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Steve Whysall: Grab a tarp and some friends to party under the trees

BY STEVE WHYSALL, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 2, 2014

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Linda Poole checks out some of the first blossoms at the Firehall Theatre in Vancouver. Photograph by: wayne leidenfrost , Vancouver Sun

At the heart of the month-long Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, which gets underway today, is the desire to bring people together.

This is really why it was started in the first place by Linda Poole back in 2006. She wanted to do something that would bring communities together, get people to stop and appreciate the beautiful blossoms, and give us all a reason to come together to celebrate the joy of life for a moment.

In Japan, where all this appreciation of the delicate, transitory cherry blossom began, coming together to look at the flowers is called "hanami."

From the tip to the top of Japan from March to May, people party under the blossoming cherry trees. In most cases, they spread blue tarps on the ground to sit on.

Some people think the tarps are a bit ugly, but when the cherry blossoms sprinkle down in a breeze, the tarps are soon transformed into pretty tapestries.

Here in Vancouver, Poole would love to see more people spread a tarp or blanket under a cherry tree and having a picnic party.

"We always like the words of Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa: 'There is no stranger under the cherry tree,'" says Poole.

In Japan, the partying can go on all day and into the night when lanterns are hung in the trees to provide illumination.

Poole thinks there are plenty of beautiful, spreading cherry trees in parks and green spaces here in Metro Vancouver where people can have a fun "hanami" party.

However, the main goal of the festival is to get us all to stop and appreciate the beauty of cherry blossoms, especially their short-lived, ephemeral, transitory nature, and from all of this introspection it is hoped we will gain a fresh perspective on the important things in life.

To help, the festival has set up a great website (www.vcbf.ca) where all the best places to see cherry trees at peak bloom around the city are identified.

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In Metro Vancouver, at least 45 varieties of ornamental cherry trees are planted throughout the city. There are at least 18,000 planted as street trees along with almost as many ornamental plum trees.

But, in reality, the blossom party has already begun, since "Whitcomb" cherries, one of the first to bloom, began flowering way back in March and a few late-winter-flowering cherries before that.

But April is the prime month. We will see the pink wave expand with the blooming of "Akebono" and "Accolade" trees along with "Okame," "Spire" and "Somei-Yoshino" cherries. Next comes "Umineko" and "Shirotae" along with "Pandora" and the Oshima cherry. By mid-April, there will be dozens more joining the party, from "Rancho," "Amanogawa" and "Takasago" to "Shogetsu," "Kiku-shidare" and "Shirofugen."

And by the end of April and on into May, we can expect to see the bulk of the cherry population in full bloom, including "Kwanzan," the most widely planted cherry tree in the city.

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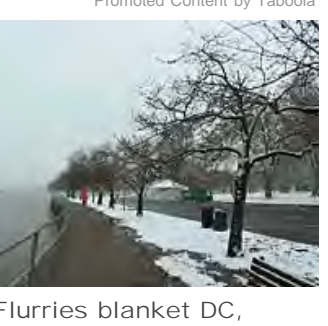
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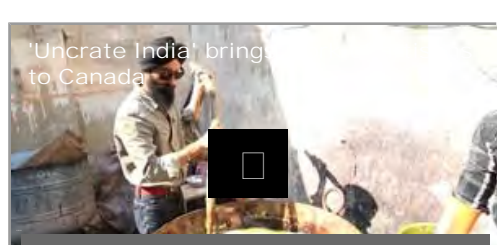
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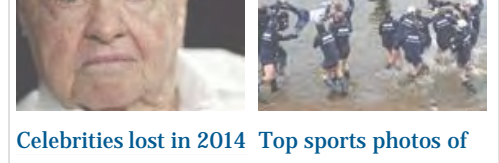
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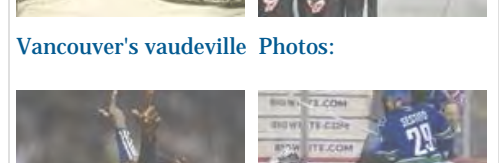
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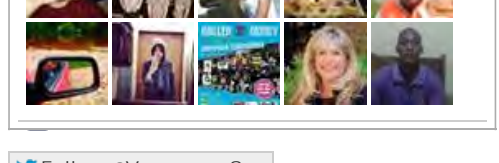
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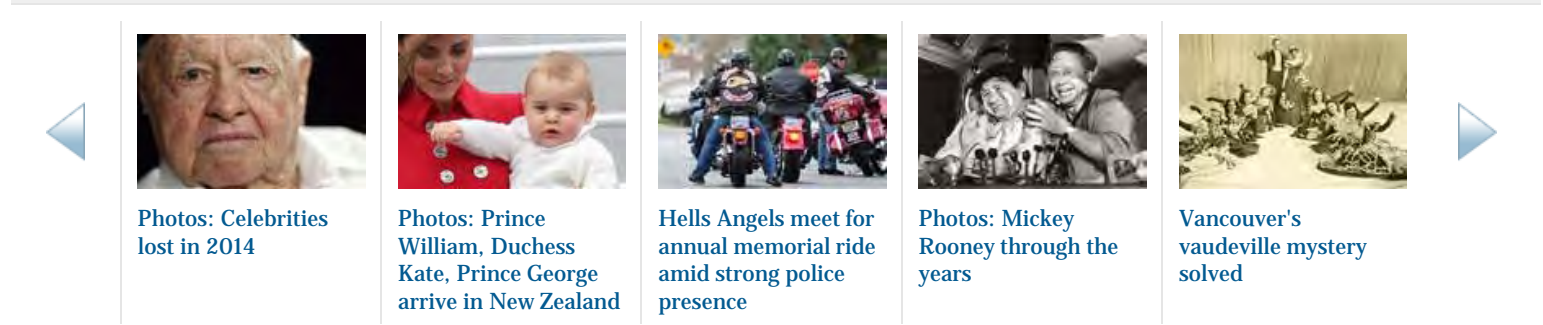
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