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FEATURES

RCMP Musical Ride canters onto the Coast July 30

Cathie Roy/Associate Publisher

Dashing officers in red serge, brilliant black horses and cavalry manoeuvres set to rousing music — the one and only RCMP Musical Ride is coming for the first time ever to the Lower Sunshine Coast for a performance July 30.

Right now the Ride is touring in northern B.C.

Sgt. Karen Miller is the officer who trained the Musical Ride. Originally from Nova Scotia she's been a member of the RCMP for 26 years including a three-year stint in North Vancouver. Miller and the Ride were in Quesnel on Tuesday when she spoke with Coast Reporter.

"I joined the Ride in 1997. I was a member of it until 2000 then I spent some time in Ottawa. In 2005 I was privileged to come back as an instructor/trainer. I was recently made sergeant, first female to do so on the Ride. The two corporals on the Ride who report to me are both women as well, another historical first."

The Ride features 32 riders travelling with 36 horses, a farrier and other personnel. Riders are, according to official handouts, "first and foremost" police officers who have at least two years of active police work before joining the Ride. Most of them are non-riders before training with the equestrian team. The riders can remain with the troop for a maximum of three years.

The Musical Ride performances feature the 32 riders and an officer in charge.

The horses are predominantly black with the odd one having white markings. The mounts range in age from six years to 25. Hector, the officer's horse, has senior horse distinction.xxxx"Hector doesn't actually do the show. He just basically falls asleep until it's time to go back to the barn," Miller laughed.

For Miller, touring with the prime public relations arm of Canada's national police force is an amazing job. She has toured all over Canada and internationally. One trip in particular made a huge impression on her.

"In Switzerland we had crowds of 10,000 every night. They made us feel like rock stars," she recalled.

In her home country it's going into small communities like ours that touches her heart.

"It makes you really proud to show what we have to offer. We get to see the smiles on the people's faces. We

are the best PR tool the RCMP has,” she said.

Any talk of budget cuts reducing the Ride makes her shudder. “That’s the worst thing [the Force] could do. We’re up there with Coca Cola and Disneyland for recognition,” she said.

For Staff Sgt. Herb Berdahl, the Sunshine Coast detachment commanding officer, it’s a great honour to have the Ride come here.

“It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity for a lot of people who might never otherwise get a chance to see it,” he said.

And although he’s been a member of the Force for 36 years, Berdahl first saw the Musical Ride at the Olympics in 2010, the last time the spectacle was in B.C. He wants all Coast citizens to be able to meet the riders and horses. And there are many opportunities to do so.

The public is welcome to meet some of the riders and horses at the Chaster Creek Farm & Stables at 805 Payne Rd. in Gibsons on Monday, July 29, from 5 to 9 p.m. and again on July 30 from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. People will be able to pet the horses and speak to the riders.

The District of Sechelt is holding a reception for the riders on July 29 at the Seaside Centre, and folks are invited to attend. There will be free refreshments and treats for the youngsters. See details at www.district.sechelt.bc.ca.

The big event is scheduled to kick off at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, July 30, at Dempster Field next to the Gibsons Community Centre. The opening acts will be the Coast Cow Girls followed by the Irish Pipes and Drums from Vancouver. Cost for the show is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. Tickets are going fast, available at all the IGAs on the Coast as well as all branches of the Sunshine Coast Credit Union. All net proceeds from the event will go towards the Rotary rooms in the new extension of St. Mary’s Hospital.

Berdahl is pleased that the event will have participation from all four Rotary Clubs on the Coast. As is perhaps fitting, the Rotary Club of the Sunshine Coast - Sechelt with current president, Gerry Webb, retired RCMP sergeant, is the official host organization for the Ride. But without the help of the Gibsons, Pender Harbour and Sechelt clubs, this mammoth undertaking would be very difficult.

“I made a pitch to get [the Ride] here, but without the Rotary, it wouldn’t have gone anywhere. I’ve been so impressed with the groups’ professionalism,” Berdahl emphasized.

Along with local businesses that have supplied everything from hay to port-a-potties at cost or free, Chaster Creek Farm has been a godsend. The event is truly the result of a community pulling together. Berdahl was also grateful to the baseball community.

“Dempster Field is basically a shrine to baseball — for the local group to step up and allow the ride on the field is a true blessing,” Berdahl stated.

If you’re planning to attend the show on July 30, be aware that parking will be at a premium in the surrounding area. Wherever possible, make plans to take public transport or car pool. Only specified VIPs’ cars and vehicles with handicapped designation will be allowed to park at the Community Centre.

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