorial Health Centre".



1

BISHOP COLEMAN MEMORIAL HEALTH CARE CENTRE



2



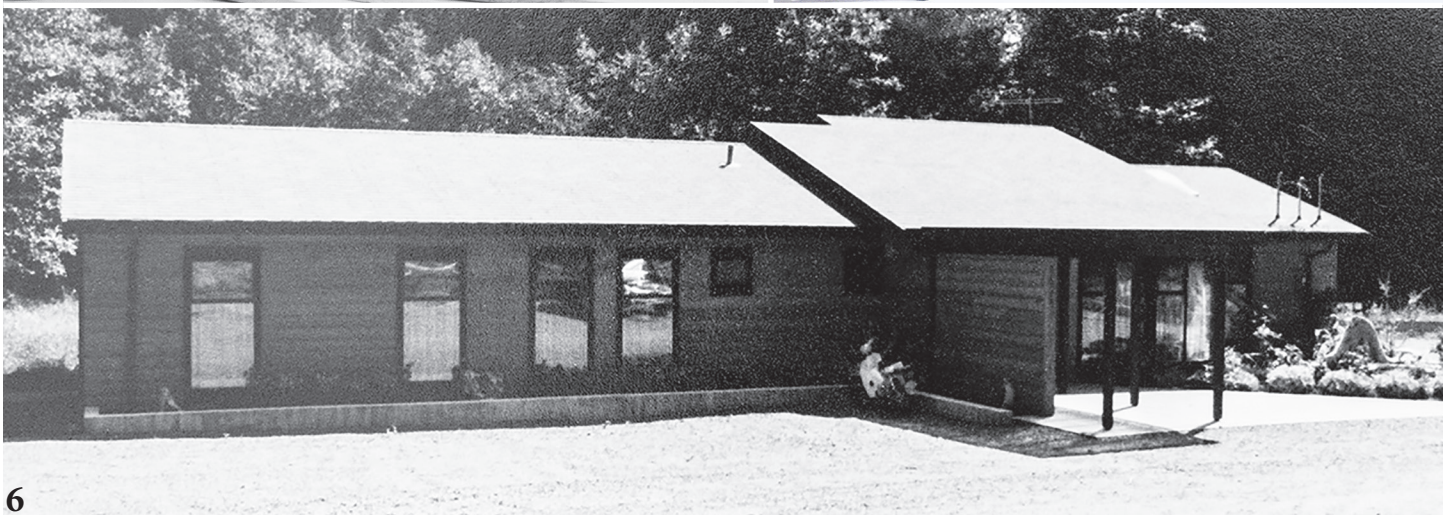
3



4



5



6

Chapter 2: Here for Us for 40 Years

White-haired Neptune Grimmer, earlier the baby born in a rowboat, watched along with the murmuring crowd as Mrs. Coleman, with a wistful nod to the Bishop's dream fulfilled, cut the bright ribbon to the entrance to the clinic. Stan Carey transferred the keys and responsibility for the clinic from the Lions Club to the President of the new Health Care Society.

Stewart Corbett turned the key in the lock and from that moment on May 30, 1981, the Penders would never again be without a resident doctor. Dr. Sutherland, office manager Doreen Hanson, the chiropractor, the massage therapist and the physiotherapist soon entered their offices, and Connie Auchterlonie stepped into the clinic's pharmacy which she'd designed.

...Stewart Corbett turned the key in the lock and from that moment on May 30, 1981, the Penders would never again be without a resident doctor..

At times over the next two years, Dr. Sutherland would feel called to return to Africa to bring medical help to famine-wracked Somalia. During these times locums served our island. With our own needs now met, we did not forget others: in a 1982 Christmas letter written from Africa, Dr. Sutherland, "chilled by morning dew and the hyena's bark", told us that the people of the Penders were being remembered by a group of refugees. Our first \$5,000 donation went to the most useful project in a waterless country, a solar pump, and the next \$4,000 to sponsor nurses' training for four 2nd year students from the Sabaad refugee camp. Ultimately, in the summer of 1984, Dr. Sutherland took up a post in Geneva with the International Red Cross, in charge of a worldwide program for children.

Starting with Dr. Sutherland's absences, a young Dr. Ellen Anderson (*photo #2 & 3 on p. 8*) joined the clinic to provide continuity of care for the next six years, earning high regard from colleagues. Dr. Anderson had deep roots on Pender through both her parents and grandparents. She came to us after a stint in Australia, bringing her children and her husband, Warren Moore, whom we can thank for taking on the child and home care so she could be accessible to us.

In 1986, Therese Williams was packing up her house in Summerland while her husband, affectionately known to islanders as "Dr. Don", (*photo #1 on p. 8*) took his place in the Pender Health Centre. When he arrived, he found Dr. Anderson holding down the fort through a succession six doctors and nursing her third child while attending emergency calls in the night.

Asked by the search committee to commit for at least one year, he stayed for thirteen. He's had a lifetime commitment to behavioural medicine, to empower patients with tools such as stress management to take charge of their own health and lessen the dependence on pharmaceutical solutions.

After Dr. Williams retired he enjoyed 10 years of working as a locum to bring relief to other doctors in rural and remote communities, returning with a wealth of experience of the differing ways rural clinics fund and deliver their services. During his tenure the all-volunteer ambulance crews made their way to our homes to tend us in life and death situations, and met once a week after-hours with Dr. Don and John Nixon, head of ambulance services, to review their skills and learn new ones.

It takes a particular kind of person—and partner—to work in an area where you are both family doctor and emergency physician. Recognizing these demands, the Province in the '90's introduced a payment program which offers doctors contracts in lieu of fee for service. A contract system helps provide a reasonable income stream to physicians who provide rural patients with access to care. This also enables doctors in communities with a large population of seniors like ours more time to deliver care to those with complex health problems. Later, the Rural Locum Program was introduced, relieving our doctors of the burden of finding and compensating other doctors to cover their practices during their absences.



The 1986 opening of the Pender Pharmacy provided an important addition to local health care services. Ursula Poepel is seen here stocking shelves in the new store at the Driftwood.

In 1986 Ursula Poepel opened a pharmacy at the new Driftwood Centre. Friend of the environment and enemy of invasive Broom, she came to us from Germany via Iqaluit and Inuvik.

Connie Auchterlonie, then clinic manager, recalls that it was costly for the doctors to stock medicines that might expire before they were ever needed.

...continued on p. 9



1



2



3



4



5

Despite this, Dr. Rogers had never increased his 10-cent dispensing fee, this being due more to his generosity than to the low overhead of the dispensary on the side table in the Rogers' bedroom.

Ursula carried on dispensing medications and advice in her robust voice, while our feet and fashion improved as many Penderites began wearing the plain and fancy Birkenstocks she sold in her store. After Ursula handed the pharmacy over to Christine and Marty Swan, she put her prodigious energies into the Pender Island Conservancy. Sadly, we lost her in 2020 and we will miss her alto voice delivering medicine to our hearts with her lovely solo, "Stille Nacht", at our Christmas Concerts.

In 1989 a young doctor named Gerry Moore arrived to care for us. He knew that he wanted to work in rural medicine, and finding the posting for Pender in a doctors' lounge, he applied. Asked for a one year commitment, he is still in his office or in the emergency treatment room, day or night, 31 years later. Many of us owe him our good health and care, and some of us owe him our lives. He credits his long tenure as a doctor in a small community to a good marriage, so we can thank Helen Lemon Moore, whom he met at UBC, for drawing him back to the coast after medical training in Calgary and Toronto. If you look closely you just might be able to recognize him gracing the stage in one of his roles in Solstice Theatre Productions along with Helen.

When asked what it was like to be a doctor playing a corpse, he said the biggest challenge came when audience member Wim Honing prodded him with his cane. Perhaps Dr. Moore is responsible for the amazing number of clinic staff doing star turns on our stages. I believe all this makes him our longest continuously serving, and perhaps most versatile, physician.

Islanders tend to look up when the ambulance helicopter comes in to land, hoping support has come in time for someone in need. Earl Hastings donated a space for the helipad on his airstrip at the base of Einer's Hill.



In 1993 the existing Ambulance Station was built. Earl Hastings donated a space for the ambulance helicopter pad on his airstrip and paid for its lighting. Our early doctors would have been astounded.

That same year the Society added two physiotherapy offices to the original facility, and a new addition for Public Health, the optometrist, a medical equipment Loan Cupboard, along with Home Care for which the Society assumed full responsibility. The operation had become too much for the 15-member volunteer board, and they began a search for a health centre director.

...The operation had become too much for the 15-member volunteer board and they began a search for a health centre director.

Someone called attention to Robert Dill who lived on South Pender. Having wearied of his architecture practice in 1970's Vancouver, Rob made the move to Pender.

He had been invited to do a visioning session in Victoria by the James Bay Community who were staring down a zoning plan that would turn their beloved heritage area into another West End. Out of the session came a plan for the James Bay Community Project and a 5-year pilot program grant. Rob was asked to stay and make it work, and the project became one of five Community Human Resources and Health Centre pilot projects in BC responsible for the integrated delivery of health and social services in their local areas. The project operated out of a mall in the community. In 1990 the James Bay Health and Community Services Society bought a building at 547 Michigan Street to house medical, home support and community services under one roof.

In 1993 the current Ambulance Station was built beside the Health Centre.





Rob Dill's background in architecture and community advocacy were uniquely suited to his role as the first Executive Director of the Pender Islands Health Centre.

Rob had committed to a 3-month stint as a consultant, but stayed for 20 years. Feeling he had done as much as he could, he decided to break free and pursue his own love of dance, music and travel.

Only two years later he was recaptured when our Health Care Society managed to net him as Executive Director. With Rob on board, rents were revised, administrative procedures updated, and a major needs survey of the community completed.

Growing to Meet Community Health Care Needs

Between 1994 and 1996, the Society established a Crisis Worker Program (Rob Willingham) and the Closer to Home Program which includes the Community Nurses, Lab Assistant, In-Home Physio Program, and Mental Health Support. Home Support Services grew to serve the Outer Gulf Islands. When home support services were amalgamated, the criteria for service were tightened. Many of the services we had provided through our program, like friendly visiting and house cleaning, would no longer be funded, so a volunteer program supported by a Closer to Home Grant was begun.

In 1998 the lack of physicians in the Gulf Islands was making news and was noticed by a Dr. Peter Carter. After braving the cold in Prince George for 10 years, he and Julie Johnson headed our way to replace Dr. Don Williams on New Year's Day, 1999.

Peter had enjoyed city hospital work, but having grown up in the Yorkshire countryside he had envisioned a small village practice. Pender was about as close you could get to an English village surgery. Julie and Peter both recall his first house call here. In the middle of a pitch black night,

lost in Magic Lake, they madly searched for the house of a woman in labour. They were met at the door by the new father who announced the birth that had taken place three minutes earlier. From that day on, Dr. Carter advised patients to leave a car at the driveway with its flashers on.

One of Peter's most memorable experiences occurred when he spoke at the Romanow commission in Victoria. There was a big push by American interests to privatize the Canadian health system, and untruths about the system were being covered by media in the US. He had just five minutes, but told, to thunderous applause, a few true stories about cases that really worked and were cost effective. Julie went to find him after the meeting, but he was lost in a scrum surrounded by reporters and wound up on the front page of the Toronto paper.

In 2007 with the clinic outgrowing its capacity, the Board issued a challenge of raising \$125,000 in 125 days. By the 125th day *twice* that amount had been raised! Rob Dill put on his architect's apron and drew up plans which were approved by our building inspector, but the collapse of a house on Saturna caused the CRD to impose a stricter building code. Now the project required the expensive services of a geotechnical expert, a mechanical engineer and a still-registered architect. VIHA would not contribute to the expansion. The Society approached the CRD.

In 2007 with the clinic outgrowing its capacity, the Board issued a challenge of raising \$125,000 in 125 days. By the 125th day, twice that amount had been raised!

The CRD planner stated in his report that, "an expanded community health centre for Pender is undisputed. The Society has raised 60% of the cost of the project, a significant feat for the small community...The value of this grant is quite small in relation to the costs and the benefits of this expansion." With more than \$700,000 of the total 1.4 million cost coming from the community, a CRD grant of \$597,500 and a VIHA contribution of \$142,500, the community set a very high standard for fundraising for purposes that remain a priority today.

Rain did not deter attendance at the 2008 opening ceremony of the new 3,442 square foot medical wing, the largest project that the Health Centre had yet taken on, almost doubling the size of the clinic. It was expected to serve the Penders' needs for the next 10 years.

A triumphant triumvirate of Society President Peter Kappele, Board Member Paul Petrie and Executive Director Rob Dill (*photos #4 & 5 on p.8*) addressed the crowd from beneath bright blue canopies. Elsie Marler, age 90, who with her husband Garnet had donated the land for the clinic, was in attendance.

...continued on p. 11

Penderites toured a newly-expanded medical clinic space to provide for three practitioners, with a state-of-the-art Emergency Treatment Room. The existing facility had been totally renovated to provide space for the healing arts with increased space for dentistry, an optometrist, lab collection, community nursing, counselling services, volunteer services, and administration.

During construction the clinic continued to operate through the clever use of temporary walls. When the walls came down the new facility was joined to the existing facility by a peaceful courtyard with two ponds designed and built by Rob in the centre of the complex.

In 2018, after serving 25 years shepherding our clinic and its services, Rob Dill retired and picked up where he had left off in 1994, in the garden at Jennens Road. Marion Alksne was hired to become our new Executive Director.

Marion graduated as a nurse in 1974 and has spent her entire career working in hospitals, mental health, hospice and palliative care, and bereavement counselling. Entering her career at a time of great change, her whole path was mentored by ground breakers whom she credits with teaching her how to challenge the system and do what's right for the patient. Early in her career she attended a conference to hear Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, famous for her work in palliative care. As a bereavement co-ordinator in Calgary working at the Shell building, in space donated to hospice, she developed an anticipatory grief program.

Marion's last job before coming to Pender was as Executive Director of Canadian Mental Health Association of Central Alberta. No stranger to grief herself, Marion lost her first husband in 2008. Learning about Pender from a friend, she fell in love with what would become her healing place. When she introduced Pender to her new husband, Arnie,

Our modern Emergency Treatment Room is there for residents, part-timers and visitors alike, and a testament to the community ongoing determination to ensure quality, local health care.

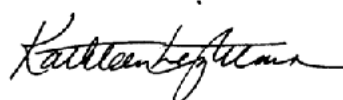
he told her, "We're going home and telling our bosses we're retiring." It proved to be time for Pender, but not quite retirement time for Marion. Since 2019, she has shouldered the responsibilities of the administration of the Centre during COVID-19 and the many major tasks of maintaining and upgrading our building. Her calm, warm, generous manner and easy sense of humour are a balm to all who work with her, and her willingness to roll up her sleeves and 'get 'er' done never ceases to amaze.

Today our 8,401-square-foot facility still provides excellent health care for the growing community. However, now approaching 40, it needs remediation and upgrades to the site, the building, equipment, and the ambulance bay. Donors are already coming forward—Pender's spirit of community giving continues to this day.

It is impossible to name here all of the PIHCS board members who, since the clinic's inception, have donated hundreds of person-years of service to our clinic. Many stories of volunteers and donors, past staff and practitioners past and present remain untold.

With this I have finished telling my history, and now *you* are charged with writing the future of our health care as we move forward during these challenging times

Back in 1984 our clinic's first physician, Dr. Sutherland said—on departing the island—that he was confident in the abilities of the people of Pender who had built and managed their own clinic and substantially changed health care on the islands. Looking back to that first midwife rowing to Pender from Mayne Island and from the opening of our clinic in 1981, I'd say his confidence was well placed.



Kathleen Lightman
President, Pender Islands Health Care Society
Fall 2020

