

## **PEJ News Featured in Monday Magazine**

Posted by

Wednesday, 13 April 2005 03:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 13 April 2005 03:35

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**Monday:** If the pen is mightier than the sword, then the website will surely outdo all the firepower at American president George W. Bush's command. At least that's the hope of Alan Rycroft and the team of volunteers who put together the Victoria-based Peace, Earth and Justice News ([www.pej.org](http://www.pej.org)), a growing online source of alternative news that has lately seen some encouraging growth with many of its visitors coming from Bush country.

[web.bcnewsgroup.com/portals/monday](http://web.bcnewsgroup.com/portals/monday)

## **Making it Work**

**Local website brings the good news of peace, earth and justice to the world**

**by Andrew MacLeod**

If the pen is mightier than the sword, then the website will surely outdo all the firepower at American president George W. Bush's command.

At least that's the hope of Alan Rycroft and the team of volunteers who put together the Victoria-based Peace, Earth and Justice News ([www.pej.org](http://www.pej.org)), a growing online source of alternative news that has lately seen some encouraging growth with many of its visitors coming from Bush country.

"I just posted a story 40 minutes ago, and it's had 80 reads so far," says Rycroft, speaking on the phone one morning at the end of February. "It looks like we'll hit 70,000 visitor sessions this month."

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On average, the site is getting 700 hits an hour, 24 hours a day, he says. Many of the visitors come from Europe and Canada, but by far the most traffic comes from the United States. The busiest day so far was the American election day, something Rycroft says may show people were looking to PEJ for some idea of how to cast their vote.

"A lot of Americans are finding we have a refreshing and different point of view compared with what they'd typically see on a news site," he says.

So, they're not emulating Fox, the popular right-leaning news network? "We're not competing with Fox, but we do have a couple stories about them," says Rycroft. The stories about the network include one that is the second-most read on the site: "Fox sics its dogs on ?Un-American? professors."

The story is typical of PEJ's take on the world. The site is managed by 12 editors who between them post 10 to 20 stories a day, some of which they've written, and many of which have been culled from other sources.

The only story that's been read more than the Fox one is a recent piece lifted from the English version of the German magazine *Dar Spiegel*, that looks at why Europeans blocked Paul Wolfowitz's appointment to head the World Bank. Other stories come direct from activists and non-governmental organizations, alternative sources like Indymedia and even the occasional mainstream media outlet. The editors include Peter Saracino, a former managing editor for *Jane's Defense Publications* in Britain, and Michael Wallace, a political science professor at the University of British Columbia's Liu Centre.

"It's turning into something," says Dani Rubin, the site's earth editor. A piece on the Boxing Day tsunami had 4,000 hits, he says, sounding floored that the site could pull that kind of traffic. The site received a boost in the past few months, he says, when outspoken movie-maker and author Michael Moore put a link on his site to it. "It's come a long way."

Rycroft is also obviously proud of the success the site is having. Throughout the weeks following our initial discussion he sends several e-mails comparing his traffic to other local media sites. He's getting a similar number of visits as the B.C. news website *The Tyee*. It's hard to say how many visits the Monday Magazine site gets, since the hits are counted with

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those for all the B.C. NewsGroup papers, but Rycroft says PEJ's traffic is close to the entire NewsGroup's. (The Times Colonist is in a similar situation, joined with other CanWest Global papers, including the National Post and the Vancouver Sun, on a website that gets much more traffic.) But PEJ gets more visits than CFX, Rycroft points out.

"I can't definitely say we're the hottest news site in town," he writes, but it is "number two if not number one."

Of course, CFX is primarily a radio station and for the papers, their primary focus is print. Asked how his radio station is doing, Rycroft responds, "Well they got us hands down on that score. But two of the editors do have radio shows up at UVic: Janine Bandcroft and Chris Cook. And we dream of PEJ Radio & TV."

At 45 years old, Rycroft says he has a background that combines computer skills with writing skills in a relatively rare package. "Most technophiles are not usually good writers, I can tell you that." He has also spent some 13 years working for activist organizations. "Most people won't spend 13 years of their lives working on causes they believe in," he says.

The site isn't quite where he wants it yet, he says. They are looking for editors to focus on issues around health, labour, first nations and human rights. So far, the site hasn't accepted any ads, and survives instead on the donated energies of the people involved.

Rycroft, who has two kids, makes his living as a media relations and fundraising consultant. He's worked for BC Ferries, local software company PureEdge Solutions and the Liberal-axed government agency Centre for Education Information Standards and Services. The website doesn't provide an income, he says, but it does fill his need to make a positive difference in the world.

"It's our community service," he says. "We're a media outlet that admits a bias. We care about what we write about . . . We're motivated really to improve our society and make earth a more peaceful place with a clean and healthy environment and justice for all."

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Asked what Rycroft is like to work with, events editor Bandcroft says, "He's really devoted to the Peace, Earth, Justice News. It's his project and he's determined to make it successful."

Rycroft has high standards, Bandcroft says, but adds, "I don't find he's unreasonable . . . He's not looking to be the king or anything. At the same time, it's his project and he has a certain vision for it."

And there is plenty of room to make suggestions and set a direction for the site, she says. "It's a fairly democratic project . . . He's good. He accepts our visions for change."

She adds later, "I'm just happy to be part of the team . . . He's sort of collected these people together from a lot of different places . . . I think I've only been with the other editors once, and some I've never met."

Bandcroft also has a radio show at CFUV, the University of Victoria's radio station, and is the spark behind the Street Newz, a paper sold in exchange for a donation by people downtown. With PEJ, she says, she has an even more powerful way to get her point of view out into the world. "I really like the idea of being our own media. Especially with all the corporate media, it's great to have an alternative source."

Rycroft says the site's stories break down into two basic categories. There are some that point to the doom and gloom in the world, and others that point the way towards the solutions.

"We cover a broad range of issues, but we filter it all through that peace, earth and justice lens," he says. "The way we see it is they're all inter-related. For example, the military is the world's worst polluter."

At the same time, he adds, over the course of years you'll see more wars fought over environmental reasons, as water, land and energy become even more scarce.

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While the problems are tied together, so are the solutions. "Progress in one area means progress in another area . . . It's important to tackle all the issues at once, not just one piece of the puzzle." And at core, he says, he believes most people, even U.S. president Bush, are nice and want to make decisions that benefit future generations and the planet as a whole.

So he's optimistic? "Overly optimistic. Despite being well-informed. You have to be. If you're well-informed you either give up or decide to make it better. It's the only alternative." M

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