

## Happy 110th birthday, Westbank!

WEDNESDAY, 17 AUGUST 2010 10:00 STEVE MACNAULL

Westbank kinda missed its centennial, so the community made a big deal of its 110th birthday on Saturday.

"The Historic Westbank Association wasn't formed until 2008, so we weren't even around for Westbank's 100th in 2003," explained president Gordon Ficke at the festivities.

"From what I understand, there was a group of about 100 who had dinner at the Westbank Community Hall to mark the centennial, but it wasn't well publicized or well attended. So, we decided let's celebrate 110 and make up for it today."

Events were concentrated in and around Lions Westbank Community Hall on Main Street, starting with a pancake breakfast and the farmers market with children's activities such as games and bouncy castles.

When the barbecues were fired up for lunch, the 110th-birthday cake also came out.

In the hall, five groups displayed historical information, photos and artifacts - Westbank Museum, Gellatly Nut Farm, Okanagan Archive Trust, Westbank First Nation and Westbank Packers.

Saturday night, there was a dinner dance at the hall for 300 with live music by The Ogopogo Locos.

The exact age of Westbank is up for debate.

"Well, the First Nation people have been here for we don't know how long," said Historic Westbank Association member Jason Bednar. "They knew a beautiful place when they saw it."

The first white settlement dates as far back as 1811, when the Fur Brigade Trail went through the area and set up a small trading post here.

The first townsite was laid out where downtown Westbank is now in 1900 with four-hectare plots for some of the first settlers.

Based on that year, Westbank would now be 113 years old.

However, the Historic Westbank Association is using the 1903 date that the community got its first post office and the Westbank postmark for its official counting.

Being an unincorporated area under the Regional District of Central Okanagan for so long also muddied the waters.

The town was called Westbank, and the larger area on that side of Okanagan Lake was geographically termed Westside.

Westbank and the Westside liked to pride themselves on being a separate and distinct community from Kelowna although, in many ways, Westbank and Westside were Kelowna bedroom communities.

Many out-of-towners simply thought Westbank and Westside were part of Kelowna.

The proximity to larger Kelowna couldn't be shaken even when the area became its own municipality in 2008 and ironically picked the name West Kelowna rather than a moniker that would have given it more separation.

It all means West Kelowna can mark its centennial in 2108 and Westbank, which a lot of people still call the town anyways, can lay claim to much longer tenure.

"Westbank is my home, where I grew up," said Bednar.

"I don't want to see it erased from the map. It's always been known as Westbank. My mail comes to a Westbank address, and the address on my driver's licence says Westbank."



Sheila Paynter holds up an old antique horse collar, resting on a saddle from 1919, during Westbank's 110th birthday celebration Saturday at the Lions Westbank Community Hall.

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