THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA ALUMNI MAGAZINE AUTUMN 2026

UVic TORCH

Food First

Fuel up on stories about Chef **Edward Edison Antejos** and others in the UVic community who pour their passion into food and nutrition.





Perfect Practice

The UVic Vikes women's soccer team kick-started the season with a practice session. Here, third-year student **MALIA PHELAN** runs drills with the team.

Photo: APShutter



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COVER PHOTO BY JIMMY JEONG; KIRA HOFFMAN PHOTO BY MARTY CLEMENS



UVic's new president and vice-chancellor **DR. RHONDA MCEWEN**.



The Cove is UVic's newest cafeteria, located across two floors of Cheko'nien House.

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CHRISTIN GEALL is the author of *Cultivated: The Elements of Floral Style* and *Flora Culture: How Flowers Shape Our World*. Her research focuses on the intersections of design, nature and horticulture. Both books include lush photography by Geall.

RHONDA MCEWEN PHOTO: UVIC PHOTO SERVICES; COVE PHOTO: MICHAEL KISSINGER

EDITOR'S NOTE

Full Plate

UVic English grad Vincent Vanderheide went from hitting the books to tending bar to co-owning three unique restaurants in Victoria, helping shape the city's food story.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



VINCENT VANDERHEIDE is one half of the Vinuel Restaurant Group. Dough Eyes Pizza is their latest venture.

VINCENT VANDERHEIDE, a veteran of some of Victoria's most iconic eating spots, knows that food is intertwined with our memories. Many of his are rooted in his family farm in Abbotsford, where he lived until he was five.

The farm was home to greenhouses, chickens, cows, a vegetable garden, rows of raspberries, an apple orchard. There, he sat down to his Dutch grandmother's fried potatoes, made from a unique golden variety, and meatball soup prepared with more salt than his nurse mother would typically add. He also remembers a salad of farm-fresh tomatoes that he counts as one of his favourite dishes. "We had perfectly fresh tomatoes all the time."

Growing up, Vanderheide considered several different paths, including computer science and horticulture, the family business. In Grade 12, he had a cool literature teacher which led him to study English at UVic, graduating in 2009. Along the way, he took a bartending course at Camosun and eventually joined the city's hospitality industry. He started at a Starbucks, then bussing at Canoe Brewpub, where he worked his way up while learning from brewer Sean Hoyne. Vanderheide discovered some top-label wines in their cellar and was inspired to earn his sommelier credentials.

Since then, Vanderheide has worked behind the bars of iconic venues, including the Empress and the Union Club. One of his favourite parts of bartending at the Empress was taking late-night customers on basement tours of the historic (and reportedly haunted) hotel. He also enjoyed giving brewery tours of Canoe and telling its story.

Victoria's food scene is more collaborative than other cities, he says. It's also more casual, with fewer white-tablecloth venues, and bolstered by access to outstanding Island produce. He and Chef Samuel Harris have committed to the city's food scene, together creating Vinuel Restaurant Group and forging the core values of stewardship, honesty and development.

In terms of stewardship, the duo saved local steak-frites fans from despair by taking over Brasserie L'Ecole and assuming the reins of Café Brio, where countless celebrations have involved scraping plates of duck breast or gnocchi. The team's new baby on the block is Dough Eyes, a family-friendly pizza place with memorable sourdough-crust pizzas, farm-to-table salads and house-made ice creams.

For Vanderheide, bringing humans together to share food—in an age where we're being force-fed artificial intelligence—makes his work meaningful. Eating together is "a pillar of civilization," he notes. "I think of it as one of the last bastions of humanity…We believe there is going to be this continued craving and need for human connection."

A good test if hospitality is your calling is if you have "the soul of an inn keeper," he says. If it fills your cup to fetch fresh napkins and look after people—you're going to be awesome in the business.

Today, a salad made with organic tomatoes from Central Saanich along with sourdough breadcrumbs and the greens shiso and agretti, is featured on the menu at Dough Eyes. The salad is a tribute to the version that he savoured at his grandmother's table.

Go to uvic.ca/alumni for some bonus tips on wines and more from Vanderheide.

TORCH

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MICHAEL KISSINGER

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

The Transformative Power of Education

UVic and our community partners represent talent and innovation that extends well beyond our campus, strengthening businesses, industries and organizations.

GUEST COLUMN BY ELIZABETH CROFT, PHD, VP ACADEMIC AND PROVOST



"Our research leads to new technologies, companies and commercial opportunities, and our partnerships move discoveries from the university into the marketplace."

I love universities. Throughout my career, I have seen the transformative power of education play out in different ways. Looking back at my own education—from a wide-eyed engineer trying out co-op jobs to a master's degree in AI and a PhD in robotics—there have been many twists and turns. Fast forward to today, I have been working as an academic for more than 30 years. I am still learning, discovering and excited about how education and research can transform our lives and the lives of those around us.

During their time here, working with professors, staff and peers, students acquire valuable skills, knowledge and diverse perspectives. They learn in formal and informal settings: classrooms, studios and labs, co-op jobs, community projects and practicum placements. Student clubs, teams, global exchanges and field schools all contribute to a rich learning experience. Ultimately, students carry these experiences into their careers, strengthening our economy and communities. I know this firsthand from my own co-op experiences, which included a steel factory, a particle accelerator and a hospital biomedical engineering unit.

As an academic leader, I work with government and sector partners to enhance student opportunities and maximize the collective impact of universities. Together, our community represents talent and innovation that extends well beyond our campus, strengthening businesses, industries and organizations. Through our global collaborations and alumni network, we open a world of opportunities for BC.

Universities don't just *contribute*, they *transform*.

We transform through the people we educate, the knowledge we generate and the partnerships we build. We bring together students, researchers, industry, governments and communities to tackle real-world problems and advance solutions.

At UVic, our research is building a stronger, more resilient economy. For example, UVic's Ocean Networks Canada—a world-leading ocean observing facility where research and data improve marine safety, environmental monitoring and informed decision-making—is helping communities and industries adapt to our changing oceans. Our Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium is translating climate research into practical information that helps communities and decision-makers prepare for and build resilience to a changing climate.

This work has a direct economic impact. Our research leads to new technologies, companies and commercial opportunities, and our partnerships move discoveries from the university into the marketplace. These outcomes were part of the impetus for creating our new Faculty of Health, which is already partnering with technology companies to develop digital health interventions, including tools to support diabetes self-management. Just as importantly, the talent we develop helps businesses and industries grow and adapt.

Our new masters in aerospace systems engineering is a great example of how we connect education, research and economic opportunity. Faculty and students are contributing to this growing sector through expertise in autonomous flight systems, artificial intelligence, advanced materials and new propulsion technologies—fields that define the future of travel, commerce and defence.

Investment in post-secondary education is an investment in BC's future. It's an investment in our economic development, but also in opportunity: for students, for communities and for the businesses and industries that depend on talent and innovation.

It's also an investment in Canada. At a time when our foreign relations are changing, global trade is a national imperative and communities are confronting the growing impacts of climate change, we will need knowledge, talent and the capacity to innovate at a global scale alongside infrastructure and capital.

UVic is leaning in to do our part. We are educating talented people, pursuing discovery, building partnerships and turning knowledge and ideas into action.

Every day, I reflect on the sparks of joy I have witnessed: a student's new passion, a colleague's research breakthrough, a budding partnership. These moments transform lives and strengthen the future of our communities, province and country. This is why, after all these years, I still love universities.

UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

PROFILE

People Power

UVic's ninth president, Dr. Rhonda McEwen, grew up on rich conversations and diverse ideas—setting the stage for an interdisciplinary career that spans expertise in technology, AI and academic leadership.

BY JODY PATERSON, LLD '12



UVIC PHOTO SERVICES

It sounds like the plot of a novel: A young girl is transported from her Caribbean homeland to the American Midwest for a life-changing adventure amid academics from around the world. Those years would be an experience like no other in shaping Dr. Rhonda McEwen's thinking about the power of interdisciplinary conversations.

She was seven when she and her family packed up their home in Trinidad and Tobago and moved to Menomonie, Wisconsin, where the University of Wisconsin-Stout was on a mission to open its doors to international students.

McEwen's parents were both pursuing graduate degrees at the time: mother in textiles and her father in industrial design. The family settled among a cohort of more than 10 Trinidad and Tobago families who had arrived in Menomonie around the same time. And for the next five years, little Rhonda soaked it all up.

"I had all these aunties and uncles around me—highly educated people with very different disciplines," recalls McEwen of that period in the late 1970s. "The conversations that were being had around all these children was incredible. We were surrounded by an interdisciplinary environment that wouldn't become vogue for many years ahead. It's like a through line to UVic."

She expects to call on those early experiences—and many more from her remarkable career—as the University of Victoria's ninth president and vice-chancellor. McEwen is UVic's first Black president and its first female president (not acting in the role).

"Interdisciplinary work brings together a breadth of ideas and perspectives that spark innovation, says McEwen, pointing to differences in problem-solving approaches, life experiences and socio-economic circumstances. Diversity within the Coast Salish," says McEwen, who opened our interview by reading aloud from science fiction writer Robert A. Heinlein's 1973 book *Time Enough for Love*, reflecting on the possibilities that emerge when we look beyond the boundaries of our own fields and bring different forms of knowledge into conversation. "Diversity is a fact of nature, and it is expressed on Vancouver Island in a spectacularly beautiful way," adds McEwen. "I was listening to a business leader on what diversity brings, and it's not just goodwill and 'kindness.' It is not about culture wars. It's an economic driver and a core ingredient for a good life; we ignore it to our peril."

"Interdisciplinary work brings together a breadth of ideas and perspectives that spark innovation."

McEwen has an interest in technology and human-machine communication that spans her 15-year career in the private sector and the research and career in academia that followed. She has been talking about technology and its impact on humans since long before the topic was making daily headlines.

Her most recent position was as president and vice-chancellor of Victoria University in the University of Toronto, where she spent four engaged years managing $1 billion in assets, stick-handling a high-profile student protest demanding fossil-fuel divestiture and marvelling at the university's commitment to alumni engagement.

But then came the opportunity to lead a major university recognized for its commitment to the issues critical to Canada now, Arctic and economic sovereignty, energy security, climate resilience, Indigenous partnerships, aerospace and technological independence. Not through one discipline but in an interdisciplinary way. McEwen moved west to Victoria with her husband, Stuart McEwen, and the older of their two children, a 23-year-old keen pianist with non-verbal autism who was one of the first to introduce her mother to the potential of human-machine communication.

REAL-LIFE STUDY OF SCREENS AND AUTISM

McEwen just completed a decade-long term as a Canada Research Chair in Tactile Interfaces, Communication and Cognition, studying human-machine interactions and the social and cognitive effects of technologies. But before that, she was the mother of a then-four-year-old with autism attending a preschool that was experimenting with screens as a way to improve communication.

"I wanted to understand the relationship between cognition and these new technologies where you touch the screen. I wasn't initially thinking of autism," says McEwen.

"But one day I picked up my daughter at school and she was holding an iPod Touch, and the teacher began telling me how the apps were helping the children visually see what was coming up—lunch time, recess, that sort of thing. I went home and thought, wait, isn't this what I'm studying?"

She launched a study at the school, tweaking as researchers got a better understanding of how the children were using the technology. "It was mind-blowing what we learned. They could express their desires, their choices," says McEwen. "That began my big interest in human-machine communication. That became a time for me to investigate tech—not passively, but actively.

"Then came Siri, Alexa, and then the pandemic, when we were removed from humans and saw people engaging with tech even more. Now we have generative AI, something that isn't just a search engine but is engaging and learning. Because I've had experiences in social sciences, engineering and business, I can bring these topics together. I love being someone who can cross those disciplines." (A notable example was her work that ultimately led to creation of a new Sesame Street puppet, Julia, who is on the autism spectrum and debuted on the show in 2017.)

McEwen returned to Trinidad and Tobago after the Wisconsin years and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in 1994 from the University of the West Indies of St. Augustine. Then came an MBA from Cass Business School (now called Bayes) at City University in London, England, and a Master of Science in telecommunications engineering from the University of Colorado in Boulder. She earned her PhD in information from the University of Toronto in 2009.

By then, she was 10 years into a career in the private sector with major consulting firms including Deloitte and, later, IBM. She had a position with Deloitte in Atlanta but was working out of its London, UK, office when she met Stuart, a fellow Deloitte staffer.

When a job offer came from Deloitte in Toronto, the couple seized the moment to grow their family in Canada. A whole other career in academia awaited in Toronto. She took on various academic roles at the University of Toronto starting in 2011.

In 2019, she became the director of the Institute of Communication, Culture, Information and Technology. Two years later, McEwen was the vice-president of academic and dean of the University of Toronto Mississauga, and then the president of Victoria University a year later. Her research continued, with no plans to change that as she begins at UVic.

AI WILL TRANSFORM

McEwen notes that "the natural reaction to all the tech I've studied is, 'Oh no, this isn't going to be good!'" But while the transformative impact of new technology on human society is never neutral, the challenge is to discover how to use the technologies effectively and ensure our values remain intact, she adds.

"We tend to view AI with loss narratives: let's defend the status quo, let's create the policy rules," says McEwen. "That is step 1, but step 2 is reimagining how we do the work of the university. Is the way we now do it the only way administratively? Are there efficiencies to be gained while considering people and security. We'll also want students to be ethical and skillful with AI. Employers are expecting that.

"And the third stage—how do we use AI in research? Just imagine: water and AI, health and AI, climate and AI, defence and AI, management and AI, creativity and AI, psychology and AI. It's entirely shifting everything. It's so exciting to be rethinking the way we've done things. It's a time for regeneration."

McEwen, the girl with the novel-like origin story, grew into an avid reader and particularly enjoys sci-fi. She leans into learning from the themes of the genre—understanding that there is strength in curiosity and community, and that we need to value diverse insights and partnership to help us create a better future for all.

RINGSIDE

Soil Solutions

UVic's Ecogastronomy Research Group explores soil health and the future of food.

BY ANNE MACLAURIN, BA '91, CERT '00



"Soil is a living thing that deserves careful attention and respect," says **BROOKE HAYES**, PhD student and researcher at UVic's EcoSoil Lab.

Changing climates and other challenges mean that farmers and vintners need targeted information to help them maintain soil health and keep producing food and drink for us all.

Researchers at the Ecogastronomy Research Group out of UVic's School of Environmental Studies are wrestling with profound questions about food, wine and the role of soil health. For example: What if vineyards grew wine without irrigation? What if farmers could retain the unique qualities of their soil? Using data and research on food and wine production, the group looks at how ecological and social sustainability, food quality and a strong sense of place come together.

Surrounded by soil-analysis machines at their Eco-Soil Lab, John Volpe, professor of environmental studies, and PhD student Brooke Hayes grapple with issues such as government agricultural policies, limited support for farmers and difficult questions about the future of food.

"Farmers are familiar with risk. There is no safety net. However, our soil research offers paths that include building climate resilience into agriculture," says Volpe.

When Brooke Hayes joined the Ecogastronomy Research Group in 2020 as a PhD student she brought her passion for soil and a drive to explore provocative questions about agricultural practices, policies, governance structures and the declining mental health of farmers. "Soil is a living thing that deserves careful attention and respect," says Hayes.

The EcoSoil lab is open to community partners and farmers looking for support in advancing their soil's health and resiliency. Hayes developed a tea decomposition test kit for farmers that measures the decomposition rate of organic matter in soils. She regularly assesses soil samples in the lab.

Both Volpe and Hayes promote a bio-regional approach to food and wine. Every region has its own terroir (climate, soil, topography, human know-how). For example, a farmer working with the EcoSoil Lab is producing compost comprised of materials exclusively from their farm to conserve the bio-regional signature in their products. All the elements that make up the compost (manure, soil, water) are found on the farmer's land. The processed compost is sold locally to other farmers in the same bio-region.

"Regionality is very important," says Hayes. "The biology in a particular region is unique, each micro-organism living in the soil is particular to that area."

Their research reflects that place matters. The same can be said of the wine world. The terroir is what gives food or drink its unique flavour and character.

Volpe is part of the global DRYWINE project, an investigation into how unirrigated vineyards maintain viability in increasingly unpredictable climates. Working with wineries from France, California, South Africa, New Zealand and the Cowichan Valley, Volpe's role is to measure the soil community's contribution to vineyard resiliency.

The Cowichan Valley produces world-class pinot noir in a cooler region. Together with Marlborough, New Zealand, another cooler climate producer, it will be paired with Burgundy, France, a warmer climate that also produces the world's top pinot noir without irrigation.

"The DRYWINE project will provide guidance for today's cooler region producers to remain viable in a warmer tomorrow without irrigation," says Volpe. "It also puts Cowichan Valley on the map of global wine research and sustainability."

As farming and agricultural production continues to be threatened by climate change, geo-global politics, shifting consumer behaviour and changing economic markets, Volpe and Hayes hope to mitigate these changes through their research, teaching and collaborative partnerships.

MICHAEL KISSINGER

Fresh Food as Medicine

University of Victoria researcher Matthew Little's study into the effectiveness of food prescriptions as an intervention showed promising results.

BY STEPHANIE HARRINGTON, MFA '17

Hippocrates once said, "Let food be thy medicine and let thy medicine be food." Now, some 2,400 years later, food prescriptions have taken the famous Greek physician's advice to a new level.

University of Victoria researcher Matthew Little has been studying the effectiveness of food prescriptions, which improve access to healthy foods for those who need it through vouchers or food boxes prescribed by a healthcare professional.

Little, an associate professor in the School of Public Health and Social Policy, says food prescriptions are an example of a "food is medicine" intervention, which also includes medically tailored meals and medically tailored groceries. Healthcare providers use these approaches to address food insecurity and improve nutrition among patients.

"The idea what we should be incorporating food interventions into health care through prescriptions is something that is unique, innovative and also simple," Little says.

It's an intervention that is needed: More than 4.4 million people in Canada can't afford to buy enough healthy food. Little says food insecurity is a public health crisis that worsened since the COVID-19 pandemic. People who experience food insecurity often have poorer diets and are at higher risk for developing nutrition-related chronic diseases.

Food prescriptions are more common in the United States thanks in part to a 2018 Farm Bill that dedicated funding for produce prescription programs. In Canada, without large-scale provincial and federal funding, food prescribing happens mostly on a local scale in Alberta, Ontario and BC.

But do food prescriptions make people healthier? Little co-led a recent study with the Guelph Community Health Centre in Ontario that evaluated changes in food security, fruit and vegetable intake and health among adult participants in a fresh food prescribing program.

The study enrolled more than 50 adults who were experiencing food insecurity and had at least one chronic health condition. The group received a food prescription from their healthcare practitioner that included a nutrition and cooking information package and weekly vouchers worth $10 per person in a household to buy fresh produce from an online market over the period of a year.

The results were promising. Researchers found the proportion of study participants experiencing severe food insecurity declined after receiving a food prescription, their intake of fruit and vegetables increased, and health indicators such as insulin levels improved. Participants reported that the program improved their mental and physical health, provided social connections and reduced the financial burden of buying groceries.

"The study showed the potential of food prescriptions to simultaneously address food insecurity, reduce household stress and improve nutritional health," Little says.

Little says more research is needed about the long-term impacts of food prescriptions. Researchers questioned if the same objectives could be met by providing cash instead of food prescriptions to people with lower incomes, which would allow participants to exercise more agency around the foods they receive. Little says it's also important to assess the overall healthcare savings resulting from food prescribing—for every dollar spent on food prescribing, what future healthcare costs are prevented?



Researcher **MATTHEW LITTLE** co-led a recent study that evaluated changes in food security, fruit and vegetable intake and health among adult participants in a fresh food prescribing program.

Little is involved in a large global research group that is gathering data from food prescribing research around the world to conduct a meta-analysis assessing if and how food prescribing works to improve health across multiple contexts and target populations. Along with other researchers, Little is also advocating for food prescribing to be incorporated into provincial healthcare and pharmacare systems.

"Access to nutritious, healthy foods is a human right," Little says. "Hopefully in the future, food prescribing will be widely accessible to help Canadian families meet their food and nutrition needs."

COURTESY OF MATTHEW LITTLE

We dig into ways the UVic community is contributing to improved access and knowledge about healthy, fun, climate-friendly nourishment—from a renowned chef, to a distinguished scientist, to a fire ecologist—plus, we dish up some quirky campus food facts.



EDWARD EDISON ANTEJOS serves as executive chef at the Vancouver Marriott Pinnacle Downtown.

City Chef

Chef Edward Edison Antejos traces his love of food and cooking to meals shared with his Filipino family. The Business degree he earned at UVic was a key ingredient in his journey to become a leading chef in Vancouver.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97 • PHOTOS BY JIMMY JEONG

His journey to becoming a top chef started with a dispute over a red pepper. Chef Edward Edison Antejos was in Columbus, Ohio, doing an internship at a hotel, while earning his commerce degree at UVic. His intention was to work in hospitality management in a front-of-house role.

At the time, Columbus had a thriving culinary scene, the Food Network was heating up and Antejos was savouring the writings of chef Anthony Bourdain. Antejos worked as a stewarding manager, and his duties included delivering food.

The banquet sous chef would show the team how to plate a dish, and they would copy it. During one shift, Antejos felt the food's presentation was falling short and shared that with the *chef de partie*. "It was a red pepper, and I didn't want to serve it," he says. "I said, 'Hey, that's not right. I'm not delivering that,'" recalls Antejos, who is wearing his chef whites during our interview. He has hurried to our online meeting from the breakfast rush.

The *chef de partie* in Columbus was not impressed at the feedback. "He said to me, 'I bet you can't do any better. I said, 'I could probably do better.'"

That was the fuel that led Antejos to return to Vancouver and pursue training in the culinary arts. "That's the first time I've thought of that since," says Antejos. "I'm getting goosebumps right now."

Antejos earned a BCom from UVic in 2001, a diploma in culinary arts from Vancouver Community College and went on to earn a Red Seal Endorsement, the highest accreditation for a chef in Canada. After graduating, he worked in kitchens around Western Canada and now serves as executive chef at the Vancouver Marriott Pinnacle Downtown.

He grew up in Richmond as part of Filipino family in which both parents cooked. His mother worked days for Air Canada, and his father logged nights at Vancouver General Hospital. The food he remembers most from his childhood is a crispy egg with a runny yolk, prepared by his father.

Despite their skills in the kitchen, his parents weren't happy with him veering from management to cooking. But he stood his ground. "I said, 'This is what I want to do and love to do,' so I pursued it."

One reason he went to UVic was to prove to his parents he could do it. "I have my degree in my office right now, and I look at it every day because I know how much time and effort I put into it. It's a reminder, if I have a bad day, I just look up there, and just '*Whew!*' I remember those days."

Antejos got his start at the Jericho Tennis Club working in front-of-house, attended school at night and kept trying to get into a kitchen. He learned a lot about integrity and work ethic. "If you work hard, you're going to get a job."

He sliced and diced through an apprenticeship at what was then the Delta Pinnacle for five years and earned his Red Seal, eventually becoming executive chef at Delta Winnipeg. He found he enjoys the camaraderie of restaurant work and learning from different kitchens. The pandemic caused him to do some rethinking on work/life balance, which brought him home to Vancouver to take the job at the Marriott Pinnacle. He had wanted to run his own kitchen by age 40, but fulfilled that dream at 42.

He's not cooking as much at work these days, and says his business training helps him manage his kitchen. "I've got to control food costs, and we have to strategize how we're going make revenue and have that entrepreneurial spirit… I feel that I have that mindset from UVic."

Another strong influence was his mother and her Filipino cuisine, which values the balance of flavours. Filipino food is a mish-mash of influences, including flavours from Spain and Asia. "That balance of sweet, sour, bitter, salty, you want that balance… That's how you build your palette."

After working a long day that starts in the hotel kitchen at 7 a.m., he often does menu development at home, usually trying to use one pot. He keeps it simple. "Last night I wanted something fast, had thawed a side of pink salmon, took some Kewpie mayo, smothered it and seasoned it with Montreal steak spice and threw it in the air fryer—and it was tasty."

No need to be snobbish, he suggests. His mother used onion soup mix. "Simple, quick and bold flavours, that's what I try to



Chef Antejos cites his mother and her Filipino cuisine, which values the balance of flavours, as an influence on his approach to cooking.

do at home and I try to do at work as well, too." His signature dish to bring to a potluck is Filipino barbecue. "The marinade has Sprite in it. It's a tenderizer, and it's a sweetness thing."

When asked if there's a dish or trend he feels is overrated, he looks around nervously. "I don't know what your reach is for *Torch*. I'm probably going to burn some bridges here." He pauses. "I'm not a big fan of the smash burger. It has to be done right. People call it a smash burger, but then it's not a smash burger—you have to call it what it is."

What is worth the money for the home chef? He suggests investing in a good knife that fits your hand size and grip strength. And a pepper mill. He uses one from Peugeot. His personal favourite dishes never stray far from his Filipino roots. One he enjoys is *tuyo*, or garlic rice served with dried fish that is fried, and a simple salad of tomato, onion and cilantro. It covers the bases of salty, sweet and bitter. It's a typical Filipino breakfast. "Rice is life for us."

Chefs are always thinking about food. "I don't think of it as work," he adds. He finds cooking meaningful because it builds connections between people and cultures. Like his hero, Bourdain, he applauds anyone who travels and experiences other cultures. Earlier this year, he travelled to the Philippines with his sister for four weeks. The siblings searched out *taho*, a street food they had enjoyed during childhood trips to the Philippines.

"This is the breakfast dish usually done by some individual that's walking early in the morning and they're yelling out the word '*taho, taho*,'" explains Antejos. It's basically a warm soy



pudding with brown-sugar syrup and sago pearls, which are similar to boba.

The duo could not find *taho* for days. They were in Boracay and walking back to their hotel when he spotted a person selling food. He nudged his sister. "I said, hey, I think that's *taho*… so she starts running."

It was. After speaking to the vendor, it turned out that the soybeans used in the dish came from Saskatchewan. Delighted, they hurried back to their hotel to enjoy their food. "We have these two cups of *taho*. And two bites into it, we're sitting in the lobby and I just start crying because it brought me back to my childhood, instantly."

He and his sister both cried tears of joy at being reunited with the familiar flavours. He had been cooking for 30 years and never felt that way about food until that moment, he says. "I was very privileged to experience it."

JIMMY JEONG



DR. JULIAN LUM and his team of researchers at BC Cancer examine how metabolism and diet affect the immune system, ultimately looking for ways we can better fight cancer.

Fighting Cancer Through Food

Dr. Julian Lum, PhD, and his research team are investigating a range of ways that healthy foods, and even fasting, can bolster the gut microbiome and disease prevention.

BY NICOLE CROZIER

If you're invited to dinner at Julian Lum's house, here's what you can expect: fish or chicken as your protein, fresh veggies from his backyard garden and a small amount of carbs. If you're interested in dessert, there will be a few seasonal fruits available to choose from. Missing from the table? Refined sugars, large quantities of saturated oils and ingredients you don't even know how to pronounce. One of his favourite dishes is steamed fresh fish (caught by him), with fresh ginger, cilantro and scallions with a side of long green beans

MICHAEL KISSINGER

picked from his garden and lightly softened in fresh garlic with a dash of high-quality extra virgin olive oil.

Lum is a leading expert in cancer immunology and immunometabolism. He is a professor of biochemistry and microbiology in the School of Molecular Sciences and a Distinguished Scientist at BC Cancer, where he leads research on how metabolism and diet affect the immune system, ultimately looking for ways we can help the immune system to better fight cancer. In his spare time, he is reshaping the conversation about health by bringing science to the community through clear, science-informed public education.

He's also the type of person who is annoyingly healthy. He eats, sleeps and exercises like it's his job, prioritizing time to tend to his garden, sleep and exercise, with interval swimming as a favourite.

FIGHTING CANCER THROUGH FASTING

The team at Lum's research lab is interested in understanding how metabolism impacts the immune response, and how those findings can be applied to cancer treatment. Some of his research projects look at how cancers impact nutrient availability for the immune system cells and how we can engineer immune cells to be more "nutritionally fit." More recently, he's begun investigating whether we can boost the immune system to fight cancer by changing nutrient intake.

In 2023, Lum conducted a small preclinical study with 15 leukemia patients. While no one is interested in starving a cancer patient, Lum reasoned that intermittent fasting, where patients eat only during an eight-hour window each day, may have a negative effect on the cancer cells without negatively affecting the patient. The results were striking. The number of cancer cells in their blood decreased, and major shifts were found in the patients' microbiome—including a reduction in certain types of metabolites known to suppress the immune system.

The microbiome is a broad term used to describe the healthy microbes residing in different parts of the body. The largest colony of microbes, including bacteria, viruses and fungi, live in the gut, where they play a symbiotic role, performing tasks our bodies can't do themselves. Some microbes may help digest foods that humans don't have enzymes for, while other may convert foods to new metabolites that our bodies can use productively, like ferment fibre into healthy metabolites.

"We were shocked by our initial findings and by our patients' reaction to the intervention," says Lum. "Not only did we see a reduction in the number of cancer cells, but patients felt empowered. Intermittent fasting was something they could do to be an active part of their cancer care, and many families participated, too."

While this study was exciting, Lum emphasizes that it's still early, and more studies are needed to confirm these findings. He recently received $1.4 million in funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to test the intervention on a larger group of patients.

THE ROLE OF THE MICROBIOME

Lum is not the only one who has been talking about the microbiome recently. Google searches for the term doubled between 2011 and 2023 and doubled yet again with a surge in early 2026. It's coming up increasingly in videos from online influencers. How much of the conversation is hype versus fact?

"What we eat does influence the microbiome," says Lum. "Different types of diets can lead to a different composition of microbes and the production of different metabolites. From our intermittent fasting study, we now know that when you eat can matter a lot, too."

There's also a known connection between cancer and the microbiome, and too much of certain bacteria can increase the risk or cause the development of some cancers. For example, fusobacteria have been associated with the risk and development of colorectal cancer. Scientists still have a lot to learn in this area, though.

"We're in the early days of understanding the microbiome, and we're learning a lot quite rapidly," says Lum. "At this point, it's too early to provide recommendations for what we should be eating to influence the microbiome in any particular way."

Lum does have a broad nutritional recommendation though: Eat whole foods and fresh foods, and avoid ingredients that are unpronounceable or not naturally derived.

He also has a broader health recommendation: Eat well, sleep and exercise. Surprise!

Lum's nutritional strategies aren't new, but they are how he lives his life. Like the patients in his study, Lum practises intermittent fasting. His first meal every day is lunch, which often consists of cherry tomatoes, fresh peppers, hummus and other

veggies, alongside a handful of mixed nuts. He rarely eats out, choosing to eat mostly home-cooked meals, where he knows exactly what is going into his food. He has a backyard garden where he grows his own fruits and vegetables, and he makes his own homemade granola and eats it with a big helping of kefir, a fermented drink that contains live beneficial bacteria.

EMPOWERING THROUGH HEALTH LITERACY

Lum has spent years in the lab, but he's also interested in going beyond those walls and sharing his knowledge of science, health and nutrition with the public. Alongside Hazel Booth, a nurse practitioner and instructor in UVic's School of Nursing, Lum cofounded the Institute for Health Literacy. Their goal is to provide informed educational information to the public so people can make empowered decisions about their own health.

"Health advice needs to be grounded in evidence, and it's important to fact check claims being made, especially those that circulate online," says Lum. "Public health messaging is a major gap in today's society. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to make heads or tails of a science paper without some expertise or training. I want to be an interpreter for the general public, helping people better understand the science."

As part of the Institute for Health Literacy, Lum and Booth are planning to launch a series of podcast-style webinars where they will chat with people with lived experience in cancer, mental health, metabolic syndromes and diseases and more. They are also planning monthly in-person sessions that will focus on specific health topics. The first event this fall will focus on vaccines.

"Science literacy is about having conversations and empowering people to make choices, not telling them what to do," says Lum. "By combining my deep understanding of science and research with Hazel's expertise from working on the frontline of primary care, I'm hoping we can begin to make information accessible, safe and easy to understand for our communities."

While the Institute for Health Literacy is largely focused sharing health information with the public, Lum is also frustrated with our health and food systems more broadly.

"We know we have a healthcare problem, and we know that there are problems with our food systems," says Lum. "Why are we, as a community, not marching up to the legislature and protesting this? There are many good causes, but this is us, this is our lives. The status quo is unacceptable."

A PASSION FOR HEALTH RESEARCH

Lum is an energetic, dedicated researcher and has lofty goals for improving cancer care, enhancing health literacy and pushing back on systems that aren't working. While he spends a lot of time working towards those goals, he says none of this feels like work to him.

"I'm fortunate that early in life, I found a passion for something. I love it. I work on this all the time. I don't punch in, punch out. I'm not just working: I'm doing what I love."

Eat Like Prof. Lum: Three Personal Habits

Julian Lum's approach to nutrition is shaped by his research, personal-health history and lifestyle. Here are three habits he incorporates into his daily routine:

1 Intermittent Fasting: It's Not Just What You Eat, But When

- Typically skips breakfast with lunch as his first meal.
- Aims to give his body a consistent overnight break from eating.
- Studies how meal timing influences metabolism, the gut microbiome and immune health.

2 Avoiding Refined Sugars: Keeping Food Simple

- Limits refined sugars, highly processed foods and unnecessary additives.
- Prioritizes fresh vegetables, fruits, lean proteins and whole foods.
- Prefers home-cooked meals, where he knows exactly what's going into his food.

3 Fermented Foods: Feeding His Gut Microbiome

- Regularly enjoys kefir, a fermented milk drink containing live bacteria and yeasts.
- Pairs kefir with homemade granola for a combination of protein, fibre and beneficial microbes.

Fire and Food

UVic double grad Kira Hoffman is a fire ecologist whose work on fire behaviour was acclaimed by *National Geographic*. She's collaborating with the Gitanyow Nation on using fire as a tool to help restore traditional food sources.

BY CHRISTY ASCIONE, PICS • PHOTOS BY MARTY CLEMENS AND OTHERS



KIRA HOFFMAN and Gitanyow Elder and fire keeper Darlene Vegh.

Kira Hoffman stood among the trees, waiting for the signal. When it came, she took a deep breath. The moment had finally arrived; fire was coming back to the land. Elder Darlene Vegh bent down to light the first flame, and Hoffman watched with mounting emotion. Hoffman knew the Gitanyow fire keeper had been waiting a long time for this—not simply to light a fire, but to restore a relationship with the land that had been disrupted for generations.

The plan was modest: a carefully timed cultural burn in a cedar and cottonwood forest along the Xsit'ax (Kitwanga River), where crab apples and hazelnuts grew through an old village and harvesting site. The goal was not to destroy the forest, but to renew it—to bring back plants used for food and medicine, create habitat for wildlife and reduce the dense vegetation that can fuel more destructive wildfires.

Hoffman watched to see what would happen. The week before had been wet, and no one knew exactly how the fire would move through the cottonwood forest. Then Vegh lit the first fire. It caught along the river's edge and began to move.

The flames consumed dead vegetation but moved harmlessly around the crab apple trees and hazelnuts. The fire grew, covering hollows and dips, then nimbly climbing the slope. It was behaving almost exactly as Hoffman and the fire team hoped.

"It's so textbook perfect," Hoffman remembers thinking. "We've just nailed the soil temperature, the soil conditions, the

fuels…" As the fire reached the top of the slope and continued to spread, Hoffman and the team realized they could expand the burn into an adjacent area, planned for another day. "The key thing is we made that decision together," she says. "Let's go with it. Let's keep burning—the conditions are perfect."

By the time they were finished, long after the sun had slipped below the horizon, they had burned about 40 hectares (an area more than half the size of Victoria's Beacon Hill Park). The next morning, animals were already returning. Within a few weeks, fire-loving plants such as stinging nettle and cow parsnip grew, sending their soft shoots above ground. And after it rained, Hoffman says, the landscape turned "electric green," drawing grizzly bears and ungulates in to feed.

For Hoffman, one of the most remarkable parts of the experience wasn't what she saw, but what she smelled. "If you've got that timing right, then you can almost smell the earth releasing and waking up. It's a very hard smell to describe, but for me, I'm smelling my childhood. I'm smelling memories of the past."

She was remembering the forests and fields of northern British Columbia, where fire had always been part of the landscape. Hoffman grew up outside Smithers on a farm where her family burned their fields to clear away old vegetation and encourage the growth of thick, nutrient-rich hay for their horses. They gardened, fished for salmon and picked berries. "We had a huge garden," she remembers. "We made Saskatoon wine and harvested huckleberries. We would go into old burn sites to pick berries because we knew that was where the good ones were."

Food and fire were connected long before Hoffman had a name for that relationship.

A CURIOUS MIND

As a child, she was the kind of person who wanted to know *why*. In Grade 6, she became convinced her German Shepherd, Argus, might be psychic. Every day, he seemed to know when her school bus was about to arrive. She devised an experiment to test three possibilities: perhaps he could tell time, perhaps he waited by the road all day or perhaps, improbably, he could read her mind. She took the question to the school science fair—and won.

Her experiment never produced definitive evidence about Argus's psychic abilities, so we'll never know for sure. But the impulse behind it would become a defining part of Hoffman's life: notice something, ask a question and find a way to test it.

But before she became a scientist, Hoffman became a wildland firefighter. At 18, she joined an initial-attack crew and spent summers fighting wildfires with the BC Wildfire Service. It was there she began to question the idea that every fire was a problem to be solved by putting it out. "I think I realized pretty quickly that we weren't using fire as a tool. It was definitely, and especially at that time, really suppression focused," she says.

One memory from those summers has stayed with Hoffman. She was on a helicopter crew when they landed on a small island where a single tree was burning. The fire wasn't spreading or threatening anyone. Yet the order was simple: extinguish it. "It just didn't make any sense to me why we're putting this fire out. It wasn't going anywhere," she remembers. "But it just was this mentality of, we have to put everything out." The moment stayed with her. So did a growing sense that something was missing from the way she was being taught to think about fire.

"The culture was tough. It was definitely tough to be a woman in fire. And I brought up safety concerns or other things that I was uncomfortable with and those concerns just kind of got pushed down instead of dealt with. So that was hard, it was hard not to… fundamentally change who I was. So, I left. I left and went to school."

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES AT UVIC

By the time she arrived at the University of Victoria, she had decided to set fire aside.

Hoffman arrived with a packed car and no clear idea of where her degree would take her. She found classes she loved, inspiring teachers and, just outside the classroom, the pocket of forest called Mystic Vale. She remembers feeling as though "all these doors were opening" and that it was suddenly "possible to do almost anything."

In 2012, Hoffman completed her undergraduate degree and began graduate work, examining how soil microorganisms responded to drought on the coast. Fire, however, wasn't finished with her. While working at a research site on Calvert Island, she started finding charcoal. This was one of the wettest places in North America. How could there be so much evidence of fire? Some people suggested the black material might be fungus; Hoffman, however, wasn't convinced. A committee member offered a simple test: take a piece of paper and see if the material could write. It could; Hoffman wrote her name in charcoal, took a photograph and sent it to her supervisor. This moment changed the course of her research—and ultimately, her life. "I emailed my supervisor, Dr. Brian Starzomski, and said I need to look at fire."

Hoffman went on to pursue a PhD through UVic, examining historic fire cycles and Indigenous fire stewardship on the coast.

Part of that work took her to the University of Oregon on a fellowship.

WHAT FIRE GIVES BACK

After a few years on the west coast of the United States, Hoffman returned to northern BC with her family. She explains that having a young child made the pull of home stronger: grandparents, wildlife, wild spaces and the many cultures that make the region home.

Back in the North, Hoffman began building relationships with the Gitanyow Nation, where community members wanted to revive cultural burning practices that had been suppressed for generations. "We started having conversations about, what does it mean to bring back fire after 100 years? Why are you doing it? What are the things that you want to see?" Hoffman recalls.

The Nation wanted food and medicinal plants to become abundant again and close enough for the community to harvest. Many of those plants also provide habitat and forage for wildlife. A landscape shaped by fire could support food systems while creating a more diverse, fire-resilient mosaic around a community with one road in and one road out.

It was also a return to something much older. For millennia, the Gitanyow had used fire to care for their territory and sustain the foods and medicines it provided. That relationship was disrupted when colonial policies restricted Indigenous Peoples' ability to burn.

The resulting project, Fighting Fire with Food, received support from the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS; climatesolutions.ca), a research institute hosted at UVic. But Hoffman says the most important outcome wasn't simply the research. It was the relationships. "What I see is that when you're giving money to support fire research, really what you're doing is supporting reconciliation, because so much of it is people getting together and doing a really critical thing together."

Fire, she has learned, is rarely an individual pursuit. It is something neighbours do together, that communities gather around. It is something that can bring people with very different backgrounds and experiences onto the same fire line.

The work with Gitanyow also changed how Hoffman understood science itself. She had entered the field trained to measure things, to identify what should be sampled, recorded and quantified. But working with communities brought a different question into the conversation: Who is the data for? The



Hoffman works with members of the Gitanyow Nation to revive cultural burning practices that had been suppressed for generations.



The goal of a carefully timed cultural burn is to bring back plants used for food and medicine, create habitat for wildlife and reduce the dense vegetation that can fuel more destructive wildfires.

point wasn't simply to document how the forest changed, but to understand what that change could make possible: food and medicine within walking distance of the community, plants that were more nutritious for people and animals, and berries that, Hoffman says, could be big and juicy.

"Scientists can become so focused on fitting fire into graphs and academic literature that they miss the rest of it: the sound and feeling of fire, its touch, its art and its lived experience."

Hoffman's own understanding of fire has been shaped by the people she has worked alongside. Among them is Darlene Vegh, a great-grandmother, matriarch and leader who has walked the Gitanyow territory for four decades. Vegh spent years trying to bring cultural burning back to the land. When she finally lit that first fire, it was an emotional moment.

"For 35 years I worked to map the land of my ancestors because I had no connection to Elders. It was my ancestors who taught me about the pre-industrial landscape. It was the ancestors who taught me the fire history. It was the land who taught me to love huckleberries, and how fire could be used to make big, sweet, juicy productive berries, but the timber industry has destroyed the land's ability to produce huckleberries," says Vegh. "I think our only option is to re-introduce fire back onto the land in such a scale that we will have food security. During this time, I became passionate about fire and how it could be used to restore the health of the land. I've always believed that if we could heal the land, we could heal the people or if we could heal the people, we could heal the land."

Hoffman says her relationship with Vegh is very special and calls her "an incredible teacher."

The work has transformed Hoffman's relationship with BC Wildfire Service. The young firefighter who once questioned why crews were extinguishing a single burning tree now works closely with the organization. She sees that 20-year relationship as evidence of how much the conversation around fire has changed. BC Wildfire has changed its organizational structure and its thinking about fire, she says, and she has watched that evolution from both sides of the relationship.

Sometimes she has to tell a community that it isn't safe to burn, even when people have waited a century for the opportunity. Sometimes conditions are perfect in northern BC, but fires burning elsewhere have used the resources needed to support a burn. The job, she says, is a "fragile dance" of competing priorities.

FIRE IS A TEACHER

Hoffman still loves the moment when a burn begins—the first 15 minutes, when everyone who has spent years planning suddenly watches the flame take hold. Even experienced fire practitioners can be surprised. Fire can be studied, measured and planned for, but it is never entirely predictable. As a child, she learned through risky play that some forces can be controlled and others cannot. As an adult, fire has taught her the same lesson at a much larger scale: respect the force, pay attention and accept that there is always more to learn.

That perspective has earned Hoffman recognition well beyond BC. In 2025, she was named one of *National Geographic*'s 33 Changemakers, an honour she learned about while giving a lecture in California. The recognition felt like a peak moment in her career—not simply because of the honour itself, but because of the people alongside whom she had been recognized, she says.

Yet the work still brings her back to something much simpler.

Like their mother, Hoffman's children are also fascinated by fire. Watching her children learn has also given Hoffman a glimpse of what comes next. She sees young firekeepers and guardians arriving with "a real desire to learn and connect," and she sees that same curiosity in her own children. She sees that same sense of connection on the Gitanyow fire line. The work there has grown into something larger than a research project: a way for people from different backgrounds and generations to come together around something they are learning to do together.

"I see it every spring when we burn together and people will say, 'I'm so excited to see my friends that I burn with. I don't get to see them any other time of year.'"

While fire can bring together, it can also destroy. Hoffman has watched wildfire displace people, consume homes and transform communities. She doesn't minimize that reality. But she also wants people to see the other side: the side where fire can bring people together, help grow food and medicinal plants, restore a landscape and carry knowledge between generations, communities and institutions.

Food Facts Frenzy

What's the size of UVic's Community Garden? How much butter do the popcorn fiends at the Cinecenta melt through every year? Who is Felicita's Pub named after and why? We've got answers.

BY MICHAEL KISSINGER, BED '94

Sustainer of life, filler of bellies, subject of a bajillion Instagram posts—food doesn't just do a body good, it connects us to our past and to each other. From cafeteria grub to Indigenous plants, here's a by-the-numbers buffet of UVic food-related stats to chew on.

PAST FOOD

2

Number of apple trees that still stand on campus south of the Cornett building from the original 19th century Finnerty family orchard. The Finnerty family emigrated from Ireland to Victoria in 1862 after the Irish potato famine and farmed the land around Gordon Head, Mount Tolmie and what is now the University of Victoria. UVic's Finnerty Gardens and Finnerty Road are named after the family.

116

The age of the Hamsterley Farm Water Tower overlooking Cadboro Bay at Sinclair and Haro roads. The structure was originally built in 1910 or 1911 as a water tower for Hamsterley Farm. The owners, Algernon Henry and Letitia Jean Pease, then added a steam boiler and two kettles to turn it into a jam and candy factory. Strawberries flourished in the area, and they produced a popular local jam. After changing hands over the decades, the building was condemned and then turned into a stable. The tower and property became part of UVic in the late 1960s. In 2003, the tower was damaged in a fire but restored to its current state two years later. The building, noted on Canada's list of historic places, is now used for storage. It's also been known as Tower of Jam, Drummadoon and The Pease Jam Factory, according to Canada's Historic Places.

7

Cost (in cents) of a cup of coffee at UVic's Lansdowne campus cafeteria in 1954. That year, the *Martlet* student newspaper awarded the cafeteria's revered manager Angelina "Ma" Norris a silver-plated coffee bean for her efforts in keeping the price of her powerful brew so affordable. Furthering her legendary status,



Angelina "Ma" Norris serves up an affordable cup of coffee in 1951.

UVIC ARCHIVES

Norris once made a giant cake replica of the Young Building, which still stands on Camosun campus, in honour of the 1961 convocation. It was the first time students had completed their entire Bachelor's degree programs at Victoria College instead of having to transfer elsewhere to finish upper-year university requirements. According to a May 29, 1961 *Victoria Daily News* article, Norris's impressive cake was iced in white sugar with pink sugar trim around the windows and green shredded coconut for grass. Norris eventually retired in 1966. By 1968, the cost of a cup of coffee on the UVic campus had percolated to 10 cents.

10,700

Dollars generated by "tobacco and candy sales" at the UVic cafeteria in the 1967-68 fiscal year.

16

Vending machines on campus in 1968, according to a UVic Food Services report that year. As noted in the report, the machines dispensed "cigarettes, candy, soups, sandwiches, beverages."

60

Vending machines currently on campus. Cigarettes are not sold in any of them.

20

Price of a hotdog (in cents) at UVic's Coffee Gardens in 1969. Hamburgers were 30 to 45 cents (depending on toppings), and two slices of buttered toast cost students a dime.

1982

Year the University Club of Victoria, formerly known as the Faculty Club, opened.

0

Cost of a first-time one-year membership to the University Club for all UVic alumni with an Alumni OneCard.

22

Number of years (1967–1989) beloved custodian Felicita Gomez worked at the SUB. In 1983, she cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony of Felicita's Campus Pub, named in her honour. Felicita passed away in 2021 at the age of 97.

1

Cost (in dollars) of a chicken wing at Felicita's Pub on Thursday Wing Night. The minimum order is 10.

BUTTERED UP

6

Cost (in dollars) for a large popcorn at Cinecenta's Munchie Bar.

12

Cost (in dollars) for a "movie combo" consisting of a medium popcorn, medium pop and a candy bar.

500

Pounds of butter (or 227 kg) Cinecenta melts through in a year.

10

Cost of admission to see a movie at Cinecenta for UVic alumni with an Alumni OneCard. Regular admission is $11.

450

Number of coffee drinks the Munchie Bar sells on an average day when classes are in session.



15

Per cent discount grad students with a OneCard receive on food at the Grad House.

4.7

Alcohol percentage (ABV) of Vikes Lager, produced by Swan's Brewery, with the hoppy tag line "Gold for victory. Tastes like domination. Smells like character." Although the pub and hotel remain, Swan's ceased its brewing operations in August 2024.

PIZZA PARTY

700

Seating capacity, across two levels, of UVic's newest cafeteria The Cove, which contains one of the largest Passive House kitchens in North America and is located in Čeqʷəŋín ʔéʔləŋ (Cheko'nien House).

9,000

Average number of transactions made across all UVic Food Services locations per day during peak hours.

93,600

Pounds (or 42,456 kg) of salad heaped, tonged, spooned, weighed and purchased from UVic Food Services' salad bars last year.

76,332

Deli sandwiches sold on campus last year.

86,098

Slices of pizza purchased.

67,017

Bottles of Core Power protein milk sold to muscle-minded customers last year.

54,141

ReUsables ECOBOXes checked out through UVic Food Services' ECOBOX program. Launched during fall 2025 in The Cove and Mystic Market, ECOBOXes are sustainable, reusable containers that can be borrowed instead of using single-use take-out packaging. The program is aimed at diverting landfill waste in UVic's dining facilities.

MICHAEL KISSINGER



2.94

Tons (or 2,667 kg) of disposable waste diverted by UVic Food Services last year.

4

Number of classes in the fall for the Continuing Studies' course: Savouring the Screen: Food Culture in Chinese Cinema.

GARDEN VARIETIES

1.5

Size (in acres, or .6 hectares) of the UVic Campus Community Garden, which is situated on a triangle-shaped parcel of land across from Wallace Field, bounded by McKenzie Avenue and McCoy Road.

90

Number of garden plots that comprise the Community Garden.

10

Garden plots that are managed by staff and dedicated to growing food that's donated to the UVic Student Society (UVSS) food bank.

767

Pounds (or 348 kg) of produce grown and donated to the UVSS food bank last year.

120

Number of people who attended the last community dinner of the year organized by Community Cabbage, a UVic club dedicated to diverting food from waste streams to support student food security, literacy and community.

2

Years it takes for a Himalayan Blackberry bush to produce fruit. Despite its name, the invasive species originated in Armenia and was introduced to the Pacific Northwest in the late 1800s by an enterprising American horticulturalist named Luther Burbank. The aggressive and fruitful bushes can be found on the edges of UVic's campus including Mystic Vale, Cunningham Woods and the Alumni Chip Trail. Over the years, the Greater Victoria Green Team has partnered with students, community members and the UVic Campus Planning and Sustainability Office to pull invasive vines, including Himalayan Blackberries, and plant native species.

160

Number of native plant species, including traditional Indigenous foods and medicinal plants such as camas, coastal strawberries and blackcap raspberries, that can be found in A Place of Medicine—an Indigenous-led ecological restoration and land-based learning garden located in the courtyard of UVic's David Turpin Building.

3

Number of strawberry plant species in A Place of Medicine.

24 to 48

Hours it takes to cook camas bulbs in pit ovens to allow its complex starches to become sweet and easily digestible. The rich, starchy bulb, which is said to taste like a sweet potato, has been enjoyed as an important food source for thousands of years by Coast Salish peoples.



MICHAEL KISSINGER

THE CHANGE-UP

Snack to Business

Married duo and Health Information grads Jenny and Han Yue channelled their know-how into building OHME! Foods, a freeze-dried functional snack brand in Vancouver.

We profile UVic alumni who recently made a bold life change



In 2023, **JENNY** and **HAN YUE** launched the freeze-dried functional snack brand OHME! Foods.

Names: Jenny and Han Yue

Age: 31 and 33

Hometown: Jenny was born in Shanghai, China. She was raised and lives in Vancouver. Han was born and raised in Henan, China. He lives in Vancouver.

UVic degree and year: Jenny and Han each earned a Bachelor of Science in Health Information Science and graduated in 2017.

What we used to be: Jenny was a Team Lead working on the Clinical & Systems Transformation Project from graduation until 2025. Han was a Project Manager on various health IT implementations across BC.

Then we had the idea to: Create nourishing, delicious snacks that support people's well-being while solving a problem we experienced ourselves: finding convenient snacks we could genuinely feel good about eating.

Why we did it: Working in health care gave us a deep appreciation for prevention and the role everyday choices can play in well-being. During busy workdays, we often struggled to find snacks that were convenient, satisfying and aligned with what we wanted to put into our bodies. We realized that many other people were probably looking for the same thing, so we decided to create it ourselves.

How we did it: We started small by researching ingredients, developing and testing different versions of the product, and gathering honest feedback from friends, family and potential customers. We also had to learn an entirely new set of skills, including branding, food production, operations, sales and entrepreneurship—super fun and challenging at the same time!

What we love about our new lives: We love being able to turn an idea into something tangible that people can enjoy. There is a special kind of satisfaction in hearing that someone has made our snacks part of their day. We also value the creativity, independence and constant learning that come with building something together.

In addition, we absolutely enjoy the freedom of time and not having to sit in an office from 9 to 5. This allowed us to be more agile and spend more time with our son!

What we miss about our old lives: We miss our colleagues, the sense of teamwork and the opportunity to contribute to large-scale healthcare projects. We also occasionally miss the predictability and structure of a more traditional career, especially the predictable paycheque!

One lesson learned: You do not need to have every step figured out before you begin. Starting small, staying curious and being willing to adjust are often more important than having a perfect plan.

One person who helped: Each other. Building a business can be uncertain and demanding, so having a partner who understands the vision, brings different strengths and keeps you grounded makes all the difference.

One trade secret: Taste comes first. People may initially choose a snack because of its ingredients, benefits, or packaging, but they will only come back if they genuinely enjoy eating it.

You can find us: Follow us on Instagram @ohmefoods

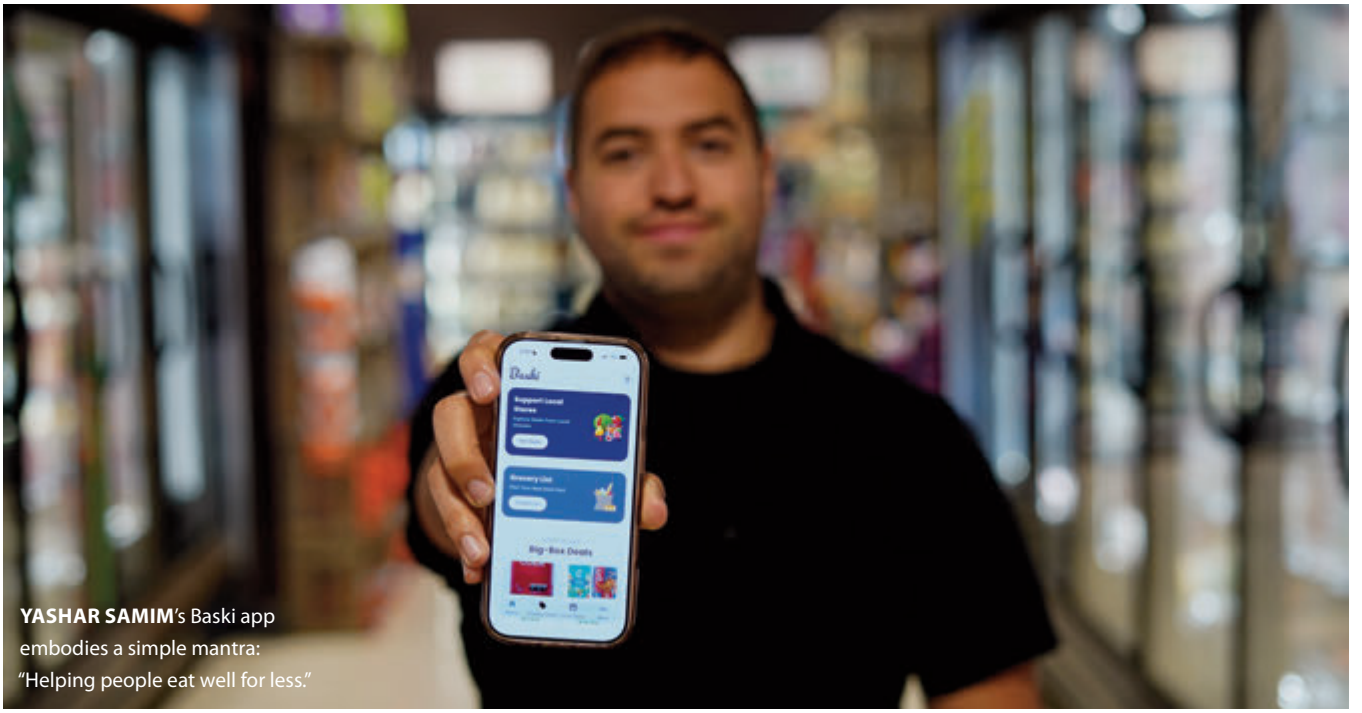
Our snacks can be found at Whole Foods, London Drugs, selected IGAs and Save-on-Foods locations, and online at ohmefoods.com.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OHME! FOODS

Higher Flyers

Business grad Yashar Samim loves to eat and to save money, so he founded Baski, an app to help customers find grocery deals and build better meal plans.

We profile enterprises run by UVic alumni.



YASHAR SAMIM's Baski app embodies a simple mantra: "Helping people eat well for less."

Name: Yashar Samim

UVic degree: Bachelor of Commerce (BCom), Gustavson School of Business in 2024.

My business: Baski

Where it's located: Victoria, British Columbia

What we do: Baski is a grocery savings and meal-planning app that helps people find the best grocery deals, build smarter shopping lists and discover recipes based on what's on sale.

Our team is: Three founders with backgrounds in business, law and technology who share a passion for helping people make the most of their grocery budget.

Why we're unique: We don't just show grocery flyers, we help people turn the week's best deals into practical meal plans and shopping lists, making it easier to save money while eating well.

Our ideal customer is: Anyone looking to save money on groceries, from students and young professionals to busy families.

Our business mantra: Helping people eat well for less.

I wasn't expecting… How passionate people are about sharing grocery deals. Some of our best ideas and features have come directly from conversations with users.

Right now, our biggest challenge is: Building awareness. Grocery prices affect everyone, and we're focused on making sure more people know there's a simple tool that can help them save.

We'll know we're successful when: People across Canada think of Baski as part of their weekly grocery routine and tell their friends, "This app helped me save money."

Where to find us: baski.app or Google Play Store.

Bottom line: My two favourite things are eating and saving money, so building Baski felt like the perfect combination.

MICHAEL KISSINGER

ASK AN EXPERT

Street Smarts

UVic triple grad Dr. Jill Wiwcharuk helps bust misinformation and nurture compassion with viral videos about her experiences and insights treating marginalized and addicted patients.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



DR. JILL WIWCHARUK is an outreach physician in Victoria who creates social-media videos about the toxic drug crisis and marginalized communities.

Name: Dr. Jill Wiwcharuk

Expert in: Family medicine, emergency medicine and providing compassionate, non-judgmental care for marginalized patients

Current job: Outreach physician in Victoria. Creator of social-media videos as "Dr. Jill," covering topics such as the fentanyl fold, the basics of harm reduction or the role of pets in homeless life.

UVic degrees: BMus '98, BA '98 in Hispanic Studies and Dipl' 00 in Applied Linguistics

Other degrees: Medical degree from McMaster University in 2008

What is something fundamental you would like people to understand about your patients who live on the streets?
People are not homeless due to personal failures. They are homeless due to decades of poor government decisions and policy failures. Our society has failed them in many, many ways, often from the time they were children.

Also, I would like people to know that the toxic-drug crisis is not an "us" and "them" issue. It is something that affects all of us, which is why it is labelled a public-health crisis. Some people feel that it isn't something that is going to affect their family. But that is the same thing that families of many people dying today said 10 years ago.

Your videos take on topics like the "fentanyl fold" that are part of a world many of us wish to turn away from. Why did you decide to explore these sensitive issues?
There is a lot of misinformation and hatred out there. There are loud voices that are not just on social media, but in mainstream media and in government that continue to stigmatize people who are homeless and people with addictions. I have always believed that when it comes right down to it, people are wired to be kind and if they truly understood what my patients go through every day, they would be more kind and compassionate. I hope this can manifest on an individual basis when people see my patients struggling day to day and when they are out voting at their next election as well. Compassion and following the evidence is what will drive meaningful change.

MICHAEL KISSINGER

Your tone in the videos is gentle, assured and never shrill. What is the secret to your success in these videos? How are you hoping to use this newfound influence?
My secret to success lies in my husband, Ron Dick. He is a retired mental-health professional with 25 years of experience working with the same population I work with. I would never have had the capacity (or the guts) to start this project on my own. This is a fully joint project. He does all the filming and editing, he helps with content decisions and writing and he is in charge of making sure that I don't make a fool of myself in front of 120k followers!

Putting myself out there on social media like this was the most uncomfortable thing I have ever done as a doctor. I didn't even have an Instagram account before this. Doing it in a partnership with someone I trust as implicitly as my husband was the only way I would have done it.

The colour purple appears in your videos often. Does it symbolize something or is it just a favourite shade?
Purple is the colour that represents overdose awareness.

Your videos have millions of views. Are your patients aware of your popularity and what do they think?
A few of my patients are aware of what I do on social media, but not many. They have so many other competing priorities in life that watching me talk about things they already know all about on Instagram is not high on their list. I did show the video I made about acquired brain injuries to one of my patients who is significantly affected by a brain injury. He watched it, got teary and asked if I could send it to his mom.

What kind of feedback have you received on the videos?
Ron and I initially said we would do this for six months and then re-evaluate. At this point we have received many comments from followers and based on that, we have decided to continue for another six months and then re-evaluate. The comments that are most meaningful are from people with lived experience of homelessness or addictions who reach out and say, "Thank you. For the first time, I feel seen. I am so grateful that you are taking the time to teach people my reality." And then there are lots of people who say that we are helping them view people with more compassion, that they are feeling their lens shift a bit, that our videos are helping them humanize people who are homeless. This is what makes us continue the work.

Can you speak about the role of stigma as a barrier for your patients?
Stigma kills more of my patients than any health condition. It makes them avoid seeking care when they are desperately sick because they are so used to being treated poorly at healthcare facilities. Stigma is what drives harmful drug policy. Stigma is what makes politicians feel like they can treat addictions as a criminal issue instead of a health issue. And the worst part is when my patients internalize stigma and feel shame and self-loathing. It is very hard to recover from an addiction, or move forward with anything, when you yourself do not think you are worth it.

Can you describe the moment where you realized you would shift from a career of professional musician to healthcare professional?
I was doing volunteer work at a home for children of people with leprosy in Kolkata, India. I was spending a year there teaching them music, English, starting a computer program and just generally being a loving presence in their lives. Towards the end of my year, there was a huge earthquake in the state of Gujarat and thousands were killed. I immediately reached out to aid agencies asking if there was any way I could help. They told me that all they needed were doctors and nurses. And that was the day I realized I wanted to be a doctor. It seemed like the most practical, hands-on way that I could make a difference for people. It hadn't even crossed my mind prior to that very day. I remember it so clearly.

Many feel hopeless about and perhaps even fearful of the large number of people struggling with poverty and addiction in our communities. What can we do?
People really need to understand that bad government decisions from as far back as the '80s have landed us where we are today. The reality is that things need to change. Densification needs to happen, increased services for people who have been failed by our governments need to happen. The recognition of addiction as a medical issue and not a criminal issue needs to happen. There is no room for NIMBYism anymore. Learn more about the issues and get involved so that you can be behind the fact that YES–change needs to happen and it can happen in everyone's "backyard."

Find Dr. Jill on Instagram @streetdrjill

ASK AN EXPERT

The Power of Flowers

UVic grad Christin Geall is the author of two richly illustrated collections of essays exploring the world of flowers and design.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97 • FLOWER PHOTOS BY CHRISTIN GEALL



CHRISTIN GEALL's latest book, *Flora Culture: How Flowers Shape Our World*, features over 250 images from over 40 countries, while exploring such topics as colonization, aesthetics and globalization.



Name: Christin Geall

Expert in: Connecting design, nature, culture and horticulture.

Current job: Author, photographer, speaker.

UVic degrees: Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and Environmental Studies, 1995, Harvey Southam Diploma in Writing and Editing, 2002.

Other degrees: MFA in Creative Nonfiction, Stonecoast MFA, Maine.

How would you describe the difference in your two books, *Cultivated* and *Flora Culture*?
In *Cultivated* I focused on principles of design and art history up to the 19th century. I covered topics such as colour theory, perception, photography, line and form and numerous other topics to help people work with nature in creative ways. *Flora Culture* is more political, global and challenging. It picks up in about the 19th century and deals with colonization, aesthetics and globalization while also addressing design terms like appropriation and tokenism. The 80 essays are arranged alphabetically, and I shot about a third of the 250 images in the book (over 40 countries are represented).

How can people make wise choices around flowers?
Treat flowers like you do food. Buy organic, support small farmers, grow your own and don't be afraid to ask hard questions not just of growers, but also of yourself. For example: why does an imported long-stemmed rose still spell love on Valentine's Day?

Any advice for interdisciplinary grads?
I've learned that careers are built on skills as much as knowledge, and weaving ideas together is endlessly rewarding for you and the public. Try to work with your head, hands and heart. My experience working in the museums' community, with politicians, as a

AUTHOR PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTIN GEALL

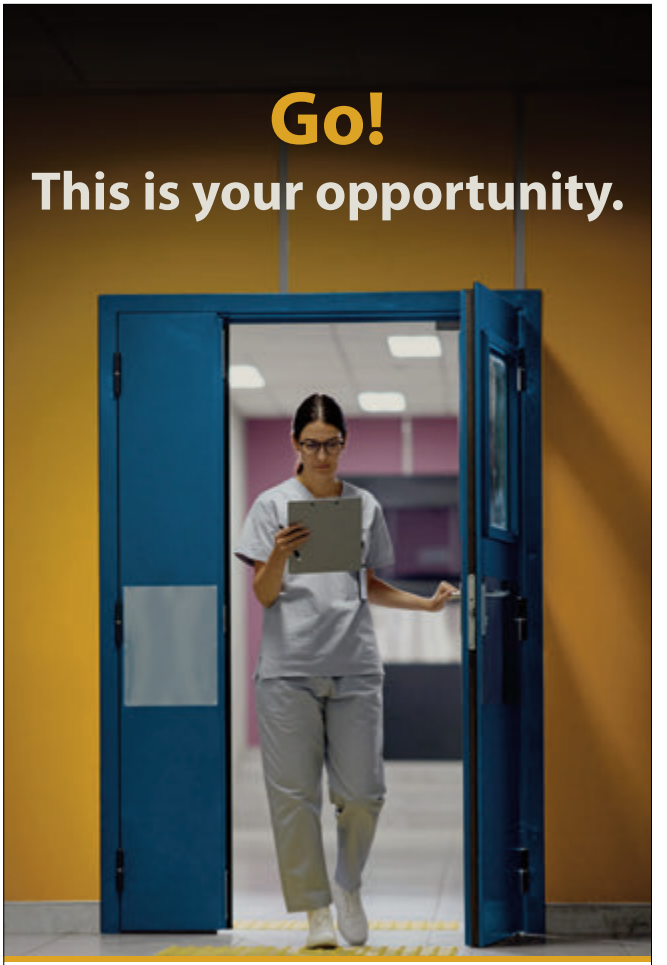


writer, photographer, lecturer, gardener and designer, all led me to the career I have now.

What is something about flowers that might surprise people?
People think gardening is good for the earth, but my research led me to see things differently. The bedding plant industry is unsustainable. Canada is the world's leading peat-moss producer, and we need to lobby for change.

You taught writing at UVic for many years. What is rewarding about the teaching you do now?
I lecture or design in museums, art galleries, botanical gardens and at public gardens and in historic homes. At every venue, I learn.

What are you working on now—what's next?
I live in Victoria part-time as I'm renovating/restoring an 1830s maisonette in London, England, and a modernist house from the late 1960s in Massachusetts. I'm rapidly accreting a lexicon of craft and decorative art terms. There could be another abecedarium in my future.



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GIVING BACK

New Heart, Full Life

Former Vikes soccer player Simon Keith has thrived since receiving a life-saving heart transplant 40 years ago. He now leads a foundation aimed at giving others the same chance.

BY DAMON VAN DER LINDE

Forty years ago, on July 7, 1986, Simon Keith received the heart of Jonathan Groves, a 17-year-old from Newport, Wales, who had collapsed playing soccer. Keith was 21, a University of Victoria soccer player whose Vikes career had been cut short by myocarditis, a virus that attacks the heart muscle.

"Never in a million years did I think I'd get 40 years," Keith says of the anniversary. "It's not a journey to do solo. It's definitely been a team effort."

Keith, LLD '25, arrived on UVic campus in 1984 on a soccer scholarship. "I was proud to be a Vike," he says. However, he only played two seasons before he got sick, and had to leave before completing his degree in education.

"Obviously it was a very challenging time for me and my family," he says. "Life is not a straight line. There are twists and turns along the way that you don't control. But I met some of my very best friends to this day at UVic."



SIMON KEITH (third from bottom right) during his Vikes days.

Keith did not simply recover. After transferring to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, he returned to the pitch and three years later was drafted first overall into the Major Indoor Soccer League—the first person in the world to play a professional sport with a transplanted heart.

Following stints playing for the Victoria Vistas, Winnipeg Fury and Montreal Supra in the Canadian Soccer League, Keith went on to have a diverse and dynamic career which included executive roles in resort development and financial services. He has served as an entrepreneur building and selling companies in diverse industries all the while becoming a world-recognized expert in organ donation and transplantation. He also had a family of his own.



Simon Keith after receiving a heart transplant in 1986.

In 2011, what started as a plan to help a family or two through the transplant journey evolved into the Simon Keith Foundation, which has raised and distributed more than $10 million across Canada and the US. The foundation focuses on helping young recipients through the transplant surgery and aftercare.

"When the child comes home after receiving an organ transplant, the need for support doesn't stop," he says. "Many families don't know what to do with a lifelong challenge that their child has."

This is why the Simon Keith Foundation funds non-medical costs year after year rather than once, plus mentorship, psychological support and trips to the Transplant Games in their countries. "I want these young recipients to see that we can be active, and we can be happy, and laugh, and joke and compete," says Keith.

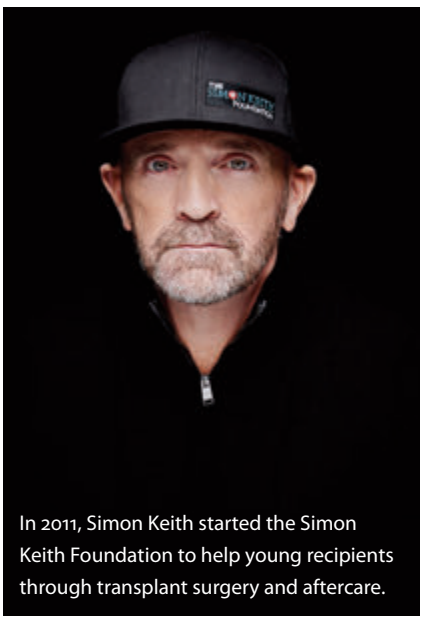
In March 2019, after 32 years with his first donor heart—nearly triple the 12-year median—Keith received a second heart and a kidney.

In 2021, he established an award at the encouragement of the Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame for an incoming UVic athlete from the region, with a preference for those whose lives have been affected by organ donation. The award has helped rowers, a soccer player and now a basketball player, Tyler Felt of Victoria.

"This award has reduced the financial burden of school along with providing an opportunity for me to play basketball at the highest level," Felt wrote to Keith this year.

In 2022, Keith was awarded the Order of Canada for his organ-donation advocacy. In June of 2025, UVic presented him with an Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) for his lifelong advocacy and support for organ-transplant recipients.

Keith keeps in touch with his first donor's family. "You want them to be proud of you, of course. And in many ways, maybe that's sort of my North Star: to make sure that I'm not wasting a minute."



In 2011, Simon Keith started the Simon Keith Foundation to help young recipients through transplant surgery and aftercare.

SIMON KEITH PORTRAIT BY JERRY METELLUS

Class Notes

News and photos from around the alumni world

1970s

Independent scholar **RON USHER**, BSc '75, has conducted in-depth research into the military history and life of Dr. Horace "Ace" Beach. Beach (1919–2008) was a Second World War veteran and intelligence officer who was awarded the American Silver Star for negotiating the surrender of 140 enemy soldiers. After the war, Beach went on to become a clinical psychologist and served as the Director of Counselling Services at the University of Victoria. In May, Usher presented his research on Beach at the Laurier University Canadian Military History Colloquium in Waterloo, Ont., and online in June for the Royal United Services Institute of Regina.

In July, the University of York (UK) conferred the degree of Doctor of Letters on Dr. **GW STEPHEN ("STEVE") BRODSKY**, MA '75, for his "significant contributions to knowledge." Now aged 92, Brodsky began his scholarly life at Queen's University, followed by graduate studies in Renaissance Studies at the University of Victoria and Modern British Authors at the University of York. He has specialized in Renaissance Drama, Literature of War and Joseph Conrad studies. Over the past four decades he has authored and edited numerous books and articles, the most recent, *Conrad and Honour: Victory in Defeat* (Routledge 2026). He taught at Royal Roads Military College and is an affiliate member of the University of Victoria Retirees Association (UVRA). His artwork and an interview have appeared in the UVRA's quarterly newsletter, *Grey Matters*.

Capilano University Faculty emeritus **CRYSTAL HURDLE**, BA '79, MA '81, has a new book called *Syl-Lo-Therapy* (Guernica Editions). According to the publisher, *Syl-Lo-Therapy* is a deep dive into Sylvia Plath and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, combining the best of creative vision with meticulous research by an experienced academic/poet. More info at guernicaeditions.com.

1980s

In May, the BC Historical Federation recognized Social Sciences grad **PAUL FERGUSON**, BA '81, for his long, exemplary service at the Chilliwack Museum and Archives as well as the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM). As



PAUL FERGUSON

curator of the Chilliwack Museum and Archives for more than 20 years, Ferguson was responsible for the development and oversight of numerous original exhibitions, including the award-winning *Brewer's Gold*, as well as *Fraser River: Its Spirit and Place and Chilliwack's Response to Conflict*. He was also a central part of the team that began digitizing and making the collection accessible to the public online—one of the first museums to do so in Canada. Ferguson worked for 10 years at the RBCM as both Associate Registrar and later as the Collections Manager of the Modern Human History department, where he mentored new staff and prepared the collections for the move to the new Provincial Archives and Research Collections building.

After graduating from UVic, **ANN MCCALLUM**, BEd '88, went on to teach in three countries (northern Canada at a one-room school, the United Arab Emirates



as a university instructor and in the US in both elementary math and high school ESL). Her latest adventure is a little more out of this world—a book titled *A Quilt of Stars: Astronaut Karen Nyberg Stitches a Dream*. McCallum co-authored the picture book with Nyberg, who's a fabric artist as well as an astronaut, and illustrator Alida Massari. More info at annmccallumbooks.com.

Born in Victoria, **VICTOR ZUPANC**, BMus '81, began his musical career studying violin and piano at the age of six at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Victoria. After receiving his Bachelor of Music from UVic, he went on to earn a master's degree in music composition at the University of California San Diego in 1983. Since 1989, Zupanc has been the resident music director/composer at Children's Theatre Company (CTC) in Minneapolis. He also composes for orchestras, choirs and films, and his music has been performed in more than a dozen countries around the world. In CTC's recent production of *Pinocchio*, Zupanc appeared as a musician onstage and served as sound designer. More info at victorzupanc.com.

JOANNE WEATHERALL, BEd '81, of Cranbrook was awarded the Medal of Good Citizenship for her decades of volunteer service supporting youth, heritage and community life. For more than 25 years, she has been an active leader with Scouts Canada, organizing weekly programming, camps and special events that are accessible to all youth. Following her teaching career, Weatherall expanded her service through the Cranbrook History Centre, where she helps organize the annual heritage fair, engaging students from elementary through secondary school. Her volunteer commitments also extend to assisting the local dog

club show in a variety of roles and hosting visiting musicians with the Symphony of the Kootenays. If that weren't enough, she also volunteers with other local organizations including the Cranbrook Garden



LAURA LYNCH

Club and Rotary Club of Cranbrook Sunrise for the Kootenay Rockies Gran Fondo.

UVic law grad and CBC journalist **LAURA LYNCH**, LLB '88, is hanging up her microphone. For the last six years, Lynch has hosted the CBC radio podcast *What On Earth*, exploring environmental issues and climate solution stories. The show will go on, but Lynch is heading off to new adventures.

SHEILA SERUP, BA '84, recently published her third book, *Spitfire Girls Trailblazer Helen Marcelle Harrison: ATA Ferry Pilot, Wartime Instructor and Flying Boat and Jet Aviator* (Pen & Sword Books). Serup illuminates the life of the Vancouver-born pilot who soared above societal norms. She became the first female military flying instructor in the world, teaching young pilots in the South African Air Force's 1,000-Pilot Plan and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan in Canada. Over her 35-year career, Harrison earned licences in four countries and learned to fly floatplanes during Singapore's flying boat era. Considered one of North America's finest pilots, she was selected to join the renowned Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). Harrison became the first Canadian woman to join the ATA, and the first woman to perform a cross-Atlantic ferry flight by flying a North American B-25 Mitchell to Britain.



1990s

Former *Torch* feature story subject Dr. **JOHN WENSVEEN**, BA '96, has completed his service as the President of the International Space University in Strasbourg, France and is now the Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs and College Operations at Broward College in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. As the institution's chief academic officer, Wensveen provides strategic leadership for academic affairs, academic operations, accreditation, student success, online learning, institutional effectiveness and college-wide initiatives that advance academic excellence, innovation and continuous improvement across a large, multi-campus institution.

UVic double grad **KEVIN P. BARTLETT**, BA '91, BSc '96, recently published the crime and espionage thriller *Timebomb*. The novel's plot is woven around the real-life story of atomic scientist Henry Moseley, whose "highly valued" notebook mysteriously went missing from Sir Ernest Rutherford's Manchester laboratory shortly after Moseley's death in the First World War. Bartlett says his UVic degrees in history and physics were of significant help in writing the novel. More info at kevinpbartlett.com.



KEVIN BARTLETT

GAIL GREENWOOD (**WAKULICH**), BA '95, MA '97, has published two new poetry books: *Dragonflies: Haiku and Other Short Poems* (Big Pond Rumours Press) and *Medusa's Blood* (Draft2Digital Press).

DEREK ROLSTONE, MBA '95, president of Stone HR Strategies (a full-service human resources consulting company based in Winnipeg with offices in Victoria and Calgary) celebrated the company's 1,500th job search posting on Indeed.ca.

Stanford Business Books has republished *Riding Shotgun: The Role of the COO*, co-written by UVic alumnus **STEPHEN A. MILES**, MS '94. Co-written with Nathan Bennett, the book breaks down the different types of COOs, the skills required to excel in the role and how businesses can leverage this position for long-term success. Miles is the founder and CEO of The Miles Group and one of the world's foremost executive coaches to CEOs and COOs. For more than two decades, he has advised top leaders and boards on CEO succession, executive development and board dynamics. He co-leads The New CEO Program at Melbourne Business School and is a widely published thought leader and podcast host. His work is featured in *Forbes*, *Bloomberg*, *HBR* and *Fortune*, and he frequently collaborates with the Stanford Graduate School of Business on leadership research.



STEPHEN MILES

In June, UVic honoured **QWUL'SIH'YAH'MAHT**, **ROBINA THOMAS**, BSW '93, MSW '00, PhD '11, with a traditional Coast Salish Honouring Ceremony to recognize her retirement after 27 years of transformative work. From the School of Social Work to capping her tenure as acting president and vice-chancellor, Dr. Thomas's career is an extraordinary testament to leadership, relationship-building, and vision. She has helped foster a campus where Indigenous ways of knowing are deeply woven into the fabric of the university.

UVic Theatre grad **MEDINA HAHN**, BFA '97, garnered much acclaim for her interactive reconciliation-based stage play called *Inheritance: A Pick-the-Path-Experience*, which she co-wrote

LAURA LYNCH PHOTO BY JEFF TOPHAM

and starred in. *Inheritance* has since been turned into a movie and is currently making the film festival circuit, with its US debut at the Red Nation International Film Festival in Los Angeles. Co-starring Hahn and directed by Camille Beaudoin, *Inheritance* explores what happens when the colonial rights to a vast plot of land come up for grabs, and three people—Indigenous, immigrant and settler—battle over its stewardship.

In her new book, *Humanitarienne: A Doctor's Stories from the Conflict Zone* (Douglas & McIntyre), UVic science grad Dr. **KIRSTEN JOHNSON**, BSc '98, details her life as a physician on humanitarian missions around the world and how she worked to



DR. KIRSTEN JOHNSON

improve conditions for aid workers. She writes about her path from a troubled childhood and living on the streets in British Columbia to working in conflict zones and remote communities with little to no access to a doctor. *Humanitarienne* has been described as "an inspiring memoir of a bold, brave global health expert—a pioneering (Canadian) woman working in some of the world's most volatile places."

2000s

ANNE-MARIE PHAM, MPA '00, has been reappointed as director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation for a term of 18 months, effective May of 2026.

Two-time Trillium Book Award finalist **LAURIE D. GRAHAM**, BFA '08, has published her fourth book of poetry. In *Calling It Back to Me* (McClelland & Stewart),



Graham traces the story of her great-grandmothers' lives before and after they left their homelands and settled on this continent, striving to understand how she came to be here and writing the act of colonization as it exists in her own family history.

MICHAEL SCHAUCH, BCom '03, has published his second book, *Anatta: Heart of Wisdom*. In the series of essays, Schauch, a lifelong Buddhist practitioner and experienced mountaineer, weaves together Tibetan and Japanese Buddhist insights to explore the sacred wisdom of "non-self" and our deep interdependence with all living things. More details at michaelschauch.com.

Alumni award recipient **JESS HOUSTY**, BA '09, has a new book called *How to Nourish a*



Cannibal (Harbour Publishing). Following their critically acclaimed debut *Crushed Wild Mint*, Housty offers a new poetry collection capturing connections between kinship, ancestral knowledge and spirituality. Drawing on Heiltsuk supernatural beings like Báxvbakvalaʼusiwa (the Great Cannibal at the North End of the World), these poems encircle the idea of the cannibal, a complex figure who is at times dangerous but also a generous conduit for spiritual gifts. They tap into the poet's own wildness, love and tenderness—and explore the sweet, agonizing anticipation of shared feasts, both from the land and of the body. Info at harbourpublishing.com.



JESS HOUSTY

JAVIER ISAAC GARCÍA ESCAMILLA, ELC '05, completed UVic's Intensive English Program in 2005. More than two decades later, he has been appointed to the Claustro Universitario (University Senate) at Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) in Mexico. García Escamilla is a full-time professor in UDEM's School of Education and Humanities and has more than 25 years of experience in education, higher education and academic leadership. He remains grateful for the role his experience at UVic



JAVIER ISAAC GARCÍA ESCAMILLA

played in his international and professional development and continues to stay connected with the UVic alumni community.

2010s

Author and disability advocate **HANNALORA LEAVITT**, BA '12, MFA '14, has written her second book introducing young readers to the unique experiences of people living with disability. Leavitt lives with vision loss and is immersed in the culture of disability and advocacy. *All About Us: 20 True Tales of Courage and Disability* (Orca Book Publishers) is a collection of biographies about inspiring people living with disability, some who were born with a disability and others who became disabled because of an accident or illness. The profiles include Paralympic triathlete Stefan Daniel, NASA scientist K. Renee Horton and TikToker Jordan Gagnon. "I wanted to write this book because the disability narrative is so often overlooked," says Leavitt. "Disability isn't real until it happens to you."

MICHAEL LARGE, LLB '11, has expanded and reshaped his law thesis into a self-published book. According to its press material, *Seed Strike* "walks a curvy path through language laws, guerilla gardens, and Indigenous teachings and territories, returning again and again to the epic struggle for control over baby-making decisions in Canada and America." Available at indigo.ca and amazon.ca.



MICHAEL LARGE

Distinguished Alumni Award recipient **ANNE TENNING**, MA '10, has published her first book, *I Am Indigenous* (Orca Book Publishers). The publisher describes the preschool picture book as "a thoughtful exploration of what it means to be Indigenous… acknowledging the vast variety of languages, territories, appearances, family structures, cultures and traditions." Each illustration was created by a different Indigenous artist, showing unique, personal expressions that highlight the diversity of Indigeneity in North America.

2020s

The British Columbia Historical Federation (BCHF) awarded **REBECCA MEITZ**, BA '26, Cert' 26, the 2025-26 W. Kaye Lamb prize for historic writing, third-and-fourth year category. Meitz received the $1,000 prize for her essay submission "Benevolent British Sisterhood: The Daughters of England in Late-Nineteenth Century Victoria." Throughout her degree, Meitz has focused on local history by centring understudied documents and alternative approaches to archival research. Recently she defended her Honours thesis, where she researched the history of dress in 19th century British Columbia. Outside of classes, she has been working and volunteering at local museums and hopes to pursue



REBECCA MEITZ *(right)*

further studies and a career in the field of public history.

In August, **LAUREN PEDERSON**, BCYC '26, was awarded BC's Medal of Good Citizenship, a provincial honour recognizing individuals who have made exceptional contributions to their communities. Pederson has empowered youth and women through advocacy, mentorship and innovative community programming. As Miss BC 2025, she founded a non-profit and partnered with Six Sense Self Defense to deliver free and low-cost self-defence and self-esteem workshops, reaching

JESS HOUSTY PHOTO BY MICHELLE MUNKITTRICK.

more than 300 youth, women and children across Vancouver Island. She served as president of the Child and Youth Care Society at the University of Victoria and St. Lawrence College, raised funds for Island Kids Cancer Association, has spoken on national radio and television on mental-health activism and has been recognized as a UNICEF child-rights advocate through her social-media platforms.

URSULA DHILLON, MA '26, has published her first academic article, "History for ecologists: Biases and best practices in the use of nautical charts to understand long-term change to kelp." Dhillon says her studies at UVic in the department of history helped to bridge the gap between historical context and environmental conservation.

UVic science grad **JOSEPH DOBBS**, BSc '20, is one of this year's International Birnstiel Award laureates. The International Birnstiel Award for Doctoral Research in Molecular Life Sciences recognizes exceptional achievements of outstanding PhD students in molecular life sciences. Dobbs studied microbiology at UVic before joining the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg, Germany for his doctoral research. Prior to his PhD, he worked at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge. During his doctorate, he completed a competitive internship at Genentech. Dobbs is now a postdoctoral fellow with Erin Schuman at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Frankfurt.

UVic grad **JORDAN SHERBINO** graduated with an MA in political science from UVic in 2022. He was recently hired as the Director of Cabinet and Legislative Services with the Métis Nation–Saskatchewan. He lives in Saskatoon.

UVic Law grad **YAMEENA ANSARI**, JD '20, was recently named one of the Top 25 Most Influential Lawyers in Canada by *Canadian Lawyer Magazine*. She is honoured under the changemaker category, which notes that she is fighting what may be the first transgender American asylum case in Canadian history.

What's New With You?
Be in the next Class Notes. Send news and photos to: torch@uvic.ca

Farewells

ERICA JEAN VIRTUE, BA '08, beloved wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt and friend, passed away on April 21, 2026, after a short but courageous battle with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). She was 40 years old.

Erica grew up in southern Alberta and British Columbia and hiked across Costa Rica with Outward Bound before she brought her energy to the University of Victoria. There, she earned her bachelor's degree in Political Science and met the love of her life, Arel English. She also became involved in the UVic Sailing Club.

Erica went on to earn her Juris Doctorate from Northeastern University School of Law, where she distinguished herself as editor-in-chief of the law journal. She gained experience as an intern for a Superior Court Judge, the Office of Bar Counsel, at Calyon Investment Bank and at the United States Securities and Exchange Commission.

In 2008, she set aside a promising legal career to enter the world of technology. She began her transition into tech at Lambda Legal, where she arrived willing to work and willing to learn. From there, she helped people discover the best places to eat and drink at GrubHub and Thrillist, before she joined Meta, where she spent a decade working at the intersection of artificial intelligence and human experience and led design initiatives for Facebook.

After her diagnosis, Erica took a round-the-world trip with Arel and their daughter Lily to Hawaii, Japan, France and England, and subsequent trips to Serbia, Bosnia, Turkey and Morocco, where they rode camels. She never stopped moving forward.

Erica is survived by her husband, Arel English; her daughter, Lilian Virtue English; her parents, Jeph and Julie Virtue; her sister Jennifer Virtue (Brandon); her large extended family; and dear friends who have been like family to her throughout her life.

UVic alumnus **JEREMY ERIC GORDANEER** was a beloved father, brother, son, uncle, husband, cousin and friend, as well as a gifted painter, scenic designer and sculptor. Among his many credentials was a Bachelor of Fine Arts from UVic in 2000.

He died a violent death in Victoria on Aug. 30, 2021 while visiting from Edmonton to see his mother. Now, five years later, his murder remains unsolved. His sister and best friend, UVic alumna Alisa Gordaneer, BA '91, MA '95, continues to appeal to the public for information on the case, with any tips, large or small. As reported in the news, officers were called to a home on Carberry Gardens—a residential street that connects to Fort Street—around 5 a.m. and found Jeremy Gordaneer inside with life-threatening injuries. Despite emergency first-aid efforts, Jeremy died from his injuries, leaving behind his heartbroken family, friends and arts community. Anyone with information on the case can contact the E-Comm non-emergency line at (250) 995-7654 and reference VicPD file #21-35509.

Savouring Life

Humanities grad and sommelier Brooke Fader of Wild Mountain Food & Drink found her philosophical groove in bringing fresh, local offerings to the community, with an emphasis on slow food and support for local producers.



BROOKE FADER co-founded Wild Mountain Food & Drink in Sooke in 2015 with a commitment to sourcing local food year-round.

It was spring semester 2003, and I was a dedicated student at UVic, the only woman who would graduate in philosophy that year. I loved talking with my fellow students, editing our philosophy journal, *Sophia*, and figuring out where I landed amongst all of the theories and ideologies. I went to my professor with a question: why was I having a more personal response to reading Aristotle than my peers? I was seeing parallels and lessons for my own life, but I was kind of alone in that. Dr. Colin Macleod told me that they're learning philosophy, and you are doing philosophy.

It was difficult to do philosophy in modern society, so I would often return to restaurant work where I loved the sense of community with a diverse group of people. I eventually found myself learning about the philosophy of Slow Food. Created in Italy in 1986 in response to the first McDonald's opening in Rome, Slow Food embodied values of sourcing locally, eating seasonally, respecting the environment and the food producer, and returning pleasure to the table.



There was something very compelling about seasonal flavours, the rhythm of nature and cooking with what was available locally. I became aware of the social issues around food, that who eats what and where and why can tell you a lot about who holds the power and the agency to access food. It was a way to honour Indigenous knowledge and communities who had long been stewarding these lands and waters. It led to awareness of the incredible wild foods unique to our forests and oceans. And ultimately it was a rallying cry to protect the earth and the people who feed us.

So, I threw myself into volunteering with Slow Food and getting to know my local food producers. I was working in places that supported these farmers, fishers and foragers when I met chef Oliver Kienast, who became my life and work partner. We began visiting and supporting farms, raising heritage pigs, learning everything we could about the growing, harvesting and preserving of foods. Volunteering with Slow Food and championing our regional cuisine led us to attend the biannual gathering Terra Madre in Turin in 2014, the largest gathering in the world of small-scale food producers. I had become a sommelier, so I presented a workshop on Canadian wine and cheese. I also helped found Slow Fish in Canada, a campaign to support local small-scale fisheries. Oliver and I wrote the standards for the Foundation for Biodiversity's Chefs Alliance in Canada, recognizing our unique ingredients and the work of chefs as the liaison between food producer and consumer. These experiences led to our drive to create a restaurant that would be a catalyst for a local food economy.

In the spring of 2015, we opened Wild Mountain Food & Drink in Sooke, named after the honey farm Oliver grew up on, and located just up from the government dock in a home that once housed a fishing family. Our commitment to sourcing local food year-round has meant a reinvestment of over half a million dollars into our local food community. This doubles to over a million dollars when we consider our purchasing of BC beverages. Our restaurant is a safe space for our staff, a place of celebration and commemoration for our guests, a refuge for our food producers, and the proof that we have one of the most vibrant, delicious and abundant food-and-beverage communities in the world.

Brooke Fader graduated from UVic in 2003 with a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and a minor in sociology. She is a sommelier, a Slow Food advocate and co-founder of Wild Mountain Food & Drink in Sooke. Find her here: wildmountaindinners.com.

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PHOTO NINA SIMONS

Irish Charms

Curiosity and medical school led science grad **NINA SIMONS** to Dublin, Ireland, where she took this photo of the River Liffey at sunrise. She shares some of her favourite shops, walks and hidden gems in and around the storied city in our Where I Live series. Read more at uvic.ca/alumni.