

# Hugh Town Memorial Builder Award Hugh Fisher 2025



### NOMINATION SUMMARY

**Hugh Fisher** has a 40+ year legacy of selfless volunteer effort to paddlesports in general and outrigger canoe racing in particular. **Hugh** has made contributions to support Canadian paddlers at the international, national, provincial, and club level. **Hugh** has been part of False Creek (FCRCC) as the first outrigger canoeing club in Canada, as 1 of the 3 "Founding Fathers" of CORA, and founder of Pemberton Canoe Association (PCA) as the third outrigger canoeing club in Canada. **Hugh** has made significant contributions to the birth and growth of outrigger canoeing nationwide across Canada. [101]

# HISTORICAL: SIGNIFICANT / EXEMPLARY CONTRIBUTIONS OVER TIME

**Hugh** is recognized as Co-Founder of False Creek (FCRCC) in 1985 and as Co-Founder of Canadian Outrigger Racing Association (CORA) in 1992 and as Founder of Pemberton (PCA) in 1997. **Hugh** has contributed to the ongoing success of False Creek (FCRCC) as a coach in the late-1980s and early-1990s. **Hugh** has contributed to the ongoing success of Canadian Outrigger Racing Association (CORA) as a "Founding Father" and for establishing Canada as an IPCF/IVF Member nation to compete in IPCF/IVF World Championships events and as a member of the CORA Executive in the early-1990s. **Hugh** has contributed to the ongoing success of Pemberton (PCA) as a coach from the mid-1990s through the mid-2020s. [111] [112] [113] [114]

Hugh had already been a Champion with four different crews at the Molokai Hoe World Outrigger Canoeing Race between 1978 and 1983, long before Hugh teamed up with Alwyn Morris to take K2 500M Gold and K2 1000M Bronze at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics. These achievements as an outrigger canoeing athlete may not be relevant in terms of coach-builder achievements, except that Hugh brought together crews of Canadian flatwater paddlers including Preston Fisk, Peter Heaver, Larry Cain, Jim Sleeth, Drew Mitchell, Donny Brien, Don Irvine, Colin Shaw, and Alwyn Morris who joined in these Molokai Hoe World Outrigger Canoeing Race achievements and then went on their own paths to build outrigger canoeing programs all across Canada. It was not only the Canadian flatwater paddlers primarily from BCKC who raced with Hugh at Molokai Hoe and the Catalina Crossing US Championships, but many other paddlers such as the Mancell brothers and Bob Disbrow from Lotus Sports Club, as well as David Boulding and other paddlers from FCRCC who embraced international outrigger canoe racing. The 1985 Molokai Na Wahine all-Canadian womens crew that included Ruth Matson, Annie Boulding, and many of the top marathon canoe and whitewater/downriver paddlers from all across Canada was inspired by the success of the Canadian mens crews and finished 5th place overall in their first-ever Molokai Na Wahine event. This was the ambition that Hugh had set into motion and had planted the seeds that would lead to steady growth of the Canadian outrigger canoeing community. [121] [122] [123]

When *Hugh* took over a medical practice from a small-town doctor in Pemberton BC in 1991, to grow what would become the largest medical practice in all of BC, it may have been difficult to visualize that *Hugh* would develop dragon boat and outrigger canoe and sprint canoe/kayak flatwater programs that would see paddlers from this small community, training on a diminutive lake in the Coastal Mountains, becoming major players on the provincial / national / international stage. This is what happens when an individual such as *Hugh* with a mindset of "*Winning As A Way Of Life*" takes it upon himself to make these things happen. [131] [132]

## **CURRENT: SIGNIFICANT / EXEMPLARY CONTRIBUTIONS THIS YEAR**

This past year in Pemberton for *Hugh* has been like so many years before. *Hugh* has provided coaching services to the outrigger canoe program, the junior dragon boat crews (Laoyam Eagles and Falcons), the adult dragon boat crew (Bald Eagles), and the sprint canoe/kayak flatwater program. What was different in 2025, has been the return of *Hugh* Fisher to six-person outrigger canoe racing. Although *Hugh* has regularly competed in V1 at IVF World Sprints, Pemberton (PCA) does not have many OC6 Masters paddlers. *Hugh* Fisher brought together a crew of unaffiliated OC6 Masters 60+ paddlers named MI6 that included Dave Ross (Jericho), Cam Fagrie (FCRCC), Laci Bujos (Jericho), Bob Woodman (Vernon), and Ron Williams (Nanaimo) for the 2025 CORA Cup Series races. One might think MI6 meant "Mission Impossible 6", but it seems MI6 meant "Myocardial Infarction 6", as apparently some of the crew had

encounters with this ailment. This MI6 crew with *Hugh* would place 1st OC6 Mens Masters 60+ in every 2025 CORA Cup Series they attended and overall finished behind a very small number of OC6 Mens Open crews. *Hugh* brought together a crew of paddlers from various outrigger canoe clubs to compete against and top some of the best club crews in BC. [141]

# SPECIFIC: SIGNIFICANT / EXEMPLARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO ADVANCEMENT OF THE SPORT

Pemberton Big-Boat Fleet: Hugh has made contributions to acquire outrigger canoes for the small paddlesports community in the Pemberton / Whistler area. When CORA was founded in 1992, and a program was put into place whereby "The Burrard" would be a one-year loaner outrigger canoe for start-up clubs. "The Burrard" was with Pemberton (PCA) as a starter outrigger canoe from 1993-1994. When the Pemberton (PCA) loan was over, "The Burrard" moved onwards to its next home which was Victoria Canoe Kayak Club (VCKC). Pemberton slowly acquired a fleet of traditional OC6s starting with a Canadian Malia OC6 from Ron Kaschula of Calmar Fiberglass, a Clipper Advantage OC6 from Western Canoeing and Kayaking, and then a Bradley Lightning OC6 from Ryan Pogue of Pogue Sports, to bring their six-person outrigger canoe fleet to three boats, which had been adequate for an outrigger canoeing club located on a sheltered diminutive lake within the Coastal Mountains. [151]

**Pemberton Racing Events:** Pemberton (PCA) has not hosted any CORA Sanctioned Racing Events in recent years, but **Hugh** organized the Green Lake Sprints races in Whistler during Fall 1993, where canoes were provided by Whistler Canoe Club and Lotus Sports Club. This was a pivotal event in the growth of outrigger canoeing in BC. The "The Burrard" was with Pemberton (PCA) as a starter outrigger canoe from 1993-1994. Victoria Canoe Kayak Club (VCKC) attended the Green Lake Sprints and then acquired "The Burrard" as a starter outrigger canoe from 1994-1995. The presence of this six-person outrigger canoe on Vancouver Island in the early 1990s would lead to the introduction of outrigger canoeing at Victoria (VCKC), Ocean River (ORPC), Comox (CVCRC), and West Bay (WBPC). [156]

**Pemberton Club Venue:** The Whistler Canoe Club was founded on Alta Lake in 1991 and local Pemberton paddlers started out being part of that club. **Hugh** was able to borrow two Voyageur canoes from paddling aficionado and friend Tim Malone at Whistler's Outdoor Experience. **Hugh** then spent a few years coaching local Pemberton paddlers that he had invited to come out and try out for the new team as part of the Whistler Canoe Club. Pemberton (PCA) was founded at One Mile Lake outside Pemberton in 1997 by **Hugh**, who then spearheaded the construction of a boathouse to store the club dragon boats, outrigger canoes, and flatwater canoes/kayaks. [161] [162] [163]

First Six-Person Outrigger Canoe In Canada: The 20-year tale of "The Burrard" has been documented in the CORA publication "The Burrard" - First OC6 In Canada. Annie Boulding would be one of the first Canadian women to participate in the Molokai Na Wahine race. The Womens crew trained in Southern California with Newport Aquatic Center Coach Billy Whitford for the 1985 Molokai Na Wahine race. When the Womens crew returned to California after the race, Annie Boulding explained to Billy Whitford that Canadian paddlers had to train for the Catalina Channel Crossing and Molokai races in Voyageur canoes. Billy Whitford had a 600-lb hull cut in half at the midsection and loaded onto the roof of Annie Boulding's whitewater instructors (Brian Creer) motor home and Annie Boulding brought the two halves of the hull of "The Burrard" north to Canada. Several False Creek paddlers including Hugh Fisher, Heather Taylor, Don Irvine, David Boulding, and Patrick Couling reassembled the two halves of the hull brought to Canada by Annie Boulding and "The Burrard" launched in early 1987 for the first time from the rocky shore under the wooden bridge walkway next to the Alder Bay Dock. [166] [167]

First Generation Of Canadian Six-Person Outrigger Canoes: In 1987, the year after the first dragon boat racing event at Expo 86, there were no dragon boats or outrigger canoes available in BC for training. Hugh had competed in outrigger races in California and Hawaii in the 1970s and 1980s. Hugh spent time in Newport Beach CA training for the Olympics and was recruited to several outrigger teams for races. Hugh competed on the Blazing Paddles team that won the 1978 Molokai race with a paddler named Billy Whitford who was steering that team. Billy Whitford and Uncle Bud Hohl had a side business of building Malia canoes. They were looking to spread outrigger racing to other parts of North America (and no doubt finding other people to buy their boats) and perceived Hugh, with his Olympian status, to be a good person to represent outrigger canoe racing in Canada. It was understood that *Hugh* was given a choice of buying the "longer and narrower boat designed for taller paddlers" or the Malia. Hugh chose the Malia because clubs in California were moving to the newer boat designs and he was offered the California Malia mould which was just sitting in someone's backyard; having the mould would make Malias more affordable and be more conducive to building a fleet of boats to race. David Boulding arranged to have Bud Hohl load the California Malia mould onto the Necky Kayaks trailer, and then drove across the border and met with US Customs to import the California Malia mould into Canada. In 1988, after fabrication of the first two Canadian Malias had begun at Steve Schleicher's shop, Lotus Sports Club acquired their boathouse at Barnet Marine Park and the two Canadian Malias. were moved to the boathouse where the finishing work was completed. When Lotus Sports Club finished using the mould for its Canadian Malias, the California Malia mould was delivered to Ron Kaschula of Calmar Fiberglass and made available to paddlers from False Creek Racing Canoe Club including *Hugh* Fisher to build at least 7 more Canadian *Malias*. [171] [172]

Second Generation Of Canadian Six-Person Outrigger Canoes: In the early 1990's, CORA and PNWORCA clubs struggled to acquire OC6s to support the growing number of outrigger canoe clubs. Ron Kaschula of Calmar Fiberglass had shops in North Vancouver, East Vancouver and New Westminster and was manufacturing / repairing just about anything fiberglass since before 1990. Sometime around 1992, a Canadian Class Racer (CCR) OC6 started appearing at BC clubs – referred to as a "Calmar". It was discovered that when the Canadian Malias overturned, they rode low in the water; David Boulding, Don Irvine, Hugh Fisher, and several others had input into designing a canoe that would increase paddlers' safety in colder BC water. The Canadian Class Racer (CCR) was designed with more floatation, a bumpy front nose to hold the covers, and more strength in the seats which resulted in a stiffer boat with more floatation in the rear.

Sprint Canoe/Kayak Flatwater Coaching: The Canoe Kayak BC Strategic Plan for each 4-year planning period builds on the successes of the previous planning period and works to better support and deliver programming and services for all members. The Canoe Kayak BC Strategic Plan for the early 1980s focused on increasing participation in sprint canoe/kayak flatwater racing by providing more venues for sprint canoe/kayak flatwater racing. Drew Mitchell (FCRCC Alumni) was involved with the Canoe Kayak BC Strategic Plan in the early 1980s after Alwyn Morris and Hugh Fisher took K2 500M Gold and K2 1000M Bronze at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics, and was in Nanaimo and Burnaby when the daughters of Allan & Ruth Matson were sprint canoe/kayak flatwater paddling. Drew Mitchell & Alwyn Morris & Hugh Fisher went to Nanaimo to visit with Allan & Ruth Matson regarding sprint canoe/kayak flatwater paddling. Hugh was coaching the daughters of Allan & Ruth Matson. Not only were they scouting for young sprint canoe/kayak flatwater paddlers, but also for a venue to create a sprint canoe/kayak flatwater paddling centre. Loudon Park at Long Lake in Nanaimo was selected as a site.

The Pemberton (PCA) sprint canoe/kayak flatwater program coached by *Hugh* has seen athletes competing at both provincial and national levels. Paddlers from this program have competed at BC Summer Games, Western Canada Summer Games, Canada Summer Games, and Nationals. [176]

**Dragon Boat Coaching: Hugh** Fisher competed in the 1988 Seoul Olympics shortly before graduating from UBC medical school, and then returned to his birthplace New Zealand to complete his medical residency training. While **Hugh** Fisher was doing his internship in New Zealand, he put together a dragon boat team that went on to win the 1990 New Zealand Championships. [181]

The first Junior dragon boat crew from the Pemberton area was formed in 1996 and Pemberton (PCA) was founded at One Mile Lake outside Pemberton in 1997 by *Hugh*. The Laoyam Eagles Junior dragon boat team from Pemberton (PCA) made their first appearance at the 1997 Vancouver International Dragon Boat Festival. In their third appearance, the Laoyam Eagles dragon boat team won the Junior category championship in the 1999 Vancouver International Dragon Boat Festival and then for 15 more consecutive years through 2014. Members of this small community, practicing on tiny One Mile Lake, have consistently won Junior national and international dragon boat races for 15 straight years. From 1996-2014, *Hugh* had sourced a couple of Voyageur canoes, had founded a local canoe club, and had coached the high school Laoyam Eagles dragon boat Junior team to 16 consecutive victories at the Vancouver International Dragon Boat Festival (VIDBF). The Laoyam Eagles Junior dragon boat team has represented Canada, as a crew, at IDBF World Championships in Philadelphia USA in 2001 and Poznan, Poland in 2003, and at IDBF Club Crew World Championships in Toronto, Canada in 2006. Individual members of this dragon boat team have also raced with Team Canada at IDBF World Nations Championship events in Tampa USA in 2011, Szeged Hungary in 2013, Welland Canada in 2015, and Divonne-Les-Bains France in 2017. This team has also travelled to competitions in San Francisco, Long Beach, and Hong Kong. [186] [187] [188] [190] [191] [192]

Outrigger Canoeing Coaching: The early 1990s saw an FCRCC initiative to deliver a womens outrigger canoe program that would be competitive at the international level. FCRCC had recruited 40+ women in 1993 to fill 2 Molokai Na Wahine crews with a Catalina Channel Crossing race as a precursor. The FCRCC womens outrigger canoe program coached by Drew Mitchell, Don Irvine, and *Hugh* Fisher would send crews to Molokai Na Wahine in 1991/1993/1994.

The Pemberton (PCA) outrigger canoeing program has qualified athletes to represent Team Canada at 2008 Sacramento IVF World Sprints, 2012 Calgary IVF World Sprints, and 2016 Australia IVF World Sprints. In 2012, Aleea Dahiden, a Pemberton (PCA) paddler, was the first Canadian Junior woman to win a medal at one of these international events. As a V1 500M IVF World Sprints Champion, *Hugh* is aptly qualified to provide coaching on this discipline to Pemberton (PCA) IVF World Sprints competitors. [193] [194] [196]

## **HUGH TOWN MEMORIAL BUILDER AWARD**

The purpose of the *Hugh Town Memorial Builder Award* is to recognize volunteers who have made significant and exemplary contributions to the Outrigger Canoe Racing Discipline of Canadian Outrigger Racing Association (CORA) within Canada in the Builder Category. This Award has been presented to 6 Recipients from 2019-2024.

https://canadianoutrigger.ca/community-2/the-Hugh-a-town-memorial-builder-award/

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