

Orchardist Jim Harvest in

By Holly

*"I'm accused of being anti-ALR, anti-most
everything and very pro-development.
But I've worked with those people out in the fields,
I've gone through the banks,
I've gone through the hailstones,
I've gone through the times when you
don't have the labor to pick the crops."*

Mayor Stuart: the City

McNeil

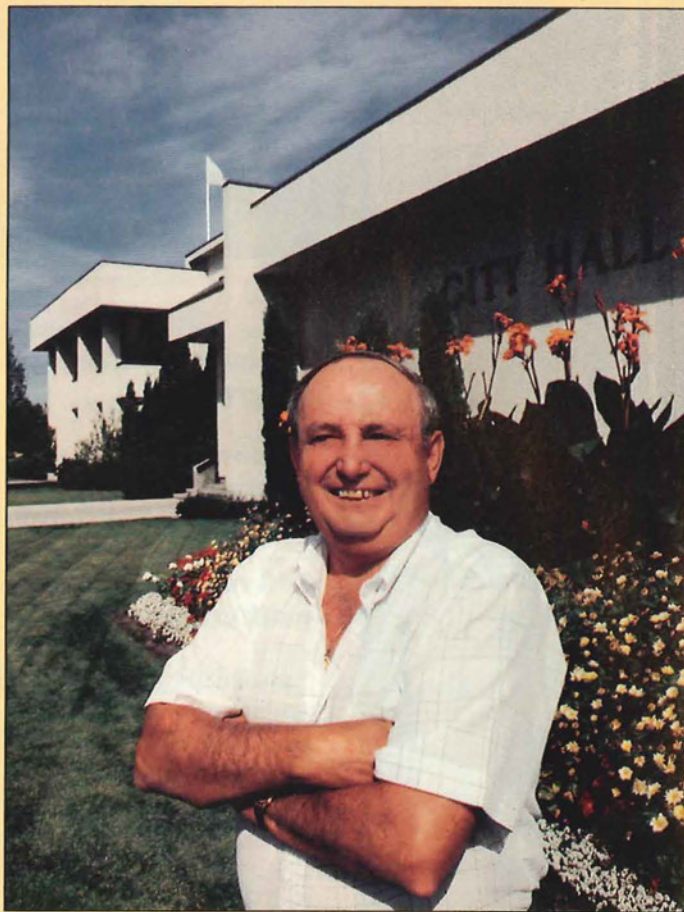
Agriculture in the Okanagan, concludes Kelowna's popular orchardist-mayor, "has never been a glorious occupation."

Jim Stuart sees Kelowna's development-versus-preservation dilemma from a unique perspective. He is a native of the city and has worked upwards of 40 acres of a south Kelowna orchard since 1953, retiring from the agriculture business only last year.

He is also a 25 year veteran of local civic politics and has been mayor for the past five years.

What will history conclude about the orchardist who oversaw one of the nation's most dramatic municipal expansions, during a provincial controversy about the preservation of agriculture land? Stuart, in a rare moment of intensity, declares: "They will probably say they (other politicians) should have listened to him more!"

In particular, he is referring to a controversial solution to secure a fresh water supply in the central Okanagan. But he also has strong opinions about the Agriculture Land Reserve (ALR), opinions that have been shaped both by personal experience and first-hand knowledge of the turmoil it has



Mayor Jim Stuart's background of being a Kelowna native has been helpful in giving him a true appreciation of Kelowna's growth.

caused in city development.

Jim Stuart is a relaxed occupant of this mayoralty office to which he has been twice acclaimed. He's known to greet guests in his shirtsleeves, serve the coffee and apple juice himself, and wave away any concern for resting the containers on the desk top. "It's a farmer's desk," he smiles. "It's meant for working."

The informality and quiet dedication is undoubtedly a reflection of the rural roots. Both his grandfathers moved to this valley in 1911, one of them becoming immediately involved in farming.

Jim's father, a logger, was persuaded to take over the family operation in Rutland, while Jim and wife Anna operated their own orchard - and raised three children - in south Kelowna.

"I guess I must have known what I was doing in that business. I got a couple of awards from the industry...At one time we were running 60 acres of orchard and that was a handful, all right."

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A hired man and the full time attention of his wife to the orchard were what enabled Stuart to carry on with increasingly heavy civic duties.

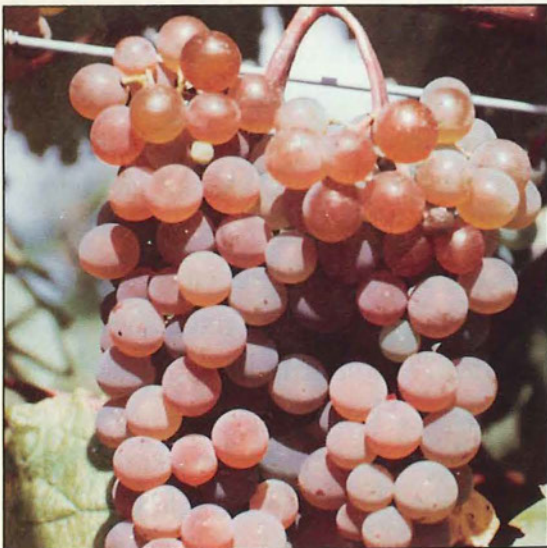
Son Charles had an interest in carrying on the farm. "But his father insisted that he get a trade before he became an orchardist," Stuart laughs ruefully. The result is that last year, when the parents had finally had enough farming, Charles was not prepared to take over. The orchard was sold in December and this fall, Jim and Anna made a "wheelbarrow" move to a new house built on a piece of their subdivided property.

With more than four decades of farming under his belt, Jim Stuart is no starry eyed conservationist. "There is not really a bright spot anywhere in a agriculture these days, not in wheat, or fruit, or cattle. Perhaps ginseng looks good...Without government subsidies, I don't think farming's got a great future."

He remembers the introduction of the ALR, by the NDP government back in the early 1970s.

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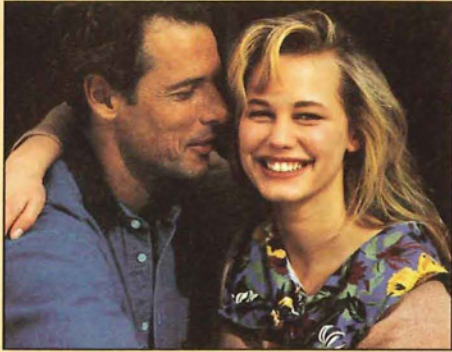
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Immediately prior to it, Kelowna had been amalgamated with Rutland and the Mission "so we could grow in a logical manner. That's what the government said at the time - then a couple of months later, they came in with this land freeze that totally destroyed our ability to grow logically."

Stuart contends that the ALR has created "a huge problem for our community." The city of Kelowna encompasses 88 square miles, twice as much as the City of Vancouver. Almost half is protected by ALR. He outlines situations where development has had to skip protected lands close in to the city, to build beyond. The new Okanagan College university campus is a case in point. "We're having to build this horribly expensive \$4 million sewage line to go beyond land that should not technically be in the ALR. It's ridiculous."

In an indirect way, the mayor also believes that 'freezing' tracts of land is in itself a hindrance



to the preservation of agriculture. When people have to travel through an ALR parcel to get to another developed area, its agriculture capability is further inhibited, Stuart suggests. As well, experience has shown that agriculture and residential are not generally co-operative neighbors.

In any event, he scoffs at the suggestion that the expansion of Kelowna has become an agriculture liability.

"The land around here hasn't been squeezed very hard." New technology has allowed farmers to grow more fruit per acre so "the land lost to agriculture hasn't shrunk our ability to produce at all. Maybe we've lost some vegetable lands but they were not really able to compete on a bigger market."

But being anti-ALR does not mean one is in favor of unlimited development. According to former city alderman Walter Gray, Stuart and his council have always had the best interests of agriculture at heart. "They are being pro-orderly growth, not anti-conservation."

Gray, who has lived in Kelowna for 45 years and served on council from 1986 to 1990, suggests that Mayor Stuart's background has "given him an understanding for the reason behind Kelowna. He was there when it was an orchard community, and he has seen all that Kelowna has had thrown at it during his 25 years in civic life."

As an orchardist, Stuart first became active as a B.C. Tree Fruits and Sun Rype board director. He initially took on civic duty as a representative to the hospital improvement district in 1964. "Just a meeting every now and then: we were just supposed to build a hospital." He stayed on as

hospital member, then became a director of the Regional District. When amalgamation came about in 1972, he was appointed to the new city of Kelowna council and then elected to an aldermanic seat in 1973. He sat as chairman of the Regional District from 1975 to 1990. Additional offices held include chairman of the Municipal Financial Authority of B.C. and a member of the B.C. Transit Authority.

In 1986, he ran for the mayor's chair. "I had no grand desire to become a civic leader. But after I'd been asked many times, I thought I should give it a try."

Don McIntosh was one of the key members of Stuart's campaign team in '86. "He was already fairly well-known as alderman and chairman of the regional district. But it's a lot different getting

tosh suggests that by the time the first mayoralty campaign rolled around, and certainly now, the farming had become enmeshed completely with civic experience. "His background of being a Kelowna native was certainly helpful...all these perspectives gave him a true appreciation of Kelowna's growth."

The mayor, declares his campaign mentor, "is like a good wine. He has achieved a true maturity in his political life."

This city in which Stuart was born in 1934 has experienced immense growing pangs during his tenure in the mayor's office. Last year, 5,500 new residents swelled the central Okanagan population of about 110,000 and the regional Economic Development Commission expects the influx to continue. Kelowna is one of the fastest growing communities per capita in Canada, if not the fastest.

"Last year we issued more building permits than Manitoba and Saskatchewan put together," claims Stuart. Kelowna city council, he estimates further, processes more work in one month than sister cities might do in six.

Prior to the 1960s, Kelowna was generally considered the least popular of the three Okanagan sister cities. Vernon got the regional government offices, Penticton gained a reputation as the city of eternal summer.

Until the floating bridge was constructed in 1955, Kelowna was literally a dead-end community. The bridge, Rogers Pass opening in the early 1960s, then the Coquihalla Connector in 1990 changed that forever.

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a public profile as mayor." The campaign team stressed Stuart's family life as "exemplary" and focussed on his personality, ability and past record.

"He was a great candidate to work with," claims McIntosh, who has worked the backrooms of both provincial and federal election campaigns. "He listens to you, disagrees sometimes, but not emotionally. Always reasonable."

McIntosh believes it was Stuart's "strong and capable" leadership after his 1986 victory that caused acclamations during the next two elections in 1988 and 1990. "We had polls telling us that he would be very difficult to beat. And I'm sure the other fellas were smart enough to have their own polls that told them the same thing."

Was Stuart's farm background an asset? McIn-



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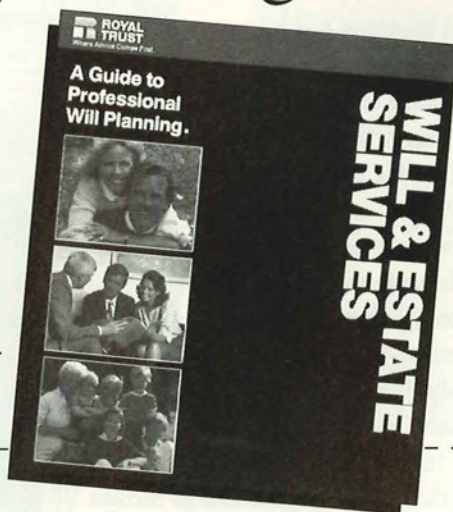
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The charge of being pro-development is something Stuart doesn't mind handling. "In this kind of office, you have to be a positive person: a promoter...Some people are really anti-growth but it would be folly to just shut our gates to everything.

"People who have lived here for a long time will tell you that we lose something with all this growth. But, in spite of what we want to happen, this area will grow." The trick, he maintains, is to replace the benefits that are lost.

"Yes, we may have beach and traffic congestion, some pollution..but we also can support more theatre, art galleries and cultural events that a smaller community could not." As for the perennial problems of few jobs and housing shortages, Stuart says they are just that: perennial.

"Kelowna has always had more than its share of unemployables." He is patently careful not to paint all members of this group with the same brush, but notes that solutions are not always the responsibility of city hall. He remembers the housing plight of one single mom, who told him she had left another community where she was housed, for Kelowna where she could not find affordable housing. There were no intentions of

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finding a job here so why did she come? Stuart can't understand it: "I guess it's because things are happening here and it's exciting...But people expect far too much from the system."

"This is the longest steady pull in our economy that I can remember...but I don't think it would matter how many jobs were created, we would still have high unemployment in Kelowna."

Yet, the need for a wider industrial and commercial base is a very real issue for Mayor Stuart and his wife. All three of their grown children - Heather, Sheila and Charles - had to move to the lower mainland for jobs because Kelowna could not provide the opportunities. The distance is even more acute since the birth of their first grandchild.

Jim Stuart in the mayor's office:
Bringing a unique perspective to
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"We've gone through the trauma of our children having to move away. We know the need first hand for more jobs here."

City hall has been criticized for lack of planning. The mayor maintains that long term planning is almost impossible, while even short term studies have to be taken with a grain of salt. "I'm a great believer that there's no plan that isn't out of date the day after it comes out. You simply cannot foresee the needs of the people five to 10 years in advance."

Examples: Kelowna has become the commercial centre of the interior. Who would have guessed that? Full-scale condominium development and 'walled cities' - which, by the way, he supports - were a concept that could not have been foreseen a decade earlier.

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Stuart is, however, putting stock in a strategic plan presently underway to determine the "average taxpayers" priorities. Not the lobby groups - because he hears from them all the time - but a polling of average opinion that will guide city council through the next growth phase.

Where is Kelowna headed? "The valley cannot grow forever," he expounds. The quality of both air and water are at risk. The mayor has been advocating another look at a controversial 1971 study that suggested the importation of water from the Shuswap district but to no avail - so far.

Former alderman Gray maintains that if his stint on council did nothing else, it assured him that "our city is very well managed. I marvelled at the high level of management. It is no wonder that we have the third lowest municipal tax rate around."

But he maintains that this very tax rate, which attracts so many new residents, also creates a huge headache in city management. A 10 per cent tax increase in Kelowna provides far less income for improvements than a 10 per cent hike in another city where taxes are higher. Says Gray: "It makes it much more difficult for the city to manage growth under this weight."

Does Jim Stuart want more of these headaches? He certainly has not ruled out another term as Kelowna mayor, when this one expires in 1993. "I sort of intimated I would not run again but I'll reconsider closer to election day." He declares absolutely no ambition to move beyond the municipal arena, although at the age of only 57 the doors must be considered wide open.

Despite the public's low perception of present day politicians and the frustrations of public office, Stuart is visibly dedicated to his job and his city. In a reflection on the times and the changes that have been wrought in Kelowna - indeed, in the world - he remarks philosophically that: "Political problems are more technical and more demanding than before. If ever we needed good people in public office we need them now."

Says Gray: "Jim is a sleeves-rolled-up kind of guy. If anything, he takes his job too seriously...he lives it 24 hours a day. He is, without a doubt, one of the fairest-minded and honest people I know."

A description, perhaps, of one of those "good" people so badly needed in public office. ■