



## ON THE FRONT COVER

BRUCE A. LEROSE, Q.C.

By the Honourable Mr. Justice Mark McEwan

On January 1, 2012, Bruce LeRose, Q.C., became the new president of the Law Society of British Columbia, and the first, ever, from the Kootenays. He was born in Trail on September 13, 1957, and except for the time he spent pursuing the post-secondary education that culminated in a law degree from UBC in 1982, Trail has been his home.

It is fair to say that the Silver City has no prouder or more engaged citizen than Bruce. Long before his involvement in the Law Society, Bruce had a remarkable reputation for service in his own community. In this respect he has carried on a legacy that goes back to 1911, when his grandfather, Bruno LeRose, arrived in Trail as part of the large influx of Italians who came to work in the smelter that dominates the town, or, as Bruno did, to start businesses to service the growing population. Despite a somewhat uncertain command of English, Bruno became the mayor in 1931, and he held that position until 1937. Bruce will tell you that his grandfather took great pride in being the first person from Italy to achieve that civic eminence in Canada and that he considered his contemporary, Fiorello La Guardia of New York, to be his American counterpart. Bruno's most obvious legacy is a massive concrete wall that lines the Columbia River, built to withstand the spring floods in the years before the Arrow Dam was built near Castlegar. It was a tremendous benefit to the city in its time and remains a prominent feature of downtown Trail to this day.

Bruno's son, Bruce's father Gino, was also a businessman. He and his brother Ernest were partners in a thriving meat-cutting business that employed as many as 14 butchers in the days before supermarkets. Later they worked together in a successful furniture business, LeRose Mercantile. In the early 1960s, Gino saw a new opportunity and turned his energies to the construction and operation of a first-rate hotel he called the Terra Nova.

Gino wanted nothing but the best, and the hotel opened with a very posh restaurant, featuring staff in tuxedos, waiters in togas and a great menu—but hardly any business. To make matters worse, Gino only had to look up the street to the ramshackle old Kootenay Hotel to see people lined up for its specialty, Italian home cooking. Needless to say, some years later, when the chance came along to hire the old hotel's cook and keeper of the recipes, Gino did so and started the Colander Restaurant, an establishment that has long since become an iconic local institution.

Like his father, Gino was no mere businessman, but a leading citizen, engaged in a wide variety of civic activities and organizations, including several years as a city councillor. He loved gatherings of all kinds and had a genius for hospitality.

For Gino and his wife, Velia, family was paramount. They had four remarkable sons, all of whom, like their father, have remained in Trail and made strong contributions to the community. Ken, the eldest, is a surgeon and one of the leading doctors in the region; Gary has taken over the Colander and the family catering business; and Brian, Bruce's twin, operates the hotel, which is still the best place in town.

True to form, once Bruce had obtained his LL.B., he returned to Trail. He articulated to Peter Geronazzo in an established firm that traced its origins back to 1949. Donald Brothers was an MLA, and between 1968 and 1972 had been Minister of Education in W.A.C. Bennett's cabinet. His partner, Richard D'Andrea, later a Provincial Court judge, carried on in the practice, and the firm came to be associated with Mickey Moran, Q.C. (himself a bencher in the 1970s) and the two Geronazzo brothers, Danny and Peter. It had become Geronazzo & Thompson by the time Bruce joined it as a student, and it became Geronazzo, Thompson & LeRose when he was made a partner in 1987. Bruce now manages the firm, which goes by the name of Thompson, LeRose and Brown and comprises seven lawyers in two offices, in Trail and Castlegar. That is as big as it gets in the Kootenays.

When Bruce started, the firm had a busy general practice. Peter's work tended to the solicitor's side but he was capable in court, while Tommy Thompson had a busy criminal practice but could turn his hand to civil, family and solicitor's work as required. Both Peter and Tommy are large and generous personalities, and Bruce thrived in the boisterous, hands-on atmosphere of the place, becoming an adept practitioner inside the courtroom and out.

Although Bruce's practice has, for many years, been largely taken up with corporate, commercial and general solicitor's work, he has occasionally had to call upon the courtroom skills he developed early in his career. Perhaps most memorably, some years ago circumstances thrust him over a weekend

into the prosecution of a criminal jury trial. Bruce stepped in and carried it off as smoothly as if he had never left the courtroom. This kind of versatility is rare now, although Bruce would be the first to say that it is not yet as rare in the Kootenays as elsewhere. He is very proud of his colleagues in the Kootenay bar and is no small part of the reason the Kootenay bar retains a reputation for civility and conviviality.

Bruce succeeded Gerry Kambeitz, Q.C., as bencher for the County of Kootenay in 2004. He has served throughout on the Finance Committee, and has taken turns on Practice Standards, Credentials, Unauthorized Practice and, for the last three years, the Executive Committee. He has also chaired committees on Lawyer Education and Continuing Professional Development, the Small Firms Task Force, the Special Compensation Fund (through a difficult time some years ago) and the Trust Assurance Fund.

It should be noted that there is one gaping hole in this resumé. Bruce never sat on Discipline, for the simple reason that he preferred to sit on the hearings, where he felt he could do more good. He certainly did his duty, but with as much kindness and understanding as circumstances would allow.

Closer to home, Bruce continued, despite these distractions, to carry on a tradition that passed to him when Peter Geronazzo retired—of organizing and presiding from time to time over dinners of the local bar, sometimes on the pretext of entertaining visiting judges or diverting members of the discipline committee. At these events Bruce obliges everyone who comes to say a few words, in an order he improvises as he goes along. The nature of the speeches is such that it is hazardous to precede some members, and even worse to follow. The one hard and fast rule is that Ron Fabbro P.C.J. always has the last word.

Bruce's civic contributions have included service on a number of health and social service boards and the presidency of the Columbo Lodge, a central institution in the Italian community. He spearheaded the installation of a civic monument in the heart of town—a statue of a working man and his family—as a tribute to the particular character of the community. It is difficult to convey Bruce's full impact on the community because his hand is in so many things, often behind the scenes.

As might be expected, Bruce carries forward the family values his parents inculcated. He is a devoted and proud father of two sons, Nicholas, 25, and Alexander, 21. Nicholas has a degree from the University of British Columbia in international relations. He is taking courses to qualify as a sommelier, an interest he shares with his father, although Bruce achieved his oenological expertise the hard way, without the benefit of formal education. Alex is in his fourth year at Simon Fraser University, studying communications. He is in Amsterdam on a student exchange. Bruce has a happy domestic life with his

partner, Melanie Olsen, who shares in and supports his endeavours, and who is as warm and gracious as he is.

Bruce is proud of his family's legacy of service. He admires his brothers and credits his mother, Velia, whose grace and strength have been a constant in his life, as a continuing source of inspiration to him and to all the members of his family, through all the good and occasionally difficult times.

Bruce spends as much of the summer as he can at Christina Lake, surrounded by family and friends. He enjoys good food, adding to his wine cellar, and the occasional trip to Las Vegas. His sporting recreations include a competent game of golf and a dedication to hockey, both as a rabid fan of the Habs and as a sometime player in a men's league in Trail. It must be allowed that the reviews of his skills on the ice are mixed. He is said to have "good hands" but to "accelerate like a diesel", to "yield to passing traffic on break-aways" and to "be all over the ice...for 17 seconds".

Well, never mind. What matters is that the Law Society will be in "good hands" in 2012. Whatever Bruce lacks in speed or stamina at the rink ("which is not admitted, but is denied") has no parallel in his professional endeavours. As the benchers have learned, and as the Kootenay bar and his community already know, Bruce is tremendous company and a compassionate, astute and completely unpretentious man who has trouble thinking ill of anyone. He brings to the Law Society a broad appreciation of the challenges of practising law in and out of court, an informed sense of the public interest and a pragmatic understanding of what is achievable. Bruce's dedication to public service and to the profession will serve the Law Society well in the coming year.



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