

All aboard for a Trestle overhaul

BY SARAH SIMPSON, THE CITIZEN
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Believe it or not, the Cowichan Valley Regional District's board of directors not once, but twice, and maybe even three times according to Board Chair Gerry Giles, voted to tear down the historic Kinsol Trestle. But, on Tuesday, July 6 a small group of dignitaries gathered at the north end of the aged span, and as the birds chirped from the trees overhead and the sun shone down on the trestle and the babbling Koksilah River down below, Giles declared rehabilitation work officially underway.

"It was really a community effort that brought us to today," she said through a beaming smile.

Giles explained how the public spoke up in opposition to the board's demolition plans and how, thanks to the efforts of historian T.W. Paterson and Cobble Hill timber specialist Gord Macdonald, among others, the board was persuaded to rethink their decision.

"There were moments in time that we thought it wouldn't happen," admitted Jack Peake, former CVRD director, now the project's fundraising chair. "For me personally it's absolutely a thrill to be here today. The rehabilitation of this trestle to me is one of the major events on Vancouver Island if not in British Columbia. It's been a long process to get here but we're thrilled to be part of saving this historic structure."

Peake said only \$765,000 of the \$7.5 million needed to complete the rehabilitation is outstanding so, relatively speaking, the fundraising goal is within sight and is actually shrinking every day as donations roll in. In fact, \$5,500 was collected at the site Tuesday morning thanks to a \$5,000 donation from Dave Johel of Johel Brothers Contracting and another \$500 boost from Frank Hartmann Electrical. Every bit counts, said Peake.

"We'll take whatever you've got," he said. "We want to raise every nickel that's required to make this a complete project so that when the ribbon is cut next spring this is a completed restored bridge and we don't have to think about a little more fundraising next year or the year after."

While Peake is busy raising funds, Macdonald said the work on the massive structure is the easy part for him and his colleagues at Macdonald & Lawrence Timber Framing Ltd. As Giles mentioned, Macdonald's firm has been instrumental in moving the process forward, working with the CVRD for about four years to prepare the detailed rehabilitation plans.

"It's been a long road," he admitted. "In many respects I feel like it's just the easy part that's left now -- the restoration project itself."

Macdonald said his company has been fortunate to be able to work on some remarkable projects both in Canada and overseas but he thinks the trestle project is special.

"I can say without hesitation that this is an absolute gem worthy of our pride," he said. "It's a very significant timber structure by any standards so it feels like a real privilege to be a part of this project and it's just magical for us that it happens to be in our own back yard."

A general contractor will soon be announced to undertake construction and installation of the new underslung steel truss walkway atop the trestle. The overall project is expected to create at least 30 direct full-time construction jobs in the Cowichan community. The rehabilitation work will replace unsound timbers, reinforce six structural piers and build a new 614-foot walkway atop the structure for hikers, runners, cyclists and equestrians. The rehabilitation will ensure that the historic characteristics -- the span, height and timbered design qualities -- are preserved as the original timbers get replaced due to age and deterioration. There will be temporary viewing areas created for the public to watch the restoration work as it goes ahead on the north side of the Trestle with access from Riverside Road. The rehabilitation project is on target to be largely completed by March 31, 2011, pending additional funds raised in the coming months, in preparation for an official reopening of the Trestle in late spring, 2011.

"We are going to be the envy of many communities in B.C.," said Giles.

Donations to the Save the Historic Kinsol Trestle rehabilitation project can be made on-line at www.kinsol.ca or by contacting the campaign office at: 250-709-1087.