

## Great ideas are @ Work



**H**undreds of ideas elicited from staff are helping the Ministry of Transportation and Highways improve both its operational efficiency and its balance sheet.

"It's been an impressive showing," says Ray Mau of the Corporate Improvement and Accountability Branch which is reviewing the multitude of suggestions. "And it demonstrates the power of employee participation."

CIAB director Wayne Carr says, in all, almost one in three MoTH staff took up the challenge issued in the wake of restructuring for ideas on how the ministry can save money or increase its revenues.

More than 1,000 ideas were submitted, and after removing those that were duplicates or impractical, 813 were left for review. Of these, 35 per cent are in place or ready to go and another 31 per cent are being worked on.

Forty-seven suggestions have been implemented to date, 28 are in the

process of implementation and 23 are within the ministry's capability to do now. Another 47 are being considered for implementation in a year or two, while 77 are under review and awaiting approval.

Carr says 34 suggestions for revenue or cost-savings are also seeking approval, and another eight are ready for executive or Treasury Board approval.

Ministry Librarian Del Rosario, seconded to work with Carr, says it's important for staff to realize their input and participation are valued and welcome. "The best and most realistic ideas come from the people who do the

day-to-day jobs in the ministry," she says.

Often a solution is simplicity itself, as in one suggestion for staff to turn off their computer monitors at night.

Information Systems Branch Director Floyd Mailhot says BCBC would save about \$70,000 a year if everyone did that. An accumulation of small savings can really make a difference. Another suggestion recommended staff not take their phone number with them when they move to a new work station. Every time a phone line is moved or a number changed it costs the ministry \$125 an

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## New Minister appointed

**T**he new Minister of Transportation and Highways, Hon. Harry S. Lali, is a 41-year-old former employment counsellor and sawmill worker who has represented the constituency of Yale-Lillooet in the provincial legislature since 1991. He takes over from Hon. Lois Boone, who has been placed in charge of the Ministry of Children and Families.

Prior to his appointment to the Cabinet, Lali was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Forests for almost two years.

Born in Jullundur, Punjab, Lali came to Canada at a fairly early age. He attended the University of Victoria and the University of British Columbia, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and South Asian Studies.

He is the founder of a group that established a Chair of Punjabi and Sikh Studies at UBC.

Lali was an employment counsellor for the federally-sponsored Merritt Outreach Program from 1986 until his election to the Legislative Assembly. He also worked for MOSAIC in Vancouver, and spent 11 summers working in the sawmill industry as well as three years as a retail business person.

He served two years on the Merritt City Council, and has been involved in various community activities through membership in the Lions Club, Merritt Recreation Commission and the Merritt Aquatic Facilities Committee.

He and his wife Rani have two children, aged 5 and 6.

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## Message from Minister Lali



Hon. Harry S. Lali

I am both honored and pleased to take on the role of Minister of Transportation and Highways. I recognize the important role our roads play in sustaining our communities, providing jobs to British Columbians and helping people in their daily lives.

Being from Merritt, I drive our highways all the time and see the challenges we face in building and maintaining our roads under difficult geography and weather conditions.

It is your dedication to the highways system that helps make all this possible. I congratulate you on your past efforts and hope to enhance an already hard-working and effective team.

**Hon. Harry S. Lali**  
Minister of Transportation and Highways

## Interior MLA gets top assistant post

Kootenay native son Ed Conroy has been appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transportation and Highways.

Conroy, 51, has represented the Rossland-Trail constituency in the provincial legislature since the 1991 general election.

He is one of two provincial government members appointed to the Pacific Northwest Economic Region Group, or PNWER – a joint U.S.-Canada body that promotes the development of the northwest from Alaska to Oregon and B.C. to Alberta and Montana. Fittingly, he is a member of the group's transportation committee. The other B.C. member is Hon. Ian Waddell, who sits on the executive of the group.

As Parliamentary Secretary, Conroy sees his role as "being of assistance to the minister in any way I can."

Born in Rossland and raised in Castlegar, Conroy attended Selkirk

College at Castlegar and the University of Victoria, where he majored in Political Science and Philosophy.

Prior to his election to the legislature, he was a towboat operator with Westar Timber Ltd. and also owns and operates a purebred cattle farm.

An active community worker, Conroy is past president of the Arrow Lakes Area for Canadian Merchant Service Guild, and has been involved in numerous societies and organizations promoting the economy and quality of life in the west Kootenays.

He and his wife Katrine make their home in Pass Creek. They have four children.



Ed Conroy

## Buettner takes on China assignment

Retired MoTH bridge technician Roy Buettner has traded the comforts of his Victoria home for an adventure in central China.

His address for the next 30 months is a job site in Henan Province where he's helping the Chinese build a freeway near the ancient capital of Luoyang.

Buettner, who retired last March after 32 years with the ministry, was asked by SNC-Lavalin of Montreal to take on the contract, which involves advising on the construction of 34 bridge structures on the highway.

Lavalin is part of a consortium of three companies providing bridge construction expertise for the project, which is funded 50 per cent by the World Bank.

Buettner joins John Peters, a geotechnician who used to be on the Vancouver Island Highway Project and who is engaged as a geotechnical advisor to the Chinese.

Buettner's wife, Donna, and Peters' wife, Joan, have joined their husbands on their never-to-be-forgotten assignment in the Middle Kingdom.

## Fisheries folk grateful for work done in creek

Skeena District has received a Certificate of Gratitude from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for environmental work at CableCar Creek, where a multiplate had to be repaired.

As part of the project, fish baffles were installed to create pools inside the multiplate for fish to rest when travelling upstream. The multiplate was at 67 per cent gradient, which created a velocity difficult for fish to travel up, but with the installation of the baffles that is now corrected.

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## Area manager needs good road savvy and lots of people skills — Laurie has both

Laurie Fulford proves if you are determined enough and smart enough you can accomplish just about anything. She has. Moreover, she has done so in what is ostensibly a man's world.

Fulford is an area manager of roads, one of relatively few women in the position in the province. Her area is Skeena, which she co-manages with Geoff Phillips. At 31, she's been at the job for nearly six years, making her one of the youngest starters in the business.

But Fulford, who was born in Brockville, Ontario, and raised in Vancouver, feels she's doing what comes naturally. An area manager has to have a lot of people skills, and that's her forte, honed by a passion for psychology and an energy level that just won't quit. She says she likes to help people in trouble and solve problems, which is precisely what an area manager has to deal with day in and day out.

When Fulford started with the Ministry as a secretary in the Burnaby regional office, she had no idea what her future would bring. Soon, however, she discovered she had an aptitude for computers, and that opened a door in systems administration. She took part in the Opportunities '90s program, designed to give secretaries engineering experience, and this led to a posting in New Westminster as a development approvals officer. There she met a number of area managers and was so taken with what they did, she decided that would be her career goal. For a year, she shadowed them, especially Lloyd Paulson, on her days off and holidays. Paulson repaid her enthusiasm with the ultimate



A highlight of Laurie's time in Terrace has been the construction of this dike beside the mighty Skeena River. The job involved 2,603 truck loads of riprap and cost more than \$280,000.

Laurie Fulford — woman on the go



compliment — he asked her to look after his area while he was on vacation.

When an area manager trainee position was offered in Nelson, she applied and won handily. A year-and-a-half later an area manager position in the Prince Rupert came open; she applied, and won again, beating out 54 other contenders in a two-day competition. "They were looking for a fast learner, someone with good communications skills, a strong understanding of management and organization, and a methodology to deal with problems," she recalls. She fit all the requirements. She was only 25 at the time.

Laurie is now based in Terrace. Her job involves patrolling her area, inspecting work and job sites, monitoring the road conditions, developing long-term rehabilitation plans for her area, dealing with complaints and inquiries, meeting regularly with the maintenance contractor road foreman to discuss work plans and deficiencies, investigating serious highway accidents, and ensuring the safety of the travelling public.

The work has been extra challenging, because to gain acceptance, she says, she's had to prove herself much more than a man would in the same position. It's built determination, stamina, confidence and character.

Fulford says she doesn't shirk from manual work. "I've found that by physically getting involved, even in the worst possible work situation, it'll earn you a lot of respect from the crew and foreman."

A big part of her job is building rapport with the maintenance contractors, developing a team approach, something, she says, Paulson taught her well.

"You can't power trip," she says. "You've always got to remember they are people too. They get dressed one pant leg at a time, just like we all do."

# There's no business like snow business

Avalanche danger is ever present over winter but the danger is often highest in the month of February

For Bruce Allen, there's no business like the snow business. He's been in it, on occasion up to his armpits, for the better part of 20 years. One of eight Ministry avalanche technicians posted around the province, Bruce looks after the Selkirk District, a vast, sparsely populated, mountainous region centred in Revelstoke and stretching to the Alberta border.

He and his four-member crew are dedicated to minimizing the risk of avalanches crashing down onto the roads and endangering the lives of travelers.

They rely heavily on direct observation - how the snow looks and feels - as well as the knowledge gained through on-the-job experience. The size and shape of snow crystals tell a lot as do the layer boundaries that mark each succeeding snowfall. Temperature variations within the snowpack are also crucial clues to the relative strength or weakness of the snow, says Allen, whose standard field equipment includes both pocket magnifier and thermometer.

Technology is helping improve forecasts. Eight electronic weather stations have been installed in remote locations around the district. They transmit hourly air temperature,

precipitation, wind speed and direction, humidity and snowpack temperature measured at 20-cm intervals to a depth of four metres

With the aid of a computer program called *StormPro*, avalanche technicians interpret the data. Allen keeps a computer at bedside, so he can monitor the weather whenever necessary. He also has a portable computer with him in his truck. "Over winter, this is a 24-hour-a-day job," he says.

Often he has to survey the snow packs from helicopter and up to 20 times a year will drop bombs onto snowy slopes to initiate controlled avalanches. It is better to set off small avalanches than wait for a big one to occur on its own, he says.

February is historically the worst month for avalanches, followed by December. But from November to April there's not much opportunity to relax vigilance.

An expert skier, Allen once worked in the heli-ski industry. In his youth while on ski patrol he had a few close shaves with avalanches. A couple of times he got caught, but was never completely buried.

There's only one thing to do when threatened by an avalanche, he says - head straight downhill as fast as you can and turn in an arc to get outside its path.

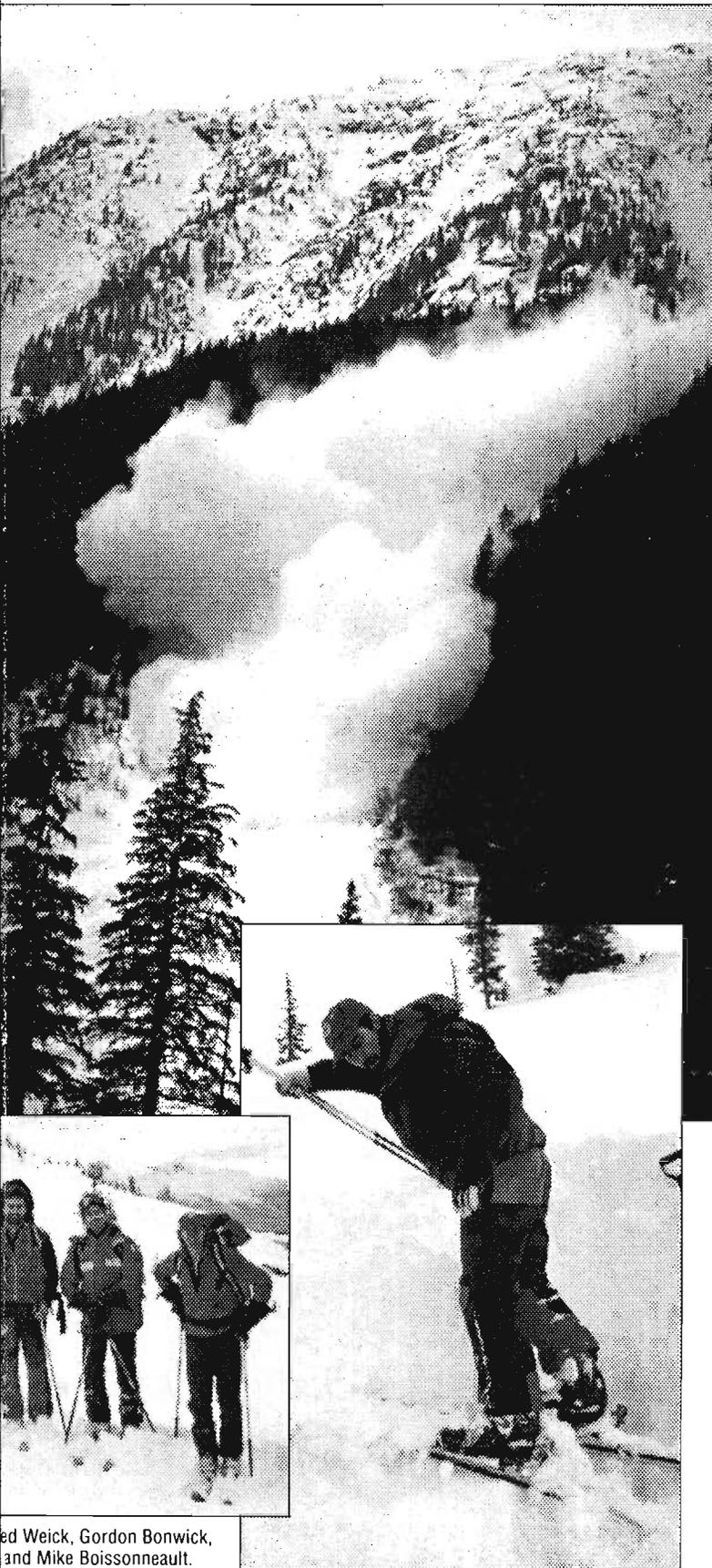


Former Maintenance Branch director Bill Bedford, assistant avalanche technician Willy Geary and Avalanche aid Kevin Marr at a 105mm recoilless rifle station in Kootenay Pass.

At right, heli-bombing sets off massive avalanche on the Coquihalla. Below right, Snow Avalanche Programs Manager Jack Bennetto tests a slope using the Rutschblock technique.



Participating in an orientation session are, left to right, Ted Cam Rawlinson, Scott Aitken, Jack Bennetto, Doug Tuck and



ed Weick, Gordon Bonwick,  
and Mike Boissonneault.

## Great Ideas

Continued from page 1

hour labor and \$50 per phone.

Carr says as a result of suggestions received from staff, the ministry is now charging for cellular telephone repeater sites along highway rights of way. A new fee schedule for service and attraction signs has been established. Video conferencing centre revenues have increased. Freedom of Information requests for routinely available information are now chargeable at FOI rates. And the ministry's Print Shop is selling manuals and other publications it prints, a move that boosts revenues by \$35,000 to \$50,000 a year.

Carr says total cost savings and new revenues are expected to reach around \$5 million in the next fiscal year. And that means more money for fixing roads and saving ministry jobs.

"We are starting to see incremental increases," he says. "Once a suggestion is in place, it seems to take on a life of its own. There are all sorts of downstream benefits. It's almost a multiplier effect."

Ideas have continued to flow in. "Many employees believe finding ways to do things better is just part of their job," Carr says. And it's a part of the ministry's culture as well.



If you have an idea that streamlines work processes, generates revenues, increases productivity or reduces ministry costs, the Corporate Improvement and Accountability Branch would like to hear about it. Contact branch director Wayne Carr at headquarters in Victoria, send him a Bmail, or phone (250) 356-0952.

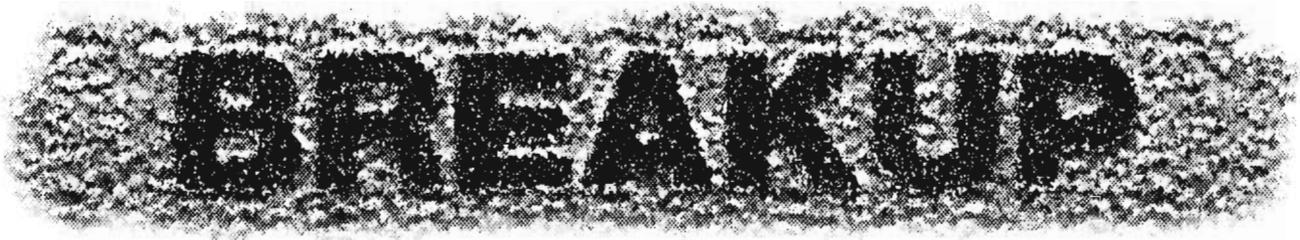
You may also submit ideas to the government-wide Employee Recognition Program. For more information, contact your local Human Resources office.

Each idea received at the CIAB is given a reference number. It is reviewed and evaluated by a project leader working with an area expert. If an idea is judged feasible, the necessary approvals will be sought, and once obtained, the idea will be implemented. If an idea is discarded, documentation will detail the reasons why and the file is closed.

In future issues, the Road Runner will provide updates on the campaign, on ideas that have been implemented and on savings that have been realized. Current status of ideas may be found in the file !suggest/costav.xls.

Don't let a good idea go to waste. Share it.

# ROAD



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**Recent weather patterns have devastated farming and affected the booming local oil and gas industry, making it difficult to move equipment over a road system that can't bear heavy loads.**

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## **Region 4 develops a plan to deal with a crisis in road maintenance in the beleaguered Peace River District**

Take a weather pattern so severe it prevents routine road maintenance for a couple of years, and you've got a crisis on your hands. That's what has happened in Peace River in northeastern B.C. where three years of wet weather have turned much of the district into a virtual bog.

District Highways Manager Bruce MacKay says in many places the water table is almost at the surface, unheard of for this time of year. The late arrival of winter's deep freeze - it came around New Year's Day - didn't help matters. Ditches, full of water, froze solid, and mini glaciers crept across road surfaces, adding to maintenance woes.

The weather has devastated farming and affected the booming local oil and gas industry, which is finding it difficult to move equipment over a road system that can't bear heavy loads.

Bill Rose, the regional project manager based in Prince George, says the underlying clay soil found in the area provides an effective sub-base if roads are constructed or covered when the weather's dry, but not in periods of wet. Then the landscape turns into gumbo, stopping everything in its tracks.

Maintenance difficulties are compounded by a paucity of gravel. Miles Webster, regional manager of professional services and planning says there is such a shortage that the local description of a gravel pit is "a place where two rocks are found together."

Yet Regional Director Kathie Miller notes North and South Peace districts have proportionately more gravel roads than anywhere in the province. Between them they have 11 per cent of the provincial road inventory and 22 per cent of the gravel roads.

Webster says traditionally road maintenance has involved applying a thin layer of gravel to the main roads once every three years. However, the weather over the past two years has prevented this from being carried out in many places. And that's why there are problems today.

Last summer the Minister responded to the crisis by allocating a special fund of \$2.6 million, followed by another allocation of \$700,000 to increase gravel stocks.

Miller says the solution lies in developing a specific strategic plan that identifies which roads should be targeted for investments. Public consultation has been an important part of the process.

There are more than 4,000 km of rural roads in the district, and while some are well used, many are not, and ministry resources can't maintain them all. Thus, the need to be more selective, to sealcoat or pave most-used sections, while providing minimum maintenance to the less-used roads.

"We need to concentrate on building a functional network," says Webster. And it's a challenge the region can't delay in meeting.

## Doyle has seen great changes over the years but quality of staff has stayed high

There are few people around who have seen more of the province than Dan Doyle, assistant deputy minister of Highways Operations. And there are none around who know the highway system better.

In his 29 years (and counting) with the ministry, Doyle has served as district engineer in McBride, district highways manager in New Denver and Kamloops, regional maintenance engineer in Nanaimo, and regional highways director in Terrace and Vancouver before his appointment to his current position, which he has held since 1989. He has supported eight premiers, 15 ministers and 10 deputy ministers.

Doyle, who holds a civil engineering degree from UBC, says only one thing has remained constant over the years and that's been the phenomenal

dedication he has seen in the highways staff. "Despite the changes, I still have the sense that our real strength is the quality of our people," he says.

Doyle has witnessed great change in the ministry and in the highway system. His recipe for dealing with change, he says, is always to stay ahead of it, and never behind it.

One of the biggest changes has been the expectation the public has of highway services. "The more we improve our service, the greater the demand on services becomes," he says. For example, the ministry didn't use to sand or salt roads, but now the public expects it to be part of regular winter maintenance.

Doyle says over the years he's learned it's performance not paper qualification



Dan Doyle

that counts most in a job, that and a sense of commitment and dedication. He owes a lot to a road foreman with little formal education who guided him in his early days. "He had the patience to take a young engineer and let him do things, to touch the hot stove," says Doyle. "It took time to train me, but he did."

## Taking on challenge all in day's work for Nyland

As a geological engineer specializing in geophysics, Dirk Nyland, regional director of the North West Region, understands how natural forces change the earth. In a 25-year career with the ministry, he has applied his knowledge on a wide variety of projects, from the Coquihalla to the Nisga'a Highway.

Since 1981 he has been based in Terrace, and since last April director of the region, overseeing highway operations in a territory so vast his native Holland would fit into a tiny sliver of it. At the time of his appointment he was regional manager of professional services, and has continued in that position as well.

From contending with change on a geologic scale, Nyland is now devoting his time to managing change at the human level as the region deals with the effects of restructuring and downsizing.



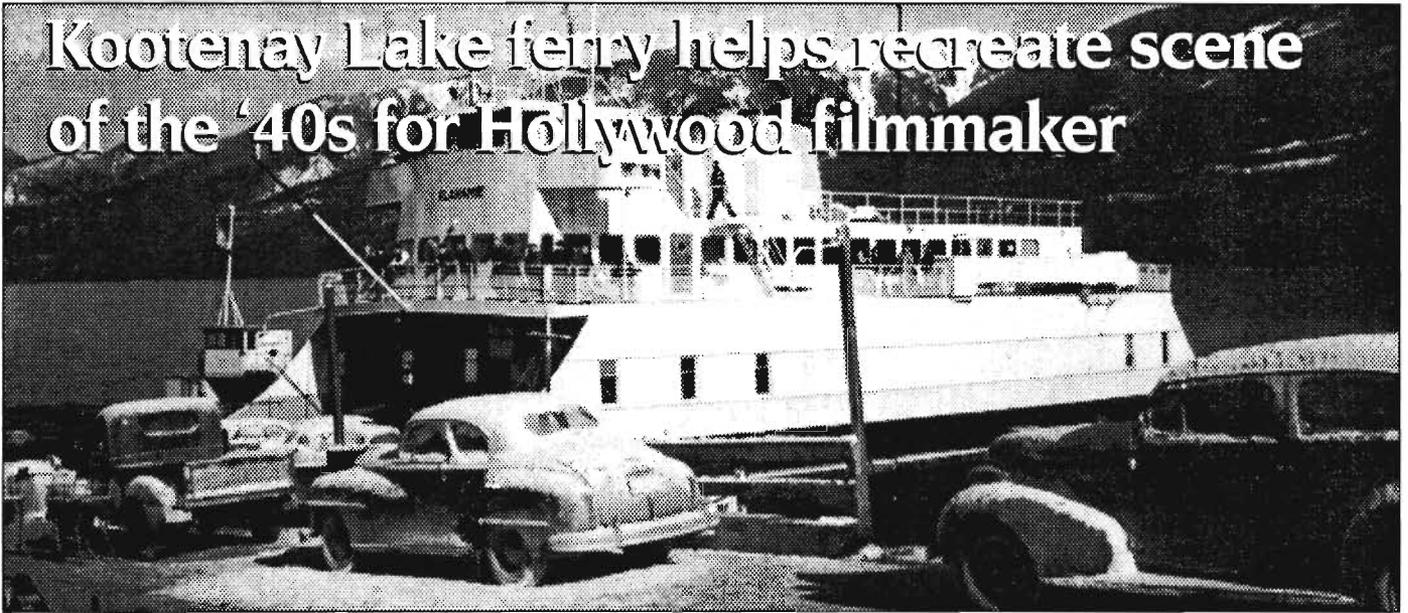
Dirk Nyland

Highways Operations have been particularly impacted, and Nyland's response has been to reshape groups into cohesive, multitalented teams, stressing versatility among his 145-member staff.

Like most people who choose to live in the north country, Nyland isn't one to shrink from challenges. Nature has supplied plenty — extremes of weather, rugged mountains, deep fjords, and fast-flowing waters give the North West its distinctive stamp. Here, the holy grail is a good quality gravel source. Here roadbuilders are challenged by coastal erosion, landslides, avalanches and rock cuts. Here resourcefulness is a way of life.

And it's a way of life that has kept Nyland in the north raising his family, enjoying the outdoors and meeting the growing demands of the job.

## Kootenay Lake ferry helps recreate scene of the '40s for Hollywood filmmaker



**M**V Anscomb, the flagship of the Marine Branch's Kootenay Lake service and oldest operating vehicle/passenger ferry in British Columbia, was taken over recently by a Hollywood filmmaker for a big screen production.

Columbia Studios used the ship for shooting scenes for *Snow Falling on Cedars*, a film based on the best-selling novel by David Guterson.

The ship was made to appear as a late-1940s Washington State Ferry on Puget Sound, setting of Guterson saga about Japanese internment on the west coast.

Modern equipment and fixtures notwithstanding, the 170-foot ship is a genuine product of that era. Its keel was laid in Nelson in 1946 and the next year it entered service between Balfour and Kootenay Bay, replacing the Nasookin, the last of the sternwheelers on the main lake crossing.

Except for a major refit in the early '70s when the engines were replaced and house works - the superstructure and sides - were modified, the ship, which has a capacity of 40 vehicles and 150 passengers, has been going strong ever since.

The slightly smaller MV Balfour joined the route in 1954, expanding service over

peak summer season and providing much needed backup.

Usually the Balfour is retired for the off-season, but it was brought into service while the movie scenes were being shot.

Captain Al DeYaeger, Marine Manager, Kootenay Operations, says the movie makers liked the Anscomb, named after Herbert Anscomb, Minister of Public Works from 1941 to 1945, because of its authentic look - the car deck, centre seating and especially wheelhouse replete with bridge wings.

Another plus for choosing Nelson was a local language school which caters almost exclusively to students from Japan. Several were cast as extras.

Kootenay Marine Branch staff never got any roles as extras, but they played significant parts nonetheless, albeit behind the scenes operating the vessel.

Vintage cars line up to board the Anscomb made to look like a Washington State ferry of the 1940s. Below, the crew who made the scenes possible are from left, engineer Don Mucha, Captain Don MacKinnon, deckhands Buck Crawford, Keith Milne and Bob Sears, mate Paul Moreau, oiler Boris Faraguna and Kootenay marine manager Al DeYaeger.



rechristened the Klahamie for the occasion.

Capt. DeYaeger says preparations for the filming had taken months and involved meticulous planning. The scenes were shot in just one day, and then it was back to the '90s.

He says the filmmaker has fully reimbursed the ministry for all costs.