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MR. TOURISM New EDO brought the ships to Campbell River

BY RUSS PARADICE

In an act of sheer bravado, Norm McLaren walked into the cruise ship company's Los Angeles office and informed the receptionist that he was on a mission.

The naysayers probably thought it was a mission impossible.

"Hi, my name is Norm," McLaren boldly announced to the secretary. "And I'd like you to bring your cruise ships to our city."

McLaren, to his own surprise, managed to bluff his way past the secretary. And one year later, in 1973, the Fairsea cruise liner docked at Campbell River for the first time.

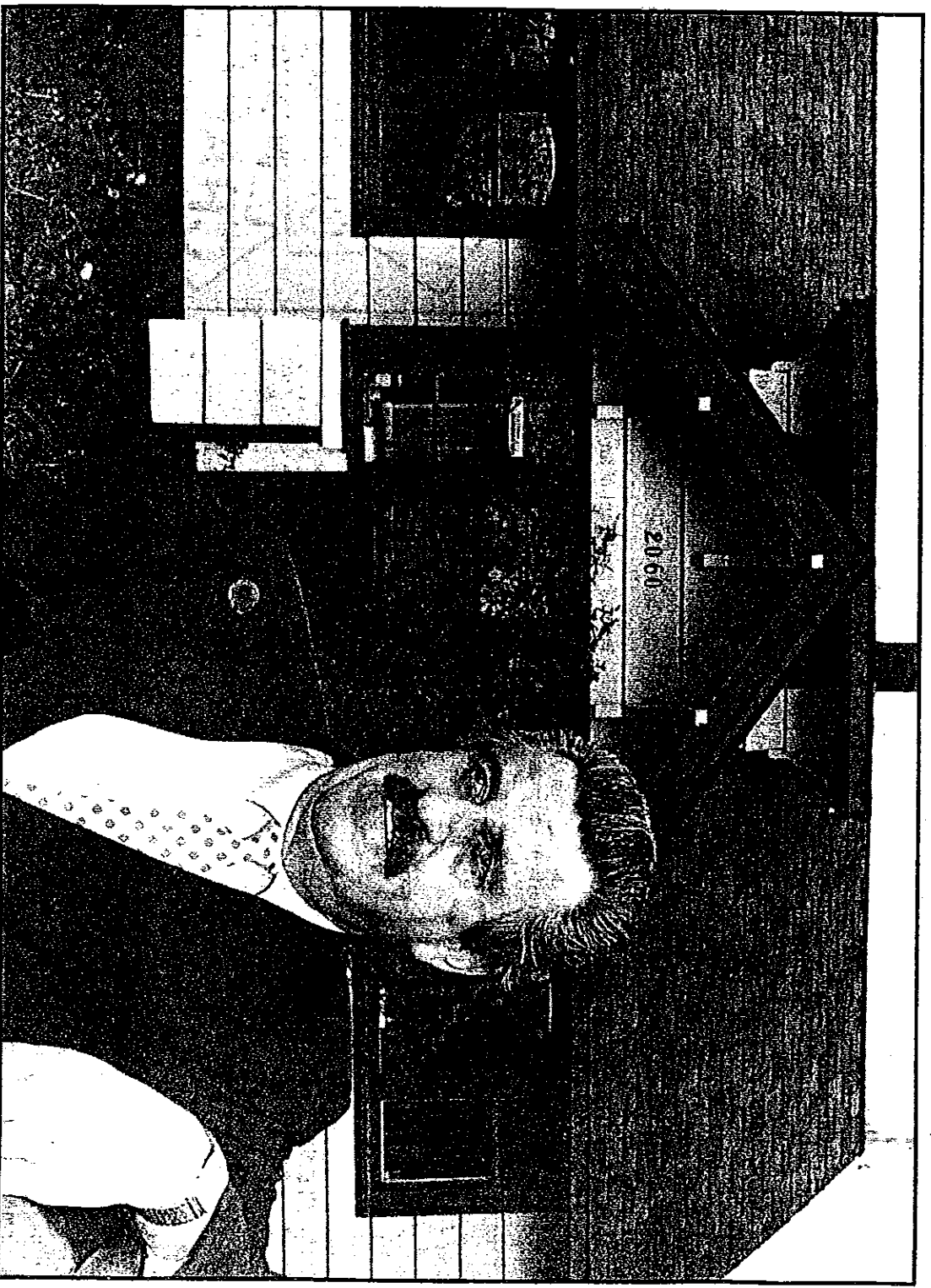
Past-forwarding ahead some 20 years, McLaren -- the self-described "guy who was responsible for bringing cruise ships to Campbell River" -- has embarked on a new mission as the Comox Valley's economic development officer.

The board of directors of the taxpayer-funded Comox Valley Economic Development Society is hoping that McLaren, who served as executive director of the Campbell River Tourism Promotion Society for nine years, will enjoy the same level of success here as he did in Campbell River.

Board chairman Robert Ash says the society, which selected McLaren from a field of more than 180 applicants, "feels very fortunate in being able to attract an individual with (McLaren's) proven track-record and qualifications."

McLaren's background seems well-suited to his job. During his 11-year career with the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce in Campbell River, McLaren worked as a commercial loans officer, giving him a sound perspective on what's required in order to get a business loan.

When the bank told him he was being transferred to Vancouver, McLaren chose "lifestyle over career" and quit the CBC. He ran a corner grocery store for the next two years.



Comox Valley's new economic development officer, Norm McLaren looks to Valley's future

Throughout his years with the bank and in small business, McLaren was a leader in the business community, serving as president of the Campbell River Chamber of Commerce, and later as president of the B.C. Chamber of Commerce.

The newly-formed Campbell River Tourism Promotion Society hired McLaren as its first executive director in April 1984. The organization began on a proverbial shoestring; it had \$3,500 in the bank to begin with, "out of which my salary was to come," McLaren says. Today, it has a budget of about \$200,000.

McLaren's job was to promote Campbell River to the

world as a tourist destination. And that he did, going to about 28 off-island business shows in one year alone. Over the years he went to, for example, a golf show in Dallas, an RV show in Phoenix, and ski shows in Vancouver. He went to Germany earlier this year for a world travel show which was sprawled out over 24 buildings.

So how does McLaren see his new job?

"In the marketplace today, there is no place that is in such a glorious position that people will just come screaming to you," he says. "That will not happen. People will consider lifestyle factors when they're deciding where to

establish a business, but they still have to know they can make money here and that profit is not a dirty word in the community.

"But I think we've got to be selective as to what we're going after. We're not trying to bring in the Pittsburgh steelmills or a new Crown Forest pulp mill. It's certainly not the instructions I'm getting from my board."

If McLaren does have one regret from his years as Campbell River's tourism czar, it's the fact that cruise ships are once again bypassing the community. Cruise ships made weekly stopovers in Campbell River in 1973-74, then abruptly stopped for good.

"The principle reason being that on one visit the ship happened to knock the existing pier 14 inches off its moorings," he says. "I was on the pier when that happened and I can tell you that I have never run so fast in my life."

Since taking over his new job, McLaren has already had discussions with "some organizations" that are looking at something similar to cruise ship stopovers, but on a much smaller scale.

"It certainly won't be on the magnitude of a cruise ship. But it could be the prelude to something like that down the road."