

# Service above Self recognized in Beaver Valley

Beaver Valley Rotary is the 2016 BV Citizen of the Year.

Representing (from left): Werner Heitmann, Bert Ernst and Dick Bilenki.

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If you look around the village there's traces of the Beaver Valley Rotary Club, everywhere.

From "Welcome to Fruitvale" signs to the town clock on main street and giggles from kids playing in Creekside Park (former Beaver Valley Rotary Park), people waiting in bus shelters or eyeing the blossoms in planters and flower beds – too many contributions to list in one go.

Then there's all the unseen benefactors both locally and internationally behind 62 years of placing "Service above Self" like

scholarship recipients, sports teams and youth groups to people stricken with medical conditions, no matter the age or country.

Those are just a few reasons why the Beaver Valley Rotary Club has been named 2016 BV Citizen of the Year.

"This year, rather than recognizing only one person or a couple, the committee's decision was to recognize an organization," said Grace Terness, on behalf of the selection committee. "We could not have chosen a more deserving group. Within this club there are many individuals, past and present, who would be eligible for this award in their own right and by choosing the Beaver Valley Rotary Club, we are recognizing each and every individual as a dedicated Beaver Valley citizen."

Everyone is welcome to the public ceremony slated for Friday, 7 p.m. in the Beaver Valley curling rink. Terness encourages all past recipients, Rotarians, former Rotarians and residents from throughout the region to come and pay homage to the club members, many who've gathered for decades every Thursday evening for a 6:15 p.m. dinner meeting that opens with grace and closes with "O Canada."

The award is an honour, though bittersweet for the club's 12 remaining members.

Come June 30, the Beaver Valley Rotary Club, established Sept. 15, 1954 – will be no more.

The organization is folding due to lack of volunteers.

Werner Heitmann has been with the group for 54 years, dedicating countless Thursday nights and untold weekends to fundraising for local and international causes.

"It was a very formal occasion to be asked to join Rotary, a great honour," recalled Heitmann, mentioning new members had to be sponsored by two Rotarians and were subject to an interview. "The principles of Rotary were very appealing," he said, voice thick with emotion. "If you wanted to help out the community, be with a group of friends, and 'Service above Self,' that was very appealing at that time, (but) not much appealing, anymore."

Bert Ernst joined the BV club as a young father and professional almost 30 years ago. Though he's disheartened the lack of volunteers has the group disbanding, Ernst was reminded of an earlier conversation with his friend, Werner.

"Being a long time member, Werner actually nailed it on the head a couple of months ago," said Ernst. "He stood up and said, 'Look, I am not disappointed, we've done a lot of great things in the community. However times change, how you raise funds has changed and volunteerism changes. But we've done a lot of great things.'"

While Beaver Valley May Days will be in full swing Friday through Sunday, there's one Saturday afternoon offering that will be off the menu for the first time in decades – Rotarians standing over an open pit, barbecuing beef to slather in a bun.

"That was the most continuous (event) we did for many years," Ernst said. "We'd be there all day, all the money went to the May Days committee – but for the first time in 50 years, we are not doing it this time."

Since raising funds for the Fruitvale Health Unit in 1965 (now the village office), Beaver Valley Manor in the 1970s, the new Beaver Valley Library in the 1980s and the Kelowna Cancer Lodge in the 1990s, each year the group donated funds for scholarships to local schools, athletics, and worked in partnership with other Rotaries and Rotary International, to eradicate polio world wide.

After so many years of Rotarian service, Heitmann isn't ready to hang up his volunteer hat just yet.

"Always finish one phase and start another one," he said, noting his options are still open. "You work, retire, then start something new again, that's how life functions," Heitmann chuckled. "Then I have my wife, she sure knows how to keep me busy."

This year's festivities kick off Friday with a seniors' tea party at Beaver Valley Manor