



THE CAPITAL AND VANCOUVER ISLAND

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Search continues for woman missing in Sooke area after car found

JEFF BELL
Times Colonist

The search for a 38-year-old woman last seen in surveillance video on Friday continued for a third day Monday in the area of the fish hatchery at Charters River, off Sooke River Road.

Melissa McDevitt spoke to her parents in North Carolina Thursday night, then failed to board a flight as planned out of Vancouver on Friday to visit them.

Family members are believed to be on their way to the capital region, said Sooke RCMP Sgt. Kevin Shaw.

McDevitt's vehicle, a 2015 grey Subaru Forester, was found

Saturday at the fish hatchery parking lot after a joint effort by Sooke RCMP and police in Victoria, where she lives.

Surveillance video of McDevitt from just before 2 p.m. Friday was located that shows her approaching trails from the parking lot. She was wearing a burgundy long-sleeved top and blue pants, and carrying hiking poles.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue personnel, a Saanich police dog and RCMP air services were brought in to help look for McDevitt, Shaw said.

McDevitt is described as petite — about five feet tall and slim — and weighing about 105 pounds, and could initially show

signs of cognitive delay. She has alopecia but could be wearing a wig or have short hair dyed in rainbow colours.

Information from her family suggests that she is an avid hiker, a hiking enthusiast, Shaw said. "There's no indication she was prepared for an overnight by any means."

The fact that she is an experienced hiker and has not made her way back raises the possibility that something unexpected could have happened, Shaw said.

Call Sooke RCMP at 250-642-5241 or Victoria police at 250-995-0765, extension 1 with information.
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Melissa McDevitt was last seen on surveillance video Friday afternoon in the Sooke area. VIA VICTORIA POLICE

\$100 cheques a pleasant surprise for Bridges for Women participants



PEDRO ABRAIS
Times Colonist

A group of women receiving support from the Bridges for Women Society got a happy surprise during last year's holiday season when they were given \$100 gift certificates, thanks to contributions from the Times Colonist Christmas Fund.

Michelle F., one of 14 graduates of the charity's pre-employment support program, said the gift certificate made a "big difference" to her and her son, who was one at that time.

"I used it to buy some groceries and had enough left over to buy some toys for my son. The gift certificate was so helpful for our group of mostly moms, especially around Christmas. It was like an extra bit of help."

Bridges for Women Society, which offers free pre-employment training programs for women affected by trauma, violence or abuse, gave out a total of 90 gift certificates to clients last year and expects to distribute the same number this holiday season.

This year's Times Colonist Christmas Fund campaign has received \$47,687.40 in donations from 1,687 donors, including \$3,389.40 from Saturday's 'Ibba Christmas event. The fund-raising goal is \$1 million.

"We are very grateful at Bridges for the support from the Times Colonist Christmas Fund," said Patricia Rawson, executive director of Bridges for Women Society.

"We want to thank all the people who donated to the fund — your contributions provide a shining light at a tough time of the year."



Michelle F., with two-year-old son Mason, received a \$100 gift certificate last year during the holidays, thanks to the Times Colonist Christmas Fund. DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

Bridges for Women's programs, along with mentorship and one-on-one support, help clients build their skills and confidence and create brighter futures through academic upgrading.

Services and programs are open to all women, non-binary and two-spirit people who identify as part of the women's community.

The organization has certified clinical counsellors who offer trauma-informed counselling, with up to 10 free sessions available for eligible clients.

For more information, go to bridgesforwomen.ca.
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How to donate to the Times Colonist Christmas Fund

- Donate online. Go to timescolonist.com/donate, which will take you to our Canada Helps page. It is open 24 hours a day and provides an immediate tax receipt.
- Donate by mail. Send a cheque to the Times Colonist Christmas Fund, 201-655 1/2 Ave Road, Victoria, B.C. V9A 6X5.
- Donate by phone. Use your credit card by phoning 250-995-4438 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Court rejects argument school's First Nations practices infringed on religious freedom

CARLA WILSON
Times Colonist

The B.C. Court of Appeal has upheld a trial judge's decision that two First Nations practices demonstrated in a Port Alberni elementary school did not infringe upon a mother's charter right to freedom of religion.

Candice Servatius, whose appeal was dismissed on Monday, had taken issue with a smudging practice carried out in 2015 by a Nuu-chah-nulth elder in a classroom at John Howitt Elementary School, as well as with a hoop dance in which the dancer said a prayer at a school assembly.

The school has about 250 students and approximately one-third of students in the district are Indigenous.

Servatius argued in the Supreme Court of B.C. that the school had infringed on her right to freedom of religion by compelling her two children to take part in religious ceremonies contrary to their own faith.

B.C. Supreme Court Justice Douglas Thompson found in 2020 that the students were observing the events as educational experiences and not participating in them, and that their freedom of religion was not infringed upon.

Justice Susan Griffin wrote the appeal decision and Justice Gail Dickson and Justice Karen Horsman concurred with it.

The appeal involved Servatius, School District 70 (Alberni), the Attorney General of B.C. and the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council.

Griffin wrote that "there will often be a tension between a person's absolute freedom on the one hand, and on the other hand, the needs of the community and the rights and freedoms of other people."

It's the role of the courts to

determine both the scope of the charter's guaranteed rights and freedoms and whether any limit is reasonable and justified, she said, citing a previous case that found the charter should be interpreted in a way that preserves and enhances the multicultural heritage of Canadians.

The Appeal Court judges pointed to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), saying it "sets out the right of Indigenous peoples to the dignity and diversity of their culture, traditions, histories and aspirations, as appropriately reflected in education."

In recent years, Canadian institutions have been moving to address historical mistreatment of Indigenous people by trying to forge a mutually respectful path forward, Griffin said, adding public education systems need to be involved in reconciliation.

"Significant efforts have been made to redress the historic legacy of schools being an unsafe place for Indigenous children and to help create better outcomes for Indigenous students."

Values of multiculturalism are often raised when the courts are examining claims of violation of religious freedom, Griffin said.

The Supreme Court of Canada has consistently pointed to the importance of respecting a variety of cultures and beliefs, and tolerance for a diversity of views, she said.

While Thompson had ordered each party to pay its own costs, the Court of Appeal ordered Servatius to pay the school district's legal costs after learning her legal case had been funded by the Alberta-based Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms.

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Island dance duo gets boost from Eurythmics singer

MIKE DEVLIN
Times Colonist

Vancouver Island dance duo Funkanometry capped its best year to date with a surprise spike in social media activity — courtesy of a shout-out from Eurythmics singer Annie Lennox.

Lennox posted the video of Funkanometry's Nanaimo-based Jackson Fryer and Cowichan-based Carlou Rush dancing to *Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)* across her social media accounts on Saturday.

The song was a No. 1 hit for Lennox and her band in 1983, and she was clearly impressed by the minute-long street-dance routine, which Funkanometry released online Nov. 16.

"Wowza!! I just saw this incredible interpretation of SWEET DREAMS," Lennox wrote. "Gentlemen, you're AMAZING!!!"

Fryer, 19, and Rush, 20, who are known for making short but invasive dance videos to a range of popular hits, made it to the semi-finals of *America's Got Talent* in August.

Bon Jovi, the Bee Gees and Sharon Osbourne have commented on their videos before, but

Lennox's post moved the needle much more, they said.

Her cross-platform post received more than 280,000 likes on Twitter alone. "I woke up and checked my phone and thought, 'What just happened?'" said Fryer. "At first, I didn't really understand that she was the one who sang the song. I was just familiar with the band."

The post sent Funkanometry's own Twitter account into overdrive. Lennox fans migrated there after she name-checked the duo, resulting in its biggest bump in Twitter activity during its seven years as a unit.

"We gained 40,000 new followers on Twitter in 48 hours," Fryer said. "It's insane."

The duo could not reveal its next professional move, but Fryer said he and Rush both recently received temporary work visas, which allows them to work south of the border for longer stretches.

"We're definitely going to be going down [to the U.S.] more now that we have visas," Rush said. "But I love the Island. It would be tough to leave here."

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Jackson Fryer and Carlou Rush of the Vancouver Island dance duo Funkanometry. VIA TWITTER