The 1st Annual Report to Tyee Builders

Fiscal Year: 2012-3
Tyee [Tahy-ee]
noun
By local current definition, a Chinook, Spring or King salmon of thirty pounds or more. But more than a century ago, the original Chinook word carried even more weight. In those days a tyee meant a chief, a king, “anything of superior order” – even an online magazine.

Cover photo by Thomas Bullock
Dear Tyee Builder,

Last year we asked you to help grow The Tyee’s journalism by committing to a monthly voluntary subscription. You responded magnificently to our request, and as a result I have the privilege of sharing this report which lets you know some of the ways your contribution made a big difference in our reporting and impact this year.

You’ve made The Tyee better. That’s a certainty. But you’ve also helped push back against some disturbing trends in Canadian journalism as a whole. Let me explain.

Are we weird to pay journalists? We don’t think so. Thanks to you and other Builders, our budget for paying reporters increased by 37 per cent. That’s critical, given that The Tyee is one of those old fashioned publications that still thinks it’s important to pay researchers, reporters and other communicators for their valuable work.

Some of the Internet’s biggest publications treat journalists like hobbyists, asking them to produce stories just for the thrill of seeing them in print. We question the quality of the work produced under that kind of arrangement. The best journalists are conscientious, tenacious, willing to go the extra mile, committed to the life of reporting they have chosen. Those people don’t work for free and why should they?

While the Tyee’s freelance rates aren’t extravagant, they more than match what some of Canada’s biggest news chains are paying freelancers these days. And thanks to you, we are able to keep our in-house Tyee reporters chasing stories.

Paywall? Open a window! Just about all of Canada’s major newspapers have gone behind paywalls in the past year, charging you to read the news they produce. We understand why. Making media costs money (see above). But if solid information is vital for our democracy, and the kind of journalism The Tyee produces can lead to positive social change, why would we want to limit who can access it by locking it behind walls and limiting our audience to those who can afford a set rate?

We think our voluntary, sliding scale Builders approach is much better. We are trusting that enough people will value The Tyee not only for what we post on the site, but the fact that our information is available to all.

Your Builder contribution keeps the paywall down. And the window to a better future wide open.

Thanks for riding along advertisers, but you aren’t driving. As ad dollars become more scarce, the big news organizations are pressured to stretch their ethics to make advertisers happy. We are seeing more vaguely labeled advertorial type content on major sites, and we at The Tyee are concerned about that.

We are extremely grateful to our advertisers who play a key role in helping the Tyee meet its bills. However, thanks to you and other Builders, advertising is a much smaller percentage of our overall revenues than it is for the Big Media. Taken together, Builder contributions are similar to what we receive from advertisers, striking an excellent balance, we think.

Again thanks to you, we keep the flexibility to choose the advertisers who match the values we at The Tyee share with our readers. And, by the way, when we do partner with a business to publish material, we take care make sure the enterprise shares our values, and we label the piece in a way to make clear the arrangement.

So those are just three of many ways your Builder contribution fortifies The Tyee against some nasty pressures other publications are succumbing to in today’s difficult news media business landscape. Think of yourself, then, as not only someone who is helping to build British Columbia’s – and the nation’s -- leading independent online source of news, culture and solutions. You are also saying to all of Canada’s journalistic establishment: Don’t mess with what makes good journalism. Don’t sell out your principles. Earn my support, and you’ll get it.

Thanks for sending that message. At The Tyee, we hear you loud and clear.

Note from the editor
The Tyee aims to be a widely read and respected independent online magazine that publishes news, reviews and commentary not typically covered by B.C. and Canada’s mainstream media to inform and enliven the democratic conversation necessary to improve environmental and social conditions.

My, how we’ve grown…

Pageviews over the years

Twitter Followers

June 2011: 10,000
June 2012: 18,000
June 2013: 26,000

Facebook Likes

June 2011: 1,323
June 2012: 2,076
June 2013: 3,237

eNewsletter Subscribers

22,000
Awards & recognition

2012-13

Canadian Journalism Foundation

Excellence in Journalism Award (Small Media)

Canadian Online Publishing Award

Best online-only article or series

Winner: Richard Warnica’s series, “Death in Remand”

Canadian Association of Journalists

Student Award of Excellence

Winner: Carly Wignes’s series, “Treaty Troubles: Colonial Obstacles to Settling Claims in B.C.”

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Friends in high places

“I support The Tyee because in these times, we need all the friends of open, accountable democracy that we can get.”
Margaret Atwood

“I support The Tyee because it publishes long investigative pieces that are important for both readers and for journalism.”
Douglas Coupland

“I support The Tyee because its reporters are brave, independent and smart as hell — and because Canadians need to learn the truth behind government spin more than ever before.”
Naomi Klein

“I support The Tyee because it tells the stories we need to read and that mainstream media has given up on.”
Maude Barlow

“I don’t like my news farmed out, I take it wild.”
Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas

“I’m completely stimulated by The Tyee’s thought-provoking work. It’s like an intellectual brain-massage. I love the honesty and, sometimes, unconventionality of their genius writers and contributors. From them I learn so much.”
Bif Naked

“Canadians deserve the thoughtful, balanced, and independent journalism The Tyee has delivered since 2003. We don’t just deserve it. We need it. Long may it continue.”
Terry Fallis
Most-read news and opinion headlines of the year

1 Chairman Harper and the Chinese Sell-Out
   Andrew Nikiforuk

2 Understanding Harper's Evangelical Mission
   Andrew Nikiforuk

3 The Tyee's BC Election 2013 Riding Forecasts
   Tyee Staff & Contributors

4 Rolf Wiborg's Tough Love for Canada
   Mitchell Anderson

5 The Wrecking of Canada's Library and Archives
   Myron Groover

6 How Bullies Thrive in a Hypersexualized Kid Culture
   Robyn Smith

7 Taking apart Tories' Party Line on China-Canada Treaty
   Gus Van Harten

8 China Investment Treaty: Expert Sounds Alarms...
   Gus Van Harten

9 Oil Wealth: Should Norway Be the Canadian Way?
   Mitchell Anderson

10 Harper's Methodical Campaign to Silence Democracy
    Keith Reynolds

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Big Issues

From pipelines to poverty, our newsroom led the conversation with in-depth reporting and analysis on these important topics:

Aboriginal Rights & Justice and Idle No More

British Columbia Provincial Election

Poverty, Rights & Justice

Education

Enbridge Northern Gateway, Fracking & LNG

FIPPA (Canada-China) Treaty

Labour & Temporary Foreign Workers
B.C. Election 2013: Editor’s highlights

TYEE “AFTERNOON EDITION”
Double the number of feature stories published in the final two weeks of the election campaign. Much of the extra cost of this content was supported by reader contributions from election and Builder fundraising.

DIVERSE CONTENT
We published a full gamut of material appealing to the political junkie and the casual voter, both. These included a daily series of amusing vignettes of past political scandals, “explainers” that laid out the BC Liberal government’s polarizing controversies, weekly economic and policy analysis from the CCPA, profiles of “hot” ridings, election outcome forecasts (wrong, like everyone else), breaking news on rebranded Election Hook, fact-checking pieces on politicians’ campaign claims, fast, nuanced analysis of polling, provocative opinion pieces by our regular columnists as well guest spots on The Hook, a 15-part series on proposed environmental law changes from UVic’s Environmental Law Centre, and the interactive Election Map & Guide....

RAISED PROFILE
This time around, The Tyee established itself as a more authoritative, hour-to-hour source for election news. Our legislative bureau chief Andrew MacLeod was a regular presence on CFAX and other radio stations, our reporting team included veterans with well recognized bylines. As well, the interactive map and guide became a source for media and other influencers, helping to raise The Tyee profile compared to the previous provincial election.

THE HORSE RACE
While our forecast got it wrong — like everyone else’s — we also raised more alarms for the NDP’s prospects throughout and especially at the end than most others, including Tom Barrett’s early “comeback” scenario for Christy Clark and his eve of election article explaining why, as the headline said, the NDP had “jitters” despite polls. Throughout, we were balanced and in-depth without being boring, offering readers plenty of smiles and substance to go with the horse race evaluations.

TYEE ELECTION MAP & GUIDE
This high quality, interactive feature, a first for The Tyee, generated a steady stream of visits, often leading all content in traffic. The Map & Guide traffic became especially heavy in the final days of the election as people used it to research candidates and ridings. On election night, the map updated live as results flowed in.
Tyee Geography: Fish around the world

Around the World
Mitchell Anderson reports from Norway: “Secrets to Norway's Petro-Wealth: Lessons for Canada?”
Geoff Dembicki’s reports from China: “Behind China’s Great Green Wall: Risks and Rewards for Canadian Tech Innovators”

Around Canada
Andrew Nikiforuk reports from Alberta, Canada’s petro heartland
Federal politics reporting and analysis by various contributors

Across B.C.
Chris Wood, Jude Isabella, Kai Nagata and Stephanie Brown report on “BC’s Enduring Central Coast”
Andrew MacLeod reports from the B.C. Legislature
Bill Metcalfe reports from the B.C. Kootenays
Robyn Smith reports from Smithers, B.C.
Geoff Dembicki and others report on Kitimat refinery
In-depth coverage of 2013 election campaigns and issues by various contributors
Countless stories from Vancouver and B.C.’s Lower Mainland
Reader comment round-up

Tyee readers are engaged, informed and insightful. Here’s a sampling of thought-provoking comments left on Tyee stories this past year…

Responding to Katie Hyslop’s article about the BC Liberal government’s announcement of $20 million in funding for Aboriginal education initiatives and student funding, ‘Tankenka’ commented:

“FINALLY an initiative has been undertaken with the consultation of First Nations, and not prescribed….”

Responding to Mitchell Anderson’s second installment of his series on Norway’s highly enriching oil wealth policies, ‘Miss Quickly’ commented:

“… Norway is a model of what we wish we had done. We are going to have to be far more aggressive if we want the same conditions now.”

Responding to Bob Mackin’s piece ripping the cover off the expensive new roof on BC Place and the NDP’s demand for an investigation, ‘Hugh’ commented:

“They shoulda just duct-taped the old roof. Cost: $1.65.”

Responding to David Hains’ review of the new pine beetle documentary The Beetles Are Coming, “rangerkim” commented:

“My first beetle probe job was with the BCFS in 1981. Even then foresters knew that this was a pest that couldn’t be stopped, only managed….”

Responding to Katie Hyslop’s article Stress Is Killing Gender Equality in Canada, “Vancouver9” commented:

“… What if our policies – and attitudes – served to rebuild family and community networks, instead of just continuing the pay-for-service, nuclear-family-as-an-island approach to life that may be driving us to the brink?”

Responding to Needed: New Laws to Protect BC’s Urban Nature, the latest in our series of Environmental Law Centre suggestions for legal reforms, “Tangler” commented:

“… the typical city routine is to completely level a natural green space, ignore all the wild animals running for their lives, plant some ‘attractive’ trees and grass, and dedicate it as a ‘park’. The citizens cheer. The animals die….”
Game-changing stories

Your Builder dollars have allowed The Tyee to really ramp up our high-impact journalism. Since your support began rolling in, here are just a few of many “game changing” reports we’ve done:

**Chinese Miners Charged Exploitive Fees to Get BC Jobs.** The Tyee was months ahead of other news outlets reporting the planned opening of a Chinese owned coal mine in Tumbler Ridge owned by and staffed by Chinese miners brought in via the fast expanding federal Foreign Temporary Worker Program. Then Tyee reporter Jeremy Nuttall wondered how a worker might get chosen. He found a B.C.-based company’s website charging $12,500 to Chinese workers wanting to mine in B.C. to ease immigration. That’s illegal here. The CBC’s follow-up confirmed our story. So why did B.C.’s investigation, triggered by The Tyee’s story, go nowhere? We haven’t stopped looking into this one.

**The Problem with Food Banks.** Tyee reporter Colleen Kimmett got inside how food banks work and raised concerns ignored by news media more likely to be lending their names to holiday-time food bank drives. Among her findings: Food banks are so tied into the food manufacturing industry now that a tax incentive for corporations donating food to them is being proposed, turning hunger, and the food bank “solution”, into a bottom line enhancer for big companies. Critics say what people really want is enough money to buy their own food, but politicians can drag their feet as long as the food bank grows, and grows, and grows.

**The Oil Patch Wants a Carbon Tax.** Who knew? While Stephen Harper and other supposedly pro-petro politicians demonize the idea of responding to climate change by putting a price on carbon – a “carbon tax” – one surprising group begs to disagree. Oil patch executives. That’s what Tyee reporter Geoff Dembicki found out by interviewing many of them as part of his 13-part series on “Greening the Oil Sands.” His reporting on pro-carbon tax oil execs was picked up by numerous major publications, including the Bloomberg business wire. The conversation about Canada’s energy future is forever changed.

**Turning Back a Dubious Trade Deal with China.** End of last year Canadians suddenly began hearing about a secretly negotiated trade pact with China to be rammed through Parliament in a matter of days. It was said to be a done deal. But Andrew Nikiforuk delved into what, exactly Canadians were giving away. His shocking analysis, Chairman Harper and the Chinese Sell-out, quickly gained 11,000 Facebook recommends and nearly 700 tweets. Andrew quoted Gus Van Harten, the Osgood Hall international trade lawyer (without corporate clients) who went on to be a regular face on the news channels as the go-to expert explaining the deal’s downsides. Eventually even Conservatives like Diane Francis of...
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Game-changing stories

the National Post were blasting the deal...which, nearly a year later, seems to have disappeared.

What Were the BC Liberals Drinking? Tyee contributing reporter Bob Mackin was out front exposing a hasty, ill-conceived attempt by the B.C. Liberal government to privatize the province’s highly profitable liquor distribution and warehousing in 2012. His stories pinpointed the involvement of well-known Liberal lobbyists who hoped to keep a low-profile, a top bidder’s dubious labour record, and the government’s lack of business plan and consultation. After heavy media attention and public debate the government pulled the plug on its idea.

What Drove the Health Ministry Firings? When the BC government suddenly fired health ministry researchers alleging they’d violated rules on sharing personal data, Tyee Legislative Bureau Chief Andrew MacLeod broke many of the key developments in this story, including publicly identifying the people involved and digging out an alternative to the government’s version of events. MacLeod explored pharma industry influence behind the action, pointing out how the fired workers’ research might have hurt drug sales, and providing the perspectives of some of the people who’d been fired. One committed suicide. The case is ongoing.

Saving Millions on Generic Drug Prices. B.C.’s government finally followed through on regulations to drop the price of generic drugs in November, several years after Ontario did the same. Andrew MacLeod was first to raise the topic in B.C. three years ago and has dogged it since. The resulting policy change will save the government, insurance companies and individuals hundreds of millions of dollars a year. MacLeod’s most recent coverage this year identifies ways to achieve even larger savings.

BC’s Smoke and Mirrors Bargaining with Unions. Andrew MacLeod zeroed in on the round of bargaining where any wage increases were supposed to come out of budget savings. The so called ‘Co-operative Gains’ policy allows the government to look financially responsible, while unions risk being blamed for budget/service cuts. This story matters not just to B.C.’s 300,000 public employees, but anyone who uses government services or pays taxes. MacLeod cut through government secrecy to show actual savings to be found were slim. Now the government is starting to change its tune on tying wage increases to elusive budget savings solely through ‘Cooperative Gains’.

Why Didn’t Christy Clark Disclose Her Assets? She and other MLAs failed to reveal their holdings as required ahead of the election. Andrew MacLeod broke the story, now getting attention from the Auditor General’s office.
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What Should Be Done about Sam Fitzpatrick’s Death?
Crushed on the job by a falling rock, the young worker was ruled a victim of “reckless disregard” by his employer, construction giant Kiewet, a big contractor in B.C. and donor to the governing Liberals. Tom Sandborn’s investigation highlighted many more safety problems on Kiewet sites, and gave voice to demands by Fitzpatrick’s family that the company face criminal charges and be blocked from more B.C. government jobs. Sandborn’s story was picked up by Global TV (a two-night special) and other media, and hammered on in the BC Legislature by the opposition.

Enbridge Pipeline Disaster Dissected. The U.S. Pulitzer Prize this year went to InsideClimate for its reporting on the spill of Alberta oil sands bitumen in Michigan’s Kalamazoo River. Who in Canada did the earliest and most in-depth reporting on that disaster? The Tyee. Andrew Nikiforuk broke, again and again, the startling revelations of the U.S. investigation as they rolled out. Energy security analyst Rick Munroe sifted the case’s mountain of evidence to create a four-part anatomy of a pipeline disaster. Taken together, a portrait of negligence and incompetence by Enbridge, the same Canadian company pushing its Northern Gateway bitumen pipeline across B.C. Mitch Anderson’s investigations of what a similar spill would mean in Vancouver’s harbour revealed an evacuation nightmare. One of those reading might have been Premier Christy Clark who (for now) says she opposes Northern Gateway as too risky.

Knowledge is Power

“Get angry, write your MP, your MLA, your mayor and council members. Better yet, call them on the telephone...”
- ‘Talon’ in response to Andrew MacLeod’s story As feds ‘sell’ CETA, BC’s Bell says he can’t talk about trade agreement

“I have sent a letter to the Standing Committee on International Trade.”
- ‘Jeaness’ in response to Gus Van Harten’s piece BC Premier Urged to Consider Fast Legal Action Against

“I know letters like this, even ones addressed to the new Minister of Education ... aren’t enough; donations aren’t enough. Volunteering to help you out might be something I could do; but pushing our government – pushing the people who elect governments – to fund education is the only way to ensure these kids have a better chance of success.”
- ‘msjcox’ in response to Anna Chudnovsky’s first-person account of teaching inner-city Grade 7 students in Vancouver.
You made this year successful.

Your support made the difference this year. Together, more than 600 Tyee Builders increased our freelance reporting budget by over $65,000. That’s no small fry!

Reader Gifts as % of Total Revenue

- Events & Master Classes
- Desk Rentals
- Partnerships
- Readers
- Advertising
- Investors

Our revenues increased by 20% this year...

And our freelance reporting budget increased by 37%.

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Thanks for swimming against the current with us.