

# Video shouldn't taint view of legal system

## Law Day an opportunity for public to see wheels of justice at work

BY LAURA E. SIMONS, SPECIAL TO TIMES COLONIST APRIL 15, 2010

Like many people in Victoria, I was upset by the now-famous Victoria Police YouTube video from a few weeks ago.

Downtown at night recently, I couldn't help but look somewhat suspiciously at the officers who passed me on the street. They were friendly, as police officers usually are toward me, but I couldn't avoid a twinge of apprehension that was likely a result of seeing the video.

It's sad that a jarring one-minute video could do this to me, especially because I work within the legal justice system as an articulated student learning the ropes of the system. I have developed a strong belief in the efficacy of our legal justice system.

Certainly, there are flaws. But working with other lawyers and seeing the court staff in action, I know that legal justice in Victoria is in great hands. Whether criminal or civil law, there is no straightforward resolution for the flaws that exist, but every day, judges, staff, lawyers and community groups are trying to improve the system.

That's why an event like B.C. Law Week is so important. On Saturday, courthouses around the province will be opened to the public in a welcoming atmosphere of education and fun.

Aside from Law Day, most people in Victoria would hope to never see the inside of a courtroom. An appearance in court usually means one is embroiled in an unpleasant legal battle, or worse, charged with a criminal offence. Law Day allows people to be a part of the courtroom experience without the threat of peril hanging over their heads.

It's a special opportunity: An open house demonstrates how the legal system attempts to provide access to justice and justice for all, as this year's Law Week theme puts it.

There are lighthearted events, like the trial of Hansel and Gretel. Charged with mischief for eating the witch's house, Hansel and Gretel will be ably defended by counsel, portrayed by prominent local lawyer Bill Murphy-Dyson.

Police demonstrations of the K-9 unit will take place on the courthouse lawn. Always fun for young and old alike, the K-9 Corp.'s demonstration displays the furry and cuddlier side of our local police force.

Two judges will be giving talks on the role of the judiciary and how this role is changing. The judges will be open to questions from the audience at the close of their talks and Victoria residents are encouraged to come for an inside view of the system.

One role change addresses the expensive and combative nature of the modern legal justice system.

Law Day will explore alternatives to the courtroom battles that make the headlines.

"Who Wants to be a Mediator" is a skit created by local lawyers that lightheartedly highlights mediation as an alternative to shooting it out with hired guns in court. Viewers will see yours truly as a mock contestant in this mediator-themed game show, among other volunteers.

The volunteer-based nature of Law Day is another testament to the importance of this event for the Victoria legal justice system. Sheriffs give up their Saturday to provide security and to take part in determining Hansel and Gretel's fate. Lawyers, court support staff and volunteers from community agencies come together because events like Law Day allow us to take pride in the strengths of the legal world to which we devote so much care and attention.

Film is a powerful medium and a one-minute video on YouTube might challenge our faith in the justice system. However, every minute of every day, there are countless examples of the system working wonderfully.

On Saturday, visit the courthouse for Law Day for a sampling of the many ways the legal justice system is working, and to learn about the steps we're pursuing to improve what exists.

Laura E. Simons is an articulated student at Butterfield Law, a Victoria law firm. More information can be found on the Victoria Law Day page of Facebook, and listings in this paper. Law Day runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Victoria Courthouse, 850 Burdett Ave.

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