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Guarding the nest

Former Sidney North Saanich RCMP detachment commander, Gary Lenz is the recipient of the Hearts of the Community award for service to families and children.

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By **Christine van Reeuwyk - Peninsula News Review**
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Gary Lenz is a branch.

The former Sidney North Saanich RCMP detachment commander, now sergeant-at-arms at the BC legislature, recalls a tale told to him by a First Nations chief, while the two toured a waterway.

The chief pointed out an eagles nest, made up of branches; and explained that First Nation culture is like that nest.

"We all circle around and protect what is inside the nest, the old and the young," Lenz recalls being told. "As a chief you have a wider branch, as we get old, these branches fall from the tree."

The chief turned and asked Lenz: "What branch are you going to be?"

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"It's the same for us, we all play a part in that nest. It's up to us to make this world the best as we can," Lenz said.

"We have to ask ourselves where do we fit into that nest, and are we doing all we can to make it strong and make it safe?"

Though he denies it, Lenz has turned out to be a strong, supportive branch, earning him the Hearts of the Community award for service to families and children.

"I'm just one of the many, many branches. I'm not anything special, or the big branch or anything," he said. "It's just something that, there's a need, and a person just steps up and does what they have to do."

He developed and implemented a program that offers education and awareness for young drivers. It required collaboration with the school district, transit, and BCS, to attain availability and accreditation. According to the nomination form: "(He) volunteered with principal advisory committee in aid of collaborative development of much-needed services for youth and families living on the Peninsula." He was also instrumental in providing links to resources for youth and families living on the Peninsula.

"Each one of these items that come up, it's really about reaching out to the community and saying 'we see this, how can we help?'" he said. "This has been a beautiful, incredible community made up of incredible people. Even for a community to put on this kind of an award, and have so many nominations come forward, it speaks milestones about what this community is made up of. The real care of the people ... it really talks about who we are as a community."

Graffiti cleanup was a particularly memorable experience for him. Lenz was among those who created a committee that engaged youth, adults and seniors in support of the cleanup in and around Sidney.

"As much as it's an artistic form that people use ... when it's in inappropriate locations, it makes people feel unsafe," Lenz said. "I created this program through our members, but also through the town of Sidney and Kenny Podmore, he picked up the brush, and we got Beacon Community Services and some youth involved ... and seniors got to see youth out and about doing good work in the community."

Many things come together to create the vision of volunteering that Lenz sees.

Lenz grew up in Lenswood, Manitoba and attended one of those one-room schoolhouses most only see on television, developing close relationships with his neighbours and friends.

"It's real community. How we all got along and how we all lived," he said.

Eventually he joined the UN through the reserves while living in Kelowna, and did work through Egypt and Malaysia. He learned what life was like in underprivileged countries.

After that he joined the RCMP running the local detachment for about eight years.

"My whole life has been helping and serving," Lenz said. "It was part of that same mindset, helping and giving and serving community."

"Any community is like a flower garden, it takes many flowers but no one flower stands out greater than any other," he added. "I think you see that when people volunteer and take pride in their community. It blooms. Sidney is full of beautiful flowers. It blooms and it's a beautiful place to be."

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