

Central Okanagan Bursary and Scholarship Society
President message April 2024

I have been proud to serve as president of COBSS these past two years, working alongside a most impressive and inspiring team of individuals. As the reins pass on to the most capable and dedicated Lorraine Miller, I am confident that our organization is in good hands. Today, I am pleased to report on the accomplishments of COBSS over the past year and provide some thoughts about the organization from my perspective as president.

We have done much in the past year to strengthen the COBSS organization and update the processes to improve efficiency, ease for students and counselors. I speak of the project that we undertook in collaboration with the school district to convert our application process to be a completely submissible online. This was a true collaborative endeavor involving school counselors, volunteer members, independent schools, and School District 23. Although the application launched smoothly for students in December, we ran into unanticipated glitches that inevitably happen with new computer systems. Much of our success weathering this hurdle is due to the unending energy, support, and ingenuity of Bev Bourbonnais during this process. We also extend our gratitude to David Teale of SD23 for his IT expertise and unwavering support of this initiative. Happily, we can report only positive feedback from donors as they transitioned from paper to electronic reviewing of applications during allocation these past weeks. Our members also adapted seamlessly and continue to offer constructive feedback to improve systems for next year.

At the beginning of the school year, we were uprooted from our long time Hollywood Rd Education Center meeting venue due to renovations. We quickly pivoted, found a new meeting location in the community that has been generously donated by Barn Owl Brewing Co. for which we are most grateful. Thank you to our secretary, Tina Pomponio, for establishing and troubleshooting our hybrid connections for the meetings.

During the year, some of our members have retired from service to COBSS and we have welcomed new members. We say goodbye and thanks to Dawne Thalheimer, Virginia Hollonquist, Paul Brodeur, & Pat Hayden for their valuable contributions. We are pleased to welcome new members Colleen Cowman, Allison McNeil, & Sally Godsell to the COBSS team and look forward to working together in the upcoming years. We thank Dawne Thalheimer & Melanie Wolczuk for overseeing the media aspect of COBSS, most notably the publication of our biannual newsletter highlighting COBSS events, stories, and people. This was distributed to donors and members and is available on our website.

Last year on May 2, 2023, COBSS hosted our first Donor Appreciation Tea since the COVID outbreak at the Hollywood Rd Education Centre. The member volunteer committee, headed by Mary Lou Inaba, did an outstanding job of creating a welcome atmosphere for donors. Highlights included being served tea by the KSS Boys Basketball team, hearing from past student recipients as they shared their experiences of receiving COBSS awards, and hearing a long-time donor's perspective of what it means to give.

Shortly after the Tea event, on the May long weekend, a group of volunteers headed by our COBSS member Carole Davidson and her husband, Larry, participated in the Knox Mountain Hill Climb Race. As a result of our strong involvement of our members, this organization donated funds for two COBSS awards that were distributed this year.

I continue to be inspired by the dedication and commitment of the COBSS executive board. I want to give special thanks to Mary Lou Inaba for her role as a director over these past many years. Her sage advice, experience as a past counselor and now a community member has served this organization in countless ways. She has led us through many events, most notably our last very successful Donor Appreciation Tea. Although Mary Lou is stepping down from the executive, thankfully she is staying on as community member. Our transition to new administrative assistant has not transpired as anticipated and we again are so very thankful to Bev Bourbonnais for her tireless commitment to COBSS, stepping up to fulfill all administrative duties when we needed her the most. We are so very thankful for her energy, efficiency, and unending support of COBSS. I also thank Deb da Silva for her steady guidance as treasurer during this time.

Upon reflection, I think about what makes COBSS so special as an organization in this community. I am reminded that it brings people with shared values together to collectively support the hopes and dreams of local graduating students. These values are as evident today as they were to the founding members of this organization. Firstly, we value the promise of young people, recognizing their future potential and giving them a hand up to help make their educational dreams come true. We also share the value of service to the community, demonstrated through volunteering our time and energies so that others may benefit. Further, we value the importance of honoring the memories of loved ones. By providing donors the opportunity to pay tribute to special people that have passed on, we help to strengthen connections with past lives and contributions, keeping memories alive in a meaningful way. We value the teamwork and collaboration that it takes to build a system that aims to be fair, transparent, & efficient in distributing awards. Every year at allocation I marvel at the complex systems in place, built step by step by those that came 50 years before us. I see the busy minds of our members at work today continuing to offer improvements in our evolving process. We listen to each other, provide feedback, and collectively make decisions that are well thought out before implementation. I appreciate the careful thought of our members, the exquisite attention to detail that makes allocation possible and successful.

In addition to our dedicated volunteer members, we have a wonderfully supportive group of school counselors that genuinely care about providing the best opportunities for their students. This is evident in all that they do for students, going above and beyond to assist students in the process and always trying to improve the system. The support and commitment to COBSS from the administrations of SD23 and independent schools cannot be understated, from providing meeting spaces to most recently funding an update to our online application, as an organization we feel supported and valued.

Lastly, it has been a privilege to be part of COBSS and work with such a special team of people. I want to thank John Logel as past president, and Lorraine Miller, as Vice President, for their support over these past two years. We will be in good hands as Lorraine steps in to take the reins as president and I will be pleased to be at her side as past president continuing to serve in any way that is helpful to COBSS. Thank you all for your support and continued dedication to COBSS.

Respectfully submitted,
Anne Pistawka

April 10, 2024