

COMMUNITY RELEASE

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Local Anti-Tobacco Champion Celebrated During Non-Smoking Week

The Lung Association & Heart and Stroke Foundation honour Victoria's Dr. Peter Coy for his contribution and commitment to tobacco use prevention, reduction and protection.

A retired oncologist and advocate for tobacco use reduction, Dr. Peter Coy is one of 10 BC individuals being recognized as a 2013 Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Award Winner by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (B.C. & Yukon). The awards, launched for the first time this year, will be presented during National Non-Smoking Week, January 20 to 26, 2013.

"Dr. Coy played a pivotal role in making the Capital Regional District the first jurisdiction in Canada to successfully pass, implement and enforce 100% smoke-free bylaws in outdoor public places, including bans on smoking inside and on patios at restaurants and bars," says Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon).

Scott McDonald, CEO of the BC Lung Association says, "Dr. Coy is truly deserving of recognition for his trailblazing work on tobacco issues. His work on smoking bans in public places has served as an example for similar measures since implemented throughout the province."

Dr. Peter Coy's story

While Dr. Coy's Canadian medical career began in Vancouver at the BC Cancer Institute and continued in Victoria when he became Director of the Vancouver Island Cancer Centre, his efforts to address the harms of tobacco use began at home in his native UK.

"When my wife and I were still living near Manchester in the early 1960s, my mother-in-law took care of our two daughters," he says. "She was a heavy smoker and I was aware of studies linking smoking and lung cancer. My challenge was how to protect our children without aggravating my mother-in-law. It was back then I first learned the importance of diplomacy in addressing smoking issues that continues to this day."

For the last 50 years, Dr. Coy has played a leadership role both locally and internationally in many aspects of lung cancer ranging from prevention, early diagnosis and treatment to palliative care.

Dr. Coy's crowning achievement was leading the Capital Regional District's Smoke-Free Task Force since the late 1980s. The task force worked tirelessly to implement smoking bans in all public places in Victoria and its surrounding areas, the first region in Canada to do so. Given the entrenchment of the tobacco industry at the time, this was no simple feat.

"Overcoming the opposition of those whose businesses were affected by growing smoke-free places bans and tobacco sales policies was not easy, but we succeeded," he says. "We were also able to drive increases in school education, prevention and quit smoking programs, and build public awareness of the harmful effects of second-hand smoke in homes and vehicles, particularly on children."

The task force's hard work has been rewarded with a drop in smoking rates in BC, from 50% in the 1960s to 14% today, but the fight is far from over. Dr. Coy voices concern that we have become complacent, and that more must be done to persuade young people not to pick up the habit.

"Young adults continue to start smoking and become addicts in significant numbers," he points out. "The challenge we face is keeping tobacco issues in the public eye so that politicians are not let off the hook, and current regulations are enforced. The international tobacco industry is certainly not going away and will only continue to find newer, more insidious ways to market this lethally addictive product."

About the Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards

Winners of the Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards are chosen by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon) for their long-term contribution to clearing the air of second-hand smoke, helping people quit smoking and encouraging British Columbians to stay tobacco-free. Nominees are selected by BC community members, public health staff and health care professionals. Launched in 2013, the awards will be announced annually during January National Non-Smoking Week.

Scott McDonald, CEO, BC Lung Association

"Recent headlines have many thinking the most pressing public health concerns are obesity, lack of physical activity or perhaps illegal drug use. All are important. However, the leading cause of preventable death in British Columbia is tobacco-related illness. It is with the help of champions like Dr. Peter Coy that we continue to make progress on this important health issue."

Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon)

"We feel it's extremely important to honour and acknowledge the important work being done by individuals and organizations to affect positive social change. Actions to reduce tobacco use and exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke are among the most important measures available to increase overall public health."

About the Heart and Stroke Foundation

The Heart and Stroke Foundation (heartandstroke.ca), a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.

About the BC Lung Association

The BC Lung Association (bc.lung.ca), a non-profit, non-governmental organization, is dedicated to improving lung health and promoting clean air initiatives across the province. Through public awareness campaigns, the Association acts as an educational resource for the general public as well as those living with respiratory conditions. The BC Lung Association also specializes in patient support programs, community services and advanced medical research.

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