

## Delta Optimist Article

Dani Penalosa/Contributing Writer Feb 21, 2022 7:00 AM



Tom Bearss' legacy of community-building and appreciating the environment we live in, will live on in a UBC bursary. Tom passed away in April, 2020. Jim Kneesch

The Tom Bearss Bursary has received a total of \$64,444 to support students specializing in environmental and nature studies at the University of British Columbia, thanks to a team effort between the Delta Naturalists Society (DNS) and Bearss' family and friends.

And what better way to honour the beloved nature enthusiast, birder and overall community-creator than to continue his legacy through a bursary dedicated to students pursuing careers in areas Bearss cared deeply about.

That was the idea when the DNS set the goal nearly two years ago of raising \$50,000 for a bursary in their long-time president's name.

"We are very satisfied, very pleased. The bursary honours Tom, who was our effervescent president for over a decade, but it also resonates with a couple of the principles of the Delta Naturalists – notably, environmental education and supporting youth," says Syd Barber current DNS president.

Originally established in 2020 by the DNS, the bursary has now been endowed in perpetuity, meaning it is self-sustaining.

The bursary has already supported four undergraduate students at UBC, and it will continue to do so every fall semester for future Bachelor of Science Degree recipients specializing in environmental sciences, marine biology, conservation biology, ecology and environmental biology or natural resources conservation.

Tom's son Scott Bearss says that, though there was certainly a concentrated effort between DNS and his own family and friends to bring in the bursary's funds, his father's lifetime of building connections and friendships everywhere he went also allowed for an overwhelming response to the initiative.

"It's amazing what you can do as one individual with support from other people, and if you bring a light heart – a jovial heart – and some humour and passion for connection, you're really not just one person. You can really bring together a community, and I think that he would be proud to hear that's how he was seen and loved," says Scott.

Sophy Wu, who is studying Natural Resources Conservation at UBC, is one of the recent recipients of the bursary.

She says she greatly appreciates the opportunity to both honour and carry forward Bearss' legacy of community-building and appreciating the environment we live in, which are values she has held, herself, since middle school.

"Having grown up in almost exclusively in urban neighbourhoods, I also wanted to take my undergrad experience to have more field experiences being outdoors, and connecting with different community groups and figuring out ways to implement sustainable development – even if it's not on a global scale yet," says Wu.

Valerie Titford from UBC, who worked closely with the Delta Nats and Bearss' family and friends to make this bursary a reality, wrote in an email to the *Optimist* how grateful the university is for the generosity of the 130 donors in supporting students to pursue an education.

“It has been a pleasure assisting Tom’s family and the DNS with establishing the Tom Bearss Bursary. I have learned so much about Tom, his legacy in the South Delta community, his ability to make people laugh and his passion for birding and nature. I hope this bursary inspires students to adopt a similar passion for learning, curiosity and the natural world,” she writes.

If you wish to add to this award, send your donation to UBC Annual Giving by contacting them at 604-827-4111 or donate online at <http://support.ubc.ca/tom-bearss>.