

'Tis the season for Shipyard Pals

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Shipyard Pals Sue (Julia Muncs) and Sal (Maruerite Hannah) will be leading free historical tours this summer. photo Paul McGrath

If you're strolling along Lower Lonsdale near Victory Ship Way this summer don't be surprised if you bump into your old pal Sal and your new pal Sue.

As usual, they'll regale you with stories, songs, and poetry.

The duo have become a summer staple in the area and are back again every weekend now until the end of August.

Sal and Sue are, of course, North Vancouver's Shipyard Pals. The annual program features free story-filled walks led by actors in costume, who deliver a presentation about the history of Burrard Dry Dock.

“We've always had a good response to this program,” says Shirley Sutherland, assistant director of the North Vancouver Museum and Archives, which leads the program. “I think people really enjoy the humour, the animation, the asides, the character development between the two actors. It's a lot of fun.”

The shipyards took up a big part of the waterfront, acres of foreshore that were blocked off from the community within the city parameters for decades, explains Sutherland.

“I think people are interested in how a place came to be and what it was and what happened there, what are the stories, and what can we learn from them?”

Many people have an interest in getting away from what is the present day and looking to the past and how things came to be, she adds.

“They're stories of people just like you and me who happened to live a little bit earlier who did really neat things, meaningful things, things that had impact on world events some of them, national events.”

The program also tries to connect the past with the present.

“Shipbuilding still happens on the North Shore,” notes Sutherland.

Knowing the achievement that has happened and that continues to be built on is significant, she adds.

“We have a lot of shipbuilders still living and working within our community.”

Every summer thousands of participants join in the story-filled walks with Sal and Sue, and also with Max and Molly in Lynn Canyon Park.

About two years ago, building on the success of the Shipyard Pals program, the archives decided to develop another program called Mountaineering Pals, which features the same format of stories, songs, re-enactments, and poems. And this year it also features the same actors. Langara College acting students: Julia Moncs and Marguerite Hanna portray both sets of pals.

“The great thing about North Vancouver is that it has a lot of really good stories, very rich stories. Unlike some communities that are essentially of the latter half of the 20th century, North Vancouver has been around and active for much longer than that,” says Sutherland, adding the mountain story is a big part of that history.

In some ways, mountaineering in the province got started here on the North Shore and history has hosted some of the sport’s significant climbers, including Phyllis Munday. “Many residents of North Vancouver are interested in the outdoors, that’s why they live here,” says Sutherland.

Sue and Sal meet visitors Saturdays and Sundays (until Aug. 27), 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., on Lonsdale Avenue and Victory Ship Way (near the Big Drawer installation).

Max and Molly meet their pals Wednesdays and Thursdays, 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., across from Lynn Canyon Café in Lynn Canyon Park. All walks are 45 minutes long. A basic level of fitness is required for the Lynn Canyon Park walk as there are stairs involved.

These guided walks are free, rain or shine, by drop-in. But groups can call 604-990-3700 ext. 8007 to book a tour time. You can also look for Sal and Sue at the Friday Night Markets in Shipbuilders’ Square.