Lower Mainland Newsline
A quick look at news around the region

It's going to be crowded

LANGLEY — Three controversial public hearings have been set for next Monday at an elementary school that has only 41 legal parking spaces, even though a much larger civic centre is available.

As many as 600 supporters and opponents of the Vicwood Hills development, mushroom-bylaw amendments and a proposal for a new Mohawk service station are expected to attend the meeting at Wix Brown elementary school.

Municipal clerk Rod Edwards said township council chose the school because the mushroom-bylaw amendment talks have been held there over the past few months.

Abbotsford unaffordable

ABBOTSFORD — A local survey indicates this city is one of the worst in B.C. for affordable housing. The Abbotsford community housing information office found that a majority of people surveyed here are paying more than half their incomes in rent.

Reluctant witness flayed

MAPLE RIDGE — A provincial court judge yesterday blasted a woman who alleged her boyfriend assaulted her but then refused to testify against him. "It wastes a lot of time when people come forward and later on refuse to testify," Judge Susan Antifaer told Verna Pierre, and dismissed the assault charges.

Quake-proof firehall costly

MISSION — Residents will get their new earthquake-proof firehall, but it'll cost them at least $300,000 more than expected. The 7th Avenue firehall will cost $2.7 million.

Seniors' home nixed

CHILLIWACK — An organized effort by residents of the exclusive Shannon Estates here has succeeded in shooting down a proposal for a seniors' home in their area. Almost 150 people attended a public hearing to oppose the project. They claimed a multi-family complex would disrupt their neighborhood because of traffic. Some jeered a spokeswoman for the proposal's developer, yelling "Boo-hoo!" when she spoke of elderly couples waiting for placement in the facility.

Queen's back on the job

HORSESHOE BAY — The Queen of Coquitlam is back in service as of today. The BC Ferry, which serves the Horseshoe Bay–Nanaimo and Horseshoe Bay–Langdale routes, was taken out of service last week for clutch repairs.

LOTTO

Tuesday's unofficial Daily 3 winning number was 036.

Homeowner hired man to torch house: Judge

Insurance company doesn't have to pay

By Andy Ivens
Staff Reporter

A Surrey builder whose home was torched in 1993 won't collect a penny from his insurance company — because a judge believes he hired the arsonist.

Jessie Bains, 34, sued Dominion of Canada General Insurance Co. after it refused a claim by Bains, his wife Jaspreet and his mother Gurmit for the loss of their $250,000 home and $191,000 worth of personal effects allegedly lost in the fire.

"The web of circumstantial evidence enmeshes Jessie Bains," B.C. Supreme Court Justice Kenneth Smith said in his reasons for judgment. "(It) leads inexorably to the conclusion that he arranged for (his friend) John Lau to hire the professional arsonist Jeffrey Kusch to burn the house."

Kusch, now 21, pleaded guilty in January 1995 to four Lower Mainland arsons, including the torching of Bains' home, and was sentenced to 22 months in jail.

Except for a fire at the Purewal Blueberry Farm in Pitt Meadows in August 1991, all were set with the goal of bilking the insurers.

John Chi Keung Lau, 34, pleaded guilty to the farm arson and was sentenced to 14 months' jail.

Charges were dropped against Lau in the other three arsons. But at Kusch's sentencing hearing, his lawyer told the judge Lau had hired Kusch for all four arsons.

Lau has lived off and on at the Richmond home of Bains' lifelong best friend, Howe Street bigwig Charn Deol. Although Kusch swore that Lau wasn't involved in the arson at Bains' house, Kusch drove Lau's car to and from the house, where he set the fire at about 1 a.m. Sept. 24, 1993.

Bains had taken his wife, mother, two kids and niece to California nine days earlier, a trip Smith called "suspicious," adding: "In my view, Jessie's purpose was to provide an alibi for himself when the house was burned."

Lau and Bains met in the late 1980s. Bains hired Lau to photograph his wedding to Jaspreet in October 1990. When the couple broke up in February 1996, Bains moved into the Deol home for a few months. Lau also lived there for part of that time.

"This association was remarkable," said Smith, "as it occurred after Jessie had attended Kusch's sentencing proceedings and had heard Kusch's lawyer say that Lau had hired Kusch to burn the Bains house."

Smith found that Bains, who has run unsuccessfully seven times for director of VanCity Credit Union, falsified the claim for property lost in the blaze.

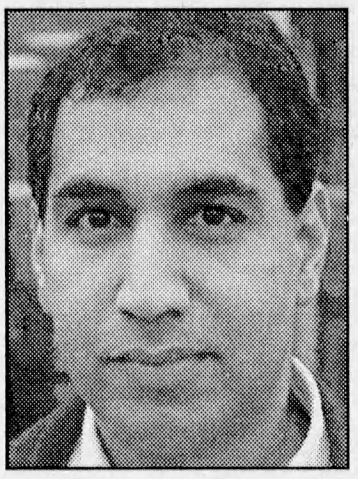
Bains' sister, Manjit Dyal, testified that Jaspreet told her she put all her gold jewelry, including her wedding ring, into a safe-deposit box before the trip. The Bainses listed the jewelry among the list of items lost in the fire that they presented to the insurance company.

Calls to the Bains home were not returned.

RCMP Cpl. Al Kautzman of the Surrey arson squad said he was satisfied with the judgment yesterday. He said it's unlikely that Bains, who was seeking punitive damages in his lawsuit, will be charged with arson or fraud.

"If your house and belongings go up in smoke and you don't get insurance for it, that's a pretty big fine," said Kautzman.





Jessie Bains (left) got arsonist to torch his house (above) in Surrey, a judge found yesterday, denying his insurance claim.

Cops investigate young Liberal

By Ian Austin
Staff Reporter

The former president of the Young Liberals of Canada (B.C.) is under investigation after the group rang up more than $25,000 in unpaid bills.

James MacLaren is the subject of two Vancouver police probes.

"We've been trying to do an audit of the YLCBC," said Norman Morrison, president of the Liberal Party of Canada (B.C.). "We suspect that there is money missing."

Morrison said the party asked Canada Trust Feb. 13 to provide the YLCBC's bank accounts after financial irregularities appeared.

"The president of the YLCBC resigned on Feb. 14," he said. "There is a police investigation going on right now, as well as an attempt to do a forensic audit on the books."

A second police investigation was launched in March when MacLaren wrote a cheque on the YLCBC account.

"It involved a travel agency, when a cheque for more than $700 was issued on the Young Liberals' account in March of 1997," said Morrison. "He was arrested by Vancouver city police, and was questioned and released."

No charges have been laid.

Morrison said the YLCBC is a youth commission created under the constitution of the Liberal Party of Canada (B.C.).

"We were presented with more than $25,000 in unpaid bills," he said.

"Those bills have subsequently been paid by the Liberal party.

"Canada Trust has turned over the records to the commercial-crime detachment in Vancouver."

The YLCBC's executive was disbanded Feb. 15 after the financial irregularities were discovered.

A new YLCBC executive was elected last Sunday, but only Morrison has been authorized to speak to the media.

Vancouver police spokeswoman Const. Anne Drennan could not provide any further details last night.

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.