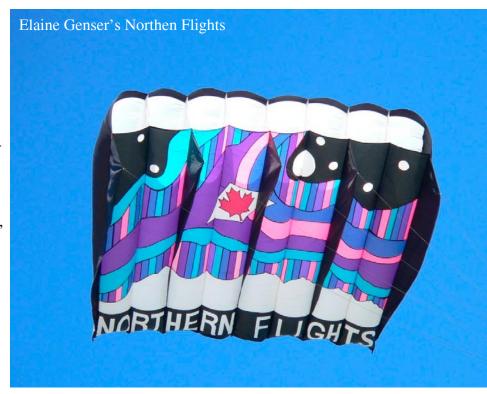
## HAVE I GOT A DEAL FOR YOU by John Freeman

Something over two years ago I was contacted through email by Clarence Esslinger, a member of the local Parksville Lions Club. Someone in the club thought that a kite festival in Parksville would be a good thing—and who am I to argue with a notion like that? Clarence had done his homework, and gotten on the web looking for kite festivals in Canada. He contacted the organizers of the festival in Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

We had attended that festival as invited flyers, so they gave Clarence our email address. The labor pains for the birth of The Parksville Lions Club International Kite Festival had begun.

What follows is a very brief telling of the beginnings of a festival. It doesn't have to start big. A happy assembly of the nicest people in the world—kiters—is all it takes. Oh—and someone to do the work of organizing the community. There will be mistakes the first year, but learning experiences can be a good thing.

For those of you not fortunate enough to live in the great Pacific Northwest of North America, Parksville is a small town on the east coast of Vancouver Island, a largish island about 20 miles/30kilometers off the west coast of Canada. It is an area noted for its Gol-



dilocks climate—not too hot in the summer, and not too cold in the winter. Just right. Our flying field, in the community park, is a large area of lawn right next to the open water, with, usually, nice smooth breezes off the water. Parking right beside the flying field. No sand in your kite bag, no sand in your shoes, no exhaustion from hauling your gear through soft sand. In short—Nirvana for kiters.



We worked with the Lions Club, mostly by contributing our ideas of what we thought should happen, and how, and when. The Lions do all the work of arranging with the city for the use of the park, renting the porta-pottis, talking with vendors, making and distributing posters, and soliciting local businesses for support. We selected as our permanent date the third full weekend in July so there would never be any danger of a conflict with one of our other favorite festivals—the Westport Windriders Kite Festival on the coast of Washington State—always held on the second full weekend of July. In this part of the kite world,



avoiding conflict with another of our many festivals is sometimes a tough, but necessary thing.

The first year for our festival, 2006, went surprisingly well. Beautiful weather, a good attendance by kiters from all around the area, and the public loved it. The kids' kitemaking tent was free that year, so almost 500 kids' kites were built. This turned out to be a not economically feasible way of doing things, so changes were planned for the future. We had a Rok battle, and sport kite team flying demonstrations. Because of local rule complications there were no food vendors that year—a problem since worked out. The Teddy Bear drop went well, even though the low wind at the time made it necessary to work hard at keeping the lifting kite high enough.

Year number two is better forgotten. The weather gods were not smiling on us. We had very strong winds, and rain. The dreaded "R" word. It made us fear for the future of the festival, as attendance by the public was pretty much nothing. Because of the weather, activities were much more subdued, though the Teddy Bear drop went well during a time of decent wind and before any starting of the "R" word. A little excitement came when one of the parachuting bears decided to get independent on us—he stopped descending at about thirty feet/ten meters and went sideways out over the bay. Our bay is very shallow, making it ideal for kids' play, and one of our

intrepid helpers waded out and retrieved the bear and chute we had concluded were lost forever. In spite of it all, this year we were back—and it's all good.

This year we had most of the usual things—kids' kitemaking tent (well over 300 kites built, this time

for a small fee), T-shirts for sale, food vendors. What we didn't have is rigid organization. No high tension competition. No schedules. Our only concession to organization is the Teddy Bear drop, ably handled by those old pro Teddy Bear droppers Cliff and Gerry Pennell. OK, so this year it was a Teddy Bear toss—not enough wind for heavy lifting! You don't want to get into a breeze-shooting contest with Cliff! His shtick with the bear drop is amazing. What tales that fella can spin! The kids eat it up.

Mainly what we do is get out there and fly kites—whatever we feel like, and whenever we feel like it. We also spread lots of ground display stuff around for more color. The southeast corner of the field was pretty much sport kite territory, two lines and four lines. Two groups, calling themselves islandQuad and iNot (both with a nod



to the now well known iQuad) with four or more rev flyers each, put on a good show for hours on end.

One of the joys for kiters at this festival is the interaction with the public. I know that some would frown darkly on the notion of civilians walking around on the flying field, but it works here. Kids playing with the bouncing balls and small bols, shrieking in mock terror and real delight. Adults with their mouths open in wonder. I hope I never tire of the "when I was a kid we built kites with sticks and newspaper" stories. I know that at the end of the weekend there were more than the usual number of sunburned faces. One lady told me "it is a feast for the eyes being able to see the whole kite, looking up at it from underneath." Sometimes we forget that seeing a kite from way off to the side is not really seeing it. The amazement at the colors and our modern materials. The awe for the appliqué skills. All music to a kiter's ears!

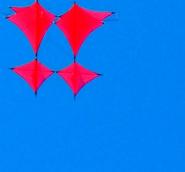
Sure, we have competition and judging—you just never know what or by whom. This year the Lions gave out medallions for the Youngest Flyer (2!), the Oldest Flyer (90!), Most Original, Most Colorful, and Largest Kites, as well as for best Ground Display. What other festival can boast an 88 year spread in ages of the flyers? My kind of festival.

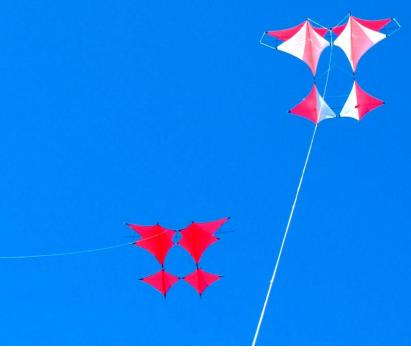
Does it sound like your kind of festival too? We'll be here again next year, the third full weekend in July.

There is something about our festival that I don't yet understand. Not complaining—I just don't understand. The Lions Club does all the hard work. The kiters have all the fun. So, to balance things out, the Lions



A trio of Ken McNeill Ichibans, by Steve Brown, Paul Horner, and Dana Inglis.





spend all day cooking a great meal and feed us all on Saturday night for free—including a good drink of anything you desire. As I said—have I got a deal for you!



photos by Steve Brown, Glenda Kleppin, Georgan Curran, and John Freeman

