

Vernon Lawn Bowling Club turns 100

Article by Club Publicist David Nagy

Images of the Centennial Gala by Club Photographer Gary Monk

The Vernon Lawn Bowling Club revealed one of its biggest secrets as it turned 100 in 2017.

Club president Jack Phillips addressed the gathering at the clubhouse and told the story about a long-time member.

“He was a guy who won every club championship numerous times. He was known for carrying a little black book, which he regularly consulted during games.

“Whenever he stood on a mat, faced with a difficult situation, he would take out this little book, study it for a moment, and make a brilliant shot.

Eventually the member died, and there was great interest in this book, Phillips added.

“Many members of the club approached the man’s widow, asking what she planned to do with this legendary book.”

Phillips said the widow – a shrewd woman who was also in need of funds – decided to auction off the book. The auction was held at the club, and after some very-spirited bidding, a member who had often finished second to the now-deceased champion, took possession of the much sought-after and now quite expensive book.

“He could scarcely wait to take the book home and look at its pages,” said Phillips.

“He sat himself down in his study and began to leaf through the pages.



Special Centennial wine and Golden Bowls were shown at the Gala on May 26, 2017. Below, Vernon Mayor Akbal Mund assists Club President Jack Phillips in cutting the Centennial cake.



“He found that the pages were blank, until he came across a single page with one sentence on it that said, ‘Small circle on the inside.’ ”

And the crowd roared with laughter.



Richard Prys-Jones shows Vernon Lawn Bowling Club's Centennial Flag at the Gala. Below, long-time member Jack Andersen delivers one of the Golden Bowls.



Phillips said the Gala was 20 months in the making, with the Centennial committee having its first meeting in September 2015.

From its beginning, the Vernon club was known as a pioneer in lawn bowling in British Columbia.

Historical records say it is the oldest club in the Interior.

The original Vernon lawn bowling green was built by the Vernon Amateur Athletic Association, and was the first green constructed in the Interior.

The Vernon club's marquee event in 2017 was its Centennial Gala, held at the clubhouse on May 26.

Dignitaries in attendance included Vernon's Mayor Akbal Mund and many long-time former members. The club's home is in the downtown Polson Park in Vernon.

About 100 people in total attended the celebration which included the raising of the club's Centennial flag, the singing of O Canada, short speeches and a toast to the past and future of the club.

Club President Jack Phillips delivered an official welcome to the guests.

"One reason to love lawn bowling, is it's very similar to curling. We have a lot of fun with it, it is very sociable, and it's warm, eh?" Phillips said as part of his address to the crowd on a typically warm Okanagan afternoon in May.



Club members and guests play a short four-end celebration game at the Gala. Below, Centennial cakes await enjoyment.

Golden Bowls were delivered by Mayor Lund and long-time member Jack Andersen.

Prior to the Gala, Phillips said he received a call from a grandson of L.G. Drew, a former member whose name appears several times on the Vernon Lawn Bowling Club President's Honour Roll. Drew served six terms as club president from 1927 to 1934.

The club has a trophy bearing the name of L.G. Drew.

"It's really interesting because (Second Vice-President and Assistant Groundskeeper) Moe Ball, his grandfather (Thomas Martin) bowled here as well," said Phillips.

Mr. Phillips hoped Mr. Ball and the member of the Drew family, who lives at Armstrong, would sit down together and compare notes about their grandparents' involvement with the club.



Richard Prys-Jones thanked Mr. Phillips for his address. Frank Anderson and Richard Prys-Jones unfurled and showed the club's Centennial flag.

"Going back in time, there was a crest that we found on (the club equipment shed) 'Jack's Shack' and it was resurrected. And with that over time, pins were made and the ladies on the committee took it a step forward, and (created) our flag with our banner year 1917 to 2017," Mr. Anderson told the crowd.

Anderson then hoisted the flag onto the club flagpole, and all gathered for the singing of O Canada. Guests then enjoyed Armstrong-based Edge of the Earth Vineyard wine and the Centennial cake prepared for the occasion.

A Commemorative plaque was presented to Mayor Lund and special pins were given to honoured guests. Late-afternoon music was provided by Molly Boyd and Sally Evans.

The club had its historical artifacts and trophies on display in the clubhouse. Some of the memorabilia had been shown at the Okanagan Regional Library branch in Vernon for several weeks.



Centennial Flag flies on the clubhouse. Below, Mayor Akbahl Mund talks with long-time member John Taylor.



Attendees also took part in an Invitational Prize Spider competition, a short four-end celebration game, and viewed a club historical video and memorabilia.

Efforts to create a lawn bowling club in Vernon began with meetings in 1917. Surveying for the bowling green in Polson Park in was done by Pat Cumming, with grading done by Joe Harwood's company. Play started in 1919.

Regular bowling at the Vernon club occurs on alternating days through the week during the bowling season.

Tournaments and club competitions are held evenings and on weekends.



Members and guests listen to presentation at the Gala. Below and next page, members gather on the green for the singing of O Canada.

The Vernon club is one of several in the Interior at which regular summer tournaments are held. In the club's very busy Centennial Year, 14 tournaments are planned.

The club will also host lawn bowling competitions for the 2017 B.C. 55+ Senior Games. The lawn bowling season officially kicked off in May.

A report in the Vernon

News in 1920 stated, "The V.A.A.A. has been strengthened by the addition of another club which will operate under its banner this season. At a well-attended meeting, with D.A. McBride in the chair, the Vernon Lawn Bowling Club was formed and judging from the enthusiasm manifested it will take an important place in the association's activities this summer," the report added.



In 1926 the Vernon Amateur Athletic Association ceased to function and the Vernon Bowling Club took control of the green. During the same year, the Interior Lawn Bowling Association was formed and opening tournament held at Revelstoke.



Tournaments continue to be held throughout the Interior every season with Vernon bowlers winning their share of trophies and prizes.

Some historical highlights from the 1930s include a visit by Mainland bowlers from Vancouver in a goodwill tour of the Interior.

An early honour earned by the club was the election of Vernon member Arthur B. Godfrey as honorary president of the B.C. Lawn Bowling Association in 1931.

Also in 1931 Tom Martin won the Interior of B.C. Singles Championship.

Also in the 1930s the club hosted 43 South African bowlers on their Dominion-wide tour.

The South Africans declared Vernon's lawn bowling green as among the finest in Canada.

The club expanded its original building in the 1930s, adding a dining room for entertainment and visitors.

In the 1946 the clubhouse interior was renovated with the installation of lockers. A ladies' lounge and new restrooms were added in 1953.



The present clubhouse was also constructed in the 1990s at a cost of \$150,000. Of that amount, \$100,000 was contributed by Greater Vernon Parks and Recreation and the rest by the club. It opened for use in 1997.



Also in the 1990s the green facilities were upgraded to tournament size.

The club's original clubhouse, shown above, in use since the 1920s – which was also Vernon's first post office – was returned to near its original location in downtown Vernon.

- *Details of the Centennial Gala reported by David Nagy, with background from archives*
 - *Gala Photographs by Gary Monk*
- *Page 7 images of Original clubhouse and present-day clubhouse by David Nagy*

