

Lieutenant-governor Steven Point is driven by literacy

Steven Point and his aide partner in a campaign to deliver books to isolated B.C. communities

BY JONATHAN FOWLIE, VANCOUVER SUN SEPTEMBER 25, 2010



Lt.-Gov. Steven Point reviews the Guard of Honour after installation ceremonies at the BC Legislature in 2007.

Photograph by: Darren Stone, CNS

It started with a simple question, and has blossomed into a campaign that is changing lives.

Not long after being sworn in as lieutenant-governor in October 2007, Steven Point was on a car ride to Whistler, along with honorary aide-de-camp Bob Blacker.

The two were talking about Blacker's work with the Rotary Club, and specifically a series of programs promoting literacy in Third World countries.

"You ever think about bringing books to communities in British Columbia?" Point recalls asking Blacker at the time.

Point said Blacker told him he didn't think any such programs existed within Rotary.

"I said, why not?" Point recalled.

"He said, 'I don't know. I'll ask.'"

Since then, Point and Blacker have partnered in a literacy campaign to bring books to remote and isolated communities throughout B.C.

"It's heartbreaking to see the conditions that our people are living in, but it's heartwarming to see the help that's coming forward," said Point, who has personally visited about a dozen communities to deliver books.

"[A book] is the smallest gift in the world, but it's a big gift," he said. "Literacy is a big gift."

Blacker added that individual Rotary clubs have partnered directly with about nine communities and are working on a variety of projects. For example, in Kingcome Inlet, Rotary is helping the community build a library and learning centre to help spark an interest in reading for young children, and provide resources for older children so they don't have to leave their communities to go to school.

"It's really moved along from a little thought in a car to now it's getting more momentum," Blacker said in an interview Friday. "It's really evolving as we've gone along and it's gathering a lot of steam, and whenever I talk about it to folks they say, 'Well it makes a lot of sense. Why aren't we looking in our own backyard?'"

Point is also running the Write Me A Story program, which has schoolchildren writing stories to go with images provided by Point and his staff. The children then send the stories to Point to read, and he says he has found himself up until 1 a.m. on more than a few nights going through the submissions.

"Kids can be very funny. They think of things you had never dreamed," he said.

"I've got pages of stories from some kids. These guys are going to be writing books by the time they're in high school."

Point said since the Write Me A Story program was launched in 2008, about 2,500 children have participated. He said all the children get their stories back with his signature on them, along with a small memento such as a pencil or sticker. But it is not a contest.

"We just want them to participate," he said. "Everyone who participates gets the same thing and there's no judging on quality. It's just encouraging them to write."

Point said his focus on literacy comes from his time as a Provincial Court judge.

"There's a real correlation between children who are having difficulty in school, who don't do well in school, who end up dropping out of school, who end up getting into trouble," he said.

"The key, I think, is to help communities realize the value of literacy, the value of a good education.

"If we can find ways of impressing upon them that literacy is a good thing, then it might help them to stay the course, stay in school."

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Raise-a-Reader

Help us raise a reader today by making a donation. All proceeds raised for the campaign, which culminates Sept. 29, support public libraries and children's literacy programs in B.C.

There are three ways to donate:

- Online at www.raiseareader.com
- Call 1-866-637-READ (7323) or 604-605-2304
- Mail in a cheque payable to:

The Vancouver Sun Raise-a-Reader, #1 -200 Granville St., Vancouver, B.C., V6C 3N3

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Auction offers sweet deals for sports fans

If you love a deal, get online for Raise-a-Reader's second annual auction -- but do it quickly. Bidding closes at 3 p.m. Monday.

More items have been donated this year, so organizers are hoping this will translate to more money being raised for the literacy program, started 14 years ago by The Vancouver Sun. All money raised goes to support public libraries and children's literacy programs.

About 40 different products and services are being auctioned off, including a few for local sports fans.

- The Ultimate B.C. Lions Fan Package, donated by the Lions, includes an autographed jersey from Geroy Simon, two bronze tickets to one of the remaining games, two pre-game field passes and a photo with coach and GM Wally Buono at same game.
- A Suite Summer Night Out, donated by the Vancouver Canadians, includes seating for 25 people with food and beverages at any Sunday home game next season.
- Every Kid's Canucks Dream" donated by the Vancouver Canucks, offers a chance for a boy or a girl, aged 8 to 13, to lead the Canucks on to the ice for the pre-anthem skate and stand with the starting

lineup during the singing of the national anthem at the Canucks' home game Oct. 22. The package also includes two upper-bowl tickets to watch the game (one for the child and one for a guardian).

Other auction items include a one-year membership to the Vancouver Art Gallery, two tickets to It's a Wonderful Life at the Arts Club Theatre and a one-night stay at the Coast Plaza Hotel with breakfast for two, a value of \$400.

The auction can be found at www.bidforliteracy.com.

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