



ON THE FRONT COVER

HOWARD R. BERGE, Q.C., NEW PRESIDENT OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

By James Herperger

Howard Berge became president of the Law Society on January 1, 2003. Although it took Howard three times to be elected as a benchler, once elected he served five and one-half terms before becoming president. His election as president by his fellow benchers is a fitting culmination to a stellar legal career that began in 1967 with his call to the bar. The lawyers of British Columbia are indeed fortunate to have Howard as president in what already appears to be a challenging year for the profession.

Prior to practising law, Howard spent three years in the RCAF, latterly flying Neptune anti-submarine aircraft out of Summerside, P.E.I. Satisfied that his three years' service insured that Canada's east coast was not in imminent danger of attack by the Soviet hordes, Howard left the air force and entered law school at the University of British Columbia. His classmates included Mr. Justice Wally Oppal, Mr. Justice Randall Wong, Mr. Justice Selwyn Romilly and various future political heavyweights, including Peter Hyndman, Q.C., and Gary Lauk, Q.C.

Howard articulated at the Vancouver law firm of Mann & Wright where he toiled in obscurity for three years. In 1970, he moved to Kelowna, ostensibly to experience the "Okanagan lifestyle", but in reality to establish a firm using his own name.

Howard joined one of the oldest firms in the Interior, Fillmore & Company, which dissolved in 1979 and then reconstituted as Warren, Ladner, Berge & Company. In 1982, the firm was renamed Berge, Bishop, Purvin-Good & Flannigan; later it became Berge, Thiessen & Company and eventually Berge & Company. This

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renaming was due less to Howard's dominant personality and the corresponding weakness of his partners than to the fact that most of the latter had too many syllables in their surnames. The firm is now known as Berge Horn after another established firm in the Kelowna area, Weddell Horn, joined Berge & Company in 2000.

Over the years, Howard has been heavily involved in the Canadian Bar Association. He was instrumental in establishing the Okanagan Real Property and Commercial Law Subsection and served as the Yale County representative on the Provincial Council. Howard has, over the years, been a CLE instructor and a PLTC instructor and was a member of the CLE Society board when it converted the bar admission course into what is now PLTC. Howard's ability to maintain a busy practice of law while still contributing to the profession is legendary. When he was first elected as a bencher in 1991, he managed to continue his role as one of the top producers in his firm while quickly establishing himself as one of the hardest-working benchers.

Howard is a great raconteur. His stories of practising with various characters is the stuff of legend. He is probably the only lawyer ever accused of causing disruption in a firm by billing "too much".

In 2000, Howard announced his retirement from the partnership, moved downstairs in the building to a smaller office and carried on work as associate counsel. Although Howard describes his new office as a "broom closet", it is the product of his own design. Its most prominent features are the door leading directly outside and a built-in dog bed and water dish for his Airedale terrier, Geordie. While many retirements can lead to firm breakups, it is not surprising that Howard's "retirement" was conducted with ease and dignity.

Howard has been a mentor to many, many lawyers, both in the Okanagan and throughout the province. He truly is a lawyer's lawyer and promotes the interests of the profession just as fearlessly as he promotes the interests of his many clients. Those in the profession who have had need of legal counsel regularly turn to Howard, either for advice or to retain him. They recognize his single-minded determination and fearlessness as a gift that many profess to have but few in fact possess. Howard's former partners, associates and staff hold great respect and admiration for his knowledge, insight, level-headedness and common sense.

In October 2000, Howard lost his wife, Joan, after her long and valiant battle with cancer. With Joan's passing, Howard sold his house deep in the Mission area of Kelowna and completed the summer cottage he and Joan had planned together near Naramata, a small lakeside community between Kelowna and Penticton.

Howard has two daughters, Nadine and Carolyn. Nadine has followed her father's footsteps and is a respected civil litigator in Calgary, while Carolyn recently completed undergraduate work at the University of Victoria.

When not shuttling back and forth to Vancouver on Law Society business, Howard still maintains a busy civil litigation practice as associate counsel at Berge Horn. Howard and his constant companion, Geordie, continue to travel to Naramata to their summer cottage when they can, and when Howard attends Law Society business in Vancouver, Geordie goes "in residence" at the local puppy kennel. Howard's interests include flying, skiing, boating and the law.