

UNTDA Board Meeting March 13, 2018

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This will be a very unusual report this time out as the last 3 months have involved a sea change in the way that our core information is kept and disseminated. There have been many changes over the years and they've all been readily absorbed with little if any disruption. This time out, not so much.

In the aftermath of the change-over from the old to new Website, one of the features that needed a major repair/upgrade, was the In Memoriam Page, where the links to the Obit files had not been correctly re-referenced. While working through that and thinking about how to expand that and other pages for the future, it dawned on me that all that we'd be doing is expanding or creating another static list and very incompletely and inefficiently to boot.

It had always been a long-term goal to issue our entire Nominal List as an Interactive one. Even with the change-over to the new Website, it still remained a long-term goal. Now it seemed that a re-think might be in order. If such a thing could be done in relatively short-order then there was no point in continuing business as usual with the In Memoriam Page or any other page or list that we might be using or contemplating.

We've always had the data, we now had the modern website, so we needed to find a database engine and a user interface that could put those 2 elements together into an Interactive Webpage. The end result had to be very fast and scalable and able to produce useful and savable results. A quick survey of some major sites, Gov't and private, was undertaken to see what was possible. Surprisingly, none of them were doing all that we were contemplating doing. Close in some cases, but no cigar. All of them had speed, various degrees of scalability and usefulness but in close to all cases, no ability to save results.

We found 2 database engines that could accept our data with minimal structural changes on our part, and 2 user interfaces that could work with those database engines and also work within our existing Website capabilities. So, 4 possible combinations to work through. With trial and error and some compromises along the way, we were able to produce:

<http://untd.org/interactive-nominal-list/> quickly followed by: <http://untd.org/interactive-contact-list/>

There was an overriding sense of urgency throughout this process because all of our routine operations and updates, including the Newsletter, had to stop until this was completed or until we concluded that we couldn't do it at all. Lady luck was on our side. Users, both public and Directors, will now always have the most current information available. Any updates that are done to the Master List will appear online almost as soon as they are made. There is no longer a need for me to report on how big the List is, who is a UNTD or ROFTP+ and from what year, who has died recently or not so recently, or what their biographical details are or what someone's current contact information is. Naturally this is a big bonus for me, timewise, but more importantly and most hopefully, for all of you as well

Because of the Newsletter delay, two very time sensitive pieces of information had to be sent out in early January, as separate Bulletins to the entire EMail List. One involved the initial notification of the UNTDA RCMI Legacy Dinner to be held on this March 28th and the second was a cut-off date announcement for the post-Reunion Tour in St John's, along with hotel booking and itinerary updates.

2 other things going on in this same time period involved the Master List itself. The structural changes that had to be made for the Interactive Lists resulted in Ross Connell having to re-do the Macros that he created to automate the Membership Renewal and information update process. As well, the very large amount of new information provided by Russ Cape's recent forays into the Equimalt Museum, was also entered in completely, before finalizing the structural changes.

So all in all, "Short-term pain for long-term gain" seems to apply here. From my perspective things are or very soon will be, back to normal.

As an aside, during this Interactive construction process, we used a much smaller spreadsheet of data, to test a variety of things, particularly scalability. It was data that we had compiled some time ago, when we were contemplating the NOAC/NAC offer for the UNTDA to become a "Member". At that time, we took their Awards List, which is a static .pdf file, converted it to a spreadsheet, to analyze the NAC's existing UNTD/ROFTP content. In the present circumstance it took very little time to convert that data into an Interactive List, which permits views, analyses and saving of results that otherwise was not easily done. The resulting page: <http://untd.org/interactive-nac-awards-list/> might be of interest to NAC and it may be worth "donating" it to them, as it has served its purpose for us.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill C