

COMOX VALLEY Record

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Local priest to receive award for work with Tsolum River restoration,

Erin Haluschak
erin.haluschak@comoxvalleyrecord.com

From nine to 130,000 - it's a number Father Charles Brandt is proud of.

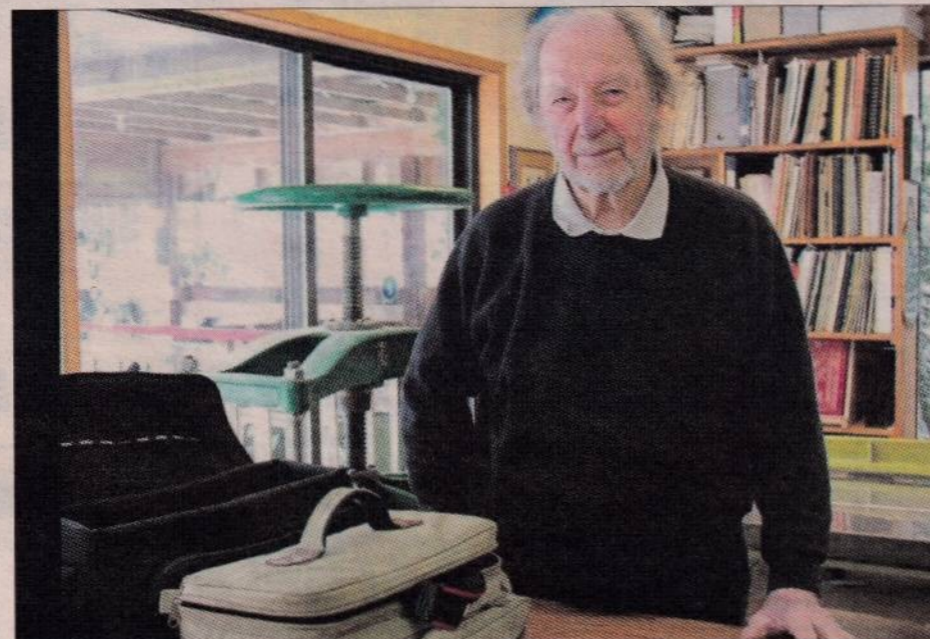
Those numbers represent the increase in return of pink salmon in the Tsolum River, a direct link to Brandt's work with the Tsolum River Restoration Society and other groups, which is now being recognized by provincial government.

Brandt is one of 16 recipients of the BC Community Achievement Awards, which were created to recognize and celebrate the spirit, imagination, dedication and contribution of British Columbians to their communities.

"All I did was spearhead the group. What I'm happy about is (the statement sent to the committee) that says it is humanity's great work to transform our disruptive influence on the earth to a being presence."

Brandt, a Roman Catholic priest, has spent tireless hours restoring the Tsolum River following years of copper leaching from a nearby mine.

The mine was operational from 1964



Father Charles Brandt, a hermit priest, will receive a BC Community Achievement Award.

to 1967, and was abandoned when the company went bankrupt. In 1985, Brandt said only nine pinks were to be found in the river.

"It was a long struggle," he admitted, and said his work first began with the

Comox Valley branch of the Steelhead Society of B.C. The group disbanded and reformed into now-operational Tsolum River Restoration Society.

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Award: Also volunteers with Oyster River Enhancement Society

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Brandt was appointed to secretary, and sent out more than 150 letters to various groups and agencies, he explained, to inform them that the pollution had taken place at the mine site.

In 2006, the province gave \$4.5 million and a fully engineered cover went on the old site and was sealed in 2009. There was immediate improvement through 2010, and in the summer of 2012, the project was declared a success and water quality returned to normal.

The improvement was so successful, noted Brandt, that copper went to less than 7 mg/L, and made it healthy for fish to live once again.

"We have a remarkable group ... with good biologists who are now working on improving the river itself."

He also has volunteered with the Oyster River Enhancement Society, contributing to the return of salmon and trout stocks to the once-degraded river.

Brandt, who moved to Vancouver Island in 1965, was ordained to the Catholic priesthood at the Canadian Martyrs Church (now a theatre) in Courtenay.

As for the ERM following his name? It's an abbreviation for hermit.

He was mandated to live the life of a hermit priest, the first hermit to be ordained to the priesthood in 200 years in the Roman Catholic Church.

Brandt came from the Trappist Monks - a Benedictine order - and said he wanted to find more solitude that one couldn't "find in the big order ... I came from New Melleray Abbey (Iowa) to join the hermitage on the Tsolum River - when the mine was going in on Mount Washington."

As a member of the Hermits of St. John the Baptist, Brandt first lived in a cabin he constructed near Headquarters Creek in the Tsolum River watershed before moving his hermitage to the banks of the Oyster River.

We have a remarkable group ... with good biologists who are now working on improving the river itself.

CHARLES BRANDT

Prior to moving to Canada, he had served as a navigator with the U.S. air force during the 1940s. He later graduated with a bachelor of science in ornithology and a bachelor of divinity from Nashotah House, a theological seminary in Wisconsin.

As for the awards which will be presented in a ceremony at Government House in Victoria on April 26, Brandt said due to neuropathy - a nerve condition that causes numbness - travelling down Island is too difficult.

He deflected any praise for his work, and said all those involved in working to help improve the condition of the Tsolum River should receive credit.

"The copper in the river was a disruptive influence to fish in the wild, and now it's about having a benign presence, but we should have one not only with that river, but with the first, ocean and lakes."

- With files from Scott Stanfield