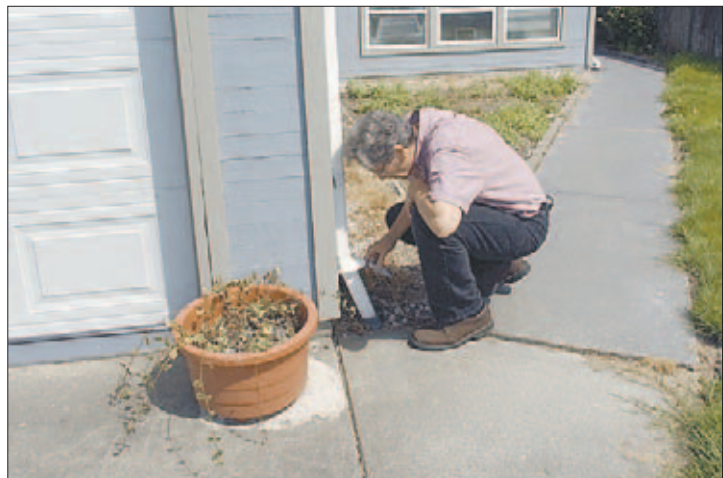


## THE DAILY SPECIAL



BILL KEAY/VANCOUVER SUN

John Schiffer checks out a fence, which seems to need support.



BILL KEAY/VANCOUVER SUN

He also looks for problems with exterior drainage.



BILL KEAY/VANCOUVER SUN

Schiffer talks things over with Scott Meixner, a first-time buyer.

will not be able to find them.

"We often liken a home inspection to an examination by your family doctor — the inspection will reduce the possibility of problems, but sometimes only deeper, more invasive examination can eliminate them completely."

Dickie said his company policy is to have clients accompany him on the inspection, so they know what they're facing.

"They're standing there and they're looking straight at it," he said.

Moore said buyers have four choices. They can swallow the extra expenses if they really want the house; ask to negotiate a reduced price; try to negotiate a reduced price; ask the vendor to make the repairs; opt to look for another house.

In rarer cases, particularly when there's a bidding war and the owner can stipulate no subjects in the offer, purchasers may hire an inspector after the fact.

And, of course, sellers often have inspections, so they know what they have to do, or how much to lower the asking price of the house.

As well as doing these types of reports, inspectors like Peter Link of Surrey-based Peter Link and Associates, will act as a consultant to home owners who want to know what is wrong with their house so they can fix it.

"Because we have disciplines right across the whole gamut, we're the natural people to call in."

As well, said Link, he could also supervise contractors doing repair work to make sure its done properly.

"They have the materials, but you still have to put it together and that's a problem for a lot of people," Schiffer said. "They like to do this stuff, but they really don't understand it."

Both Schiffer and Burnett agree that the most expensive repairs, by and large, have to be made in the case of poor electrical work, again usually done by amateurs.

"All they do is pull a few wires and hook up here and hook it up over there and if it works then you've done it right," said Burnett. "They don't even realize that the electrical box could get overheated if you have too much stuff in it."

Schiffer said that if he discovers a safety hazard he not only has to tell his client, usually the buyer, but also the listing agent of the property as well, otherwise he could be liable if the house burns down.

Burnett said that redoing wiring — including removing drywall and then replacing it — can very quickly become a major expense.

Another problem, particularly in the Lower Mainland, is old knob and tube wiring, which insurance companies want replaced.

"And that can get really expensive," said Schiffer. "Depending on the size of the house, I've seen it be anywhere from \$5,000 to \$25,000 to rewire."

The worst room in the house is generally agreed to be the bathroom.

"In 80 per cent of the homes I inspect, I find moisture in the bathroom," said Moore. "People don't maintain a proper level of caulking, they don't seal the grout in the shower stalls — and a crack in the grout or broken grout can let water seep in behind the tile and cause a lot of moisture damage."

Burnett said that he was in a Bridgeview home where a shower stall had leaked.

"The paint was bubbled on the outside of the house where the shower stall was and I was poking holes in it and the water was running out," said Burnett. "And that whole wall was just completely rotted right out."

Peeking into attics can be dangerous for home inspectors. They can encounter everything from wasps nests to bat and rodent droppings.

"On Bowen Island, I opened an attic access lid and it just rained droppings," said Burnett. "I looked up and there must have been 30 bats, little tiny guys, right above my head and they're hard to get rid of."

Schiffer said clients are always worried that he will find structural problems in the house.

"In reality, that's the least likely to cost them money," he said. "Most problems are not structural problems. Most of the money is in all of the interior stuff — the plumbing wearing out, the electrical, worn floorings, outdated windows."

"People will ask me, 'Are there any structural problems?' and I'll say 'No, but there's \$150,000 worth of work to bring it back up.'"

The big misconception, added Schiffer, is that a new house is the best to buy because there are no problems.

"I do a lot of new places and there is always a page of deficiencies," he said, adding that some contractors just build too quickly to do a proper job.

Schiffer said he has seen huge decks with joist hangers that should have had a dozen nails but

had just two or three.

Recently, he saw a new, \$2-million house where the work was so bad the client just walked away. The tubs in all the bathrooms, for example, would have leaked the second they were used.

"Superficially, just taking a quick walk through the house, it looked fine. But when you spent more than five seconds looking at each item you'd realize how badly it was done."

Such houses, he added, eventually sell to buyers who don't bother to get an inspection done.

Schiffer said he enjoys sitting down with clients and helping them to figure out how they could get their prospective home back into shape.

"I know they like the house, so I try to find solutions to make it possible for them to buy the place. Usually, there's simple solutions to a lot of problems."

While clients have tough decisions to make, property inspectors in B.C. also have their own concerns. One of these is that there is no provincial standard as to who can and cannot call themselves an inspector.

There are, at present, two professional groups headquartered in B.C. with their own standards.

The Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors (CAHPI), with some 200 members, uses the designation Registered Home Inspector (RHI). The BC Institute of Property Inspectors, with 90 members, uses the designations Certified Property Inspector (CPI) or Certified House Inspector (CHI).

Both groups have their own sets of exams and standards.

And both groups have asked the provincial government to set a universal standard because, at the moment, anyone who wants to can set up in business as a home or property inspector, no matter what their level of knowledge or professional experience.

Dickie, CAHPI (BC)'s treasurer said his organization gets many complaints about non-members. "So many in fact, that we've asked the B.C. government to take action to bring standards to the BC home and property inspection industry."

If CAHPI (B.C.) gets a complaint it can be reviewed by members and representatives of the general public who serve on its committee.

Dickie said his group has been meeting with the provincial government for the past four years, but hasn't had a response that it thinks protects the consumer.

"They said that consumers were already adequately protected under the Consumer Protection Act," said Dickie. "But that act only allows for means for recourse. It allows you to begin to sue your home inspector afterwards, as opposed to being somewhat preemptive and trying to ensure that people have the opportunity to have a qualified inspector."

Dickie added that those people who bought a house and then have had trouble with their homes now have to go through a backlogged court system.

"And that's not really much of a protection at all."

The BCIP — part of the 8,000-member Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of B.C. (ASTTBC) — is also concerned.

"ASTTBC has been advocating for many years that we find some way to confirm one standard and one regulatory approach in B.C.," said John Leech, executive-director and registrar with ASTTBC. "Consumers in BC will be better served with one-stop shopping when it comes to finding a qualified inspector."

"The public is in jeopardy when purchasing a home if they do not engage the services of a registered professional house inspector to carry out an inspection," Leech said.

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## LAW AND ORDER

## Four attackers break man's legs in beating on Fraser Street

**VANCOUVER** | A man suffered head injuries and two broken legs after he was severely beaten by four men early Wednesday morning.

Police said the man was attacked by four men at about 3:00 a.m. in the 6000-block of Fraser Street.

Const. Howard Chow said the man was knocked to the ground, beaten and punched. A witness told police one of the assailants hit the victim with a tire iron. Chow said the man was released from hospital on Wednesday, but did not give his name as police had not yet had a chance to conduct a complete interview.

Police do not have a good description of the assailants, Chow added, and are not yet certain if the attack was random or whether the man had been targeted.

Vancouver Sun

## Slain man's parents offer reward for identification, conviction of his killer

**LANGLEY** | Parents of a Langley man found slain in his apartment earlier this year are offering a \$50,000 reward to anyone who can provide information leading to the conviction of their son's killer.

Helmut and Ingeborg Ehrke Wednesday urged those with knowledge about the slaying of 31-year-old Ralph Helmut Ehrke to come forward and provide assistance to the RCMP. "Anything would just help. Any little thing — maybe it's not important to them, but it might be important to the police. I just plead with anybody [to] come forward. Tell the police what they know," said Ingeborg Ehrke.

If charges are laid but no conviction is obtained, the couple said they will still pay a reward of \$25,000.

Langley RCMP Cpl. Diane Blain said the force's regional homicide team is not disclosing why it is seeking help from potential witnesses, but said the team has reason to believe members of the community may have valuable clues about the killing.

Ehrke's father, Helmut, believes some of his son's friends may have information that could assist investigators. "I personally feel that some of his friends should step forward and [disclose] what they do know."

Ehrke was found dead by his father in his apartment at 19897 56th Avenue in Langley on Jan. 31, after Ehrke's family became concerned they had not heard from him.

Police have not released the cause of death or suggested a motive for his murder.

Blain added she does not believe drugs were a factor in the homicide, but said Ehrke was previously convicted on assault charges unrelated to his slaying. According to documents obtained from B.C. Supreme Court, Ehrke, along with two other men, assaulted two men in Surrey in 1998 in an attempt to get the victims to pay sums of money totalling \$65,000. Ehrke was sentenced in 2002 to 15 months probation, a \$1,000 fine and a \$150 victim surcharge.

Helmut Ehrke said in an interview Wednesday he is offering the reward because his family wants to find closure. "Ralph was such a kind, helpful person... He would never hesitate to go out of his way and help somebody who was in need of any kind of help. And that's so frustrating."

Langley RCMP is asking anyone with information to contact the homicide tip line at (604) 543-9217 or 1-877-543-9217.

Doris Sun, Vancouver Sun



Ralph Ehrke

## Vancouver police chief will have his legs waxed in public to help raise money for cancer

**VANCOUVER** | Vancouver Police Chief Jamie Graham has offered to have his legs waxed in public to help support the Cops for Cancer Tour de Coast campaign to raise money for pediatric cancer research and Canadian Cancer Society camps.

"Cancer has touched my family in many ways over the years, and if there is anything we can do to bring awareness or to get people to donate money or time to cancer research, I think this is well worth it," Graham told a press conference Wednesday.

He said he will roll up his pants to have his legs publicly waxed Aug. 10, but added he wants to see a minimum of \$25,000 donated before then.

Those wanting to donate money can visit the Vancouver Police website at www.vpd.ca.

Jonathan Fowlie, Vancouver Sun

## SPCA trying to track down source of dogs after puppy becomes ill

**TRAIL** | The SPCA was urgently looking for anyone who may have taken home a free shepherd-cross puppy from a local park over the past few days because they may have been given a sick animal.

"A young boy has apparently been giving out free puppies in the park," said Tim Kenna, manager of the Trail branch of the SPCA. "One of the litter was brought to our shelter on Monday with parvo, a highly infectious virus that is nearly always fatal if not treated right away."

The SPCA is treating the sick puppy it found as a stray because it was given from a child to a child, he added.

"We don't know if the child had the authority to give the dog away... we are trying to find out who has the mother as they may not know they may have a dog with parvo."

The six-week-old puppy was admitted to a local animal hospital and likely to recover, said Dr. Elaine Klemmensen.

Kenna's biggest concern is "we don't know where [in the park] the dog was being given away... if these dogs left the virus in the park, they are putting that area at risk."

Parvovirus is a highly contagious disease that affects the intestinal lining. It is preventable by vaccination.

Trail Times

## The tragic life of Michael Fulton and his never-say-die attitude

## MAYNE ISLAND

## Ferry passenger jumps overboard, swims to Mayne Island

A passenger on a B.C. ferry travelling from Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay leaped into the water in Active Pass and swam to Mayne Island, where he ran off into the woods Wednesday afternoon.

RCMP said the man, apparently using garbage bags to help with flotation, jumped off the *Spirit of British Columbia* and then refused help from the ferry's crew in a rescue boat. Rescue craft were also launched from the *Spirit of Vancouver Island* and the *Queen of Nanaimo* after the man overboard was reported by shocked passengers.

Would-be rescuers talked to the man when he reached shore near Helen Point, but he again refused help.

Ron Crocker of Saanich, a passenger on the 3 p.m. sailing who raised the alarm, said he looked over the rail when he heard a splash and, at first, saw only two garbage bags in the water. "Then a guy bobbed up between them."

Victoria Times Colonist

## NEW WESTMINSTER

## Residents protest proposed 28-storey highrise tower

Gerd Evans says Uptown residents protesting a proposed 28-storey highrise tower over the Zellers store are upset about more than just a loss of view.

On Saturday, a group of residents calling itself the 'No Tower Group' held a peaceful demonstration on the plaza that will be lost to the construction of the residential tower if city council gives its approval.

Organizers say more than 60 seniors came out to protest the tower before they were asked to leave the plaza by Royal City Centre security.

Evans, a senior who lives in the Woodward tower on Sixth Street said the No Tower Group is upset about the loss of the plaza on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street, additional traffic, loss of parking, noise and the canyon effect caused by a number of towers.

"I'm not the kind to worry about the view," said Evans.

New Westminster Record

## BURNABY

## Researcher finds no single cause for homelessness

A research project that is looking into the root causes behind a 135-per-cent increase in homelessness in Burnaby over the past four years is discovering there's no simple or single reason why a person might live on the streets.

Jennifer Brubacher, the homeless outreach worker hired by the City of Burnaby and Fraser Health Authority earlier this year, said each homeless person has a unique story.

"People are generally just one paycheck away, and once you've been evicted and on the street, it's kind of hard in our social welfare system these days to pick yourself up and pull yourself back together," Brubacher said last week.

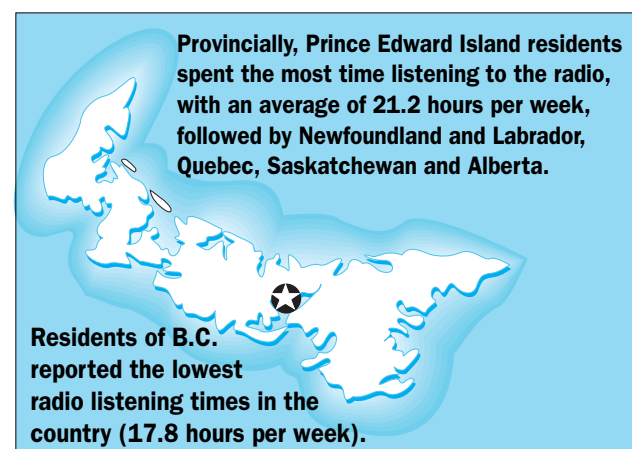
"Once you're on the street and learn to manoeuvre, you become street-entrenched and then it's hard to get out. It becomes a new uncomfortable comfort zone and then, as time goes on and more doors are slammed in your face, you lose hope."

Burnaby Now

## WESTCOAST BY THE NUMBERS

## Radio listening static at 19.5 hours a week

On average, Canadians spent 19.5 hours per week listening to radio in the fall of 2004, the same number of hours as in the previous year, but 90 minutes hours less than a decade earlier.



SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA