

# THE OPEN STANDARD

The Newsletter of the Open Learning Division of Thompson Rivers University

Winter Holiday Issue

December 2011

## FUN Facts

Enrolment trends and recent figures at TRU-OL are unveiled

By Moragh Macaulay

**R**ecord enrolments in online and distance courses are driving continued growth at Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL), leading the Division to exceed its Ministry-allocated enrolment targets by four percent in the 2011 fiscal year.

September is typically the busiest month of the year for registrations at TRU-OL and the fall 2011 term sustained that trend with over 2,700 course enrolments by students choosing to pursue their educational goals through the convenience and flexibility of online and distance learning.

"Open Learning welcomed the fall term 2011 students who began online and distance studies," Dr. Gordon Tarzwell, Acting Chief Recruitment Officer, TRU-OL, said. "We have invited them to explore our quality programs and take advantage of our comprehensive student services. At Open Learning, the OL Faculty Members and staff strive to offer an excellent learner experience and are committed to supporting all students as they work towards their educational goals."

The most significant year-over-year increases in enrolments this fall were related to students applying their prior work and life experience in order to gain credit through TRU-OL's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) services. Students who gain credit through PLAR can decrease the amount of time it takes to earn a post-secondary credential which translates to learners graduating sooner and with an opportunity to save on tuition costs. ■



## Open Learning Fact Fest

- 191 Open Learning Faculty Members provide dedicated instruction to online and distance students.
- The 2011 fiscal year saw close to 20,000 course enrolments at TRU-OL, with a student headcount of over 10,000.
- The top five programs by enrolment at TRU-OL are:
  - > Bachelor of Commerce
  - > Bachelor of Health Science
  - > Bachelor of Arts (Major Program)
  - > Diploma in Management Studies
  - > Bachelor of General Studies
- The top five courses by enrolments at TRU-OL are:
  - > ENGL 1001, Literature and Composition
  - > PSYC 1111, Introductory Psychology I
  - > STAT 1201, Introduction to Probability and Statistics
  - > SOCW 2061, Introduction to Social Work
  - > MNGT 1211, Management Principles & Practices
- In the fall of 2011, TRU-OL gained the revised Event Management Certificate program, which teaches the skills required to plan and manage festivals and other special events. The courses required for this program can be laddered into higher credentials including a diploma in Event Management or a Bachelor of Tourism degree.

### THE OPEN STANDARD

**Publisher:**  
Judith Murray  
**Editor:**  
Élise Desjardine

**Contributors:**  
Richard Baldelli  
Élise Desjardine  
Lindsey Norris

Moragh MacAulay  
TRU Marketing and  
Communications  
**Layout & Design:**  
Julie Hall

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THOMPSON RIVERS  
UNIVERSITY  
OPEN LEARNING



# First STEPS

## Inaugural graduates of First Nations tax program took the stage



On October 7, the first graduates of the new Certificate in First Nation Tax Administration program crossed the stage as part of Thompson Rivers University (TRU)'s Fall 2011 Convocation ceremony.

Some of the graduates completed the certificate using a combination of online courses through TRU's Open Learning Division and traditional face-to-face courses.

"We are tremendously proud of our graduates," Chief Michael LeBourdais, Board Chair of the Tulo Centre of Indigenous Economics, said. "We are looking forward to hearing about their leadership in developing on-reserve infrastructure projects that utilize best practices they have learned from our program – we have the utmost confidence that our Class of 2011 is now uniquely positioned to help First Nations governments unlock their economic potential and create sustainable communities."

As part of the ceremony, 11 graduates were recognized for successfully completing the certificate program, which is offered through TRU and in partnership with Tulo – a not-for-profit organization dedicated to delivering education programs and conducting further research in First Nation taxation, public finance and economics – and the First Nations Tax Commission. This partnership facilitates the transfer of knowledge and best practices from First Nations to potential investors. In order for First Nation economies to grow through investment, they must first develop: a sound tax system; tax and public policy decisions supporting efficient markets; ways to deliver quality information; services and certainties to investors; and a competitive economic infrastructure.

"Together, with the success of the Tulo graduates and the strength of our many partnerships, we are one step closer to achieving our collective goals as First Nations governments," Chief Commissioner of the First Nations Tax Commission C T (Manny) Jules said.

Commencing in September 2010, the Certificate in First Nation Tax Administration program is the first and only accredited certificate of its kind in Canada and is designed to help First Nations build legal and administrative systems that will reduce business costs on First Nation lands and support competitive market development. The program also aims to help First Nations implement new powers and develop the skill set for First Nation tax administration using the First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act, which provides a legal and administrative framework for First Nations property tax systems.

"This program reflects TRU's commitment to Aboriginal learners and is another example of how Tulo provides innovative approaches to serving the needs of our communities in BC and the rest of Canada," Dr. Alan Shaver, President of TRU, said.

For more information about the Certificate in First Nation Tax Administration program visit [www.tru.ca/distance/programs/business-management/certificate-first-nation-tax-administration.html](http://www.tru.ca/distance/programs/business-management/certificate-first-nation-tax-administration.html) or [www.tulo.ca](http://www.tulo.ca). ■



## Poinsettias

These plants are named after Joel R. Poinsett, an American minister to Mexico, who brought the red-and-green plant from Mexico to America in 1828. The plant's colouring seemed perfect for the new holiday and began appearing in greenhouses as early as 1830. In 1870, New York stores began to sell them at Christmas. By 1900, they were a universal symbol of the holiday.



# From Word to Mouth

## Open Learning Faculty Member and Author promotes new book locally

June 11 marked quite a significant "homecoming" for Open Learning Faculty Member and author Jodi Lundgren, who visited Kamloops, BC to wrap up her most recent book tour.

"When I was Writer-in-Residence at Thompson Rivers University ... I wrote the first draft of the novel that became *Leap*," Lundgren said on her Blog at [jodilundgren.com](http://jodilundgren.com).

Back in Kamloops again, this time with her literary voice poised to entertain a group of teen book club members at the North Kamloops Library, Lundgren read from her young adult novel *Leap*. The book tells a coming of age story about a teenage girl who finds refuge in dance as she transitions into womanhood. *Leap* is Lundgren's second published book, preceded by her novel *Touched*, which is about a college-aged girl struggling with mental illness.

Lundgren told local reporters that she, like most authors, does not make a living through her novels but writes because she loves it; she facilitates her passion for writing through her professional career as an English professor at Camosun College in Victoria as well as an Open Learning Faculty Member at Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL).

Ever since the age of eight Lundgren, who grew up and currently lives in Victoria, BC, has followed both her passions for writing and dancing. As an adult she performed as a dancer while pursuing her PhD in English and later won the Canada Council Emerging Writer's grant. In addition to her two novels, Lundgren has published her short stories and creative non-fiction in *Dropped Threads*, *Adbusters*, *Room of One's Own*, *Capilano Review*, *sub-Terrain* and other publications. ■



**TALKING BOOKS:** Author Jodi Lundgren (far right) talks with young adult book club members at North Kamloops Library about her novel *Leap*.

Photos: Mike Davies



# Shipping News

## Course materials are back to being delivered through course packages

Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) is changing the way students receive their course materials.

Beginning February 2011, Open Learning students were directed to the University's new online bookstore to select and purchase their course materials. However, due to various functionality issues, the online bookstore was closed and will remain so until the issues are resolved.

In order to maintain its materials services to students in the interim, TRU-OL has returned to its prior system of shipping students' course packages that contain all required course materials. The course package fees are once again included automatically when students register. Students should also be encouraged to review the detailed course description in case there are individual resources they need to source.

If any students have questions or concerns they should contact Student Services by email at [OLMaterials@tru.ca](mailto:OLMaterials@tru.ca) or call 1.888.663.1653.

Students registered in a course delivered by TRU-OL consortium partners including the University of Victoria (UVic) and Simon Fraser University (SFU) do not receive a course package from TRU-OL. Rather, TRU-OL students registered in a course delivered by SFU or UVic will receive a message from the delivering institution (SFU or UVic) with instructions regarding how to purchase materials.

In order to address potential student concerns and issues regarding the course materials process, TRU-OL has established a procedure allowing students who already own a particular textbook or resource to return the new, unopened book within five weeks of receiving it in order to receive a refund. A label is included in the course package directing students to the appropriate contact to request a postage-paid envelope in which they may return their unneeded resource.

The course packages are sent to students at the address included in their myTRU account and as such it is important that TRU-OL staff and faculty instruct them to update their address if anything has changed (See "Instructions" below). ■

### Change of Address Instructions

- > Check and update current mailing address in the myTRU portal at <https://mytru.tru.ca>
- > Once logged in, click on the "Open Learning Student" tab
- > Scroll down to the "Personal Information" box on the left hand side and click on "Update Addresses and Phones;" submit amended information

# A New Virtual TRU

## Get ready to see something truly different at [www.tru.ca](http://www.tru.ca)

By Richard Baldelli, Manager, Web Services, Marketing and Communications, TRU-OL

Big change is in the future for the digital representation of Thompson Rivers University (TRU) with the implementation of a major overhaul to the University's website [www.tru.ca](http://www.tru.ca). Helming the project, which aims to develop a website that is aligned with TRU's strategic objectives and provides users with a more seamless experience, is a working group made up of digital marketing staff representing each major Division within TRU.

According to TRU's President Dr. Alan Shaver, the website should offer a seamless experience representing all of the University's Divisions, eclectic programming, offerings and benefits such as access, facilitation, laddering, flexible modes of delivery, blended programs or online options.

"(The website should define TRU as) the University of tomorrow, for the world," Dr. Shaver said. "Not just for kids of affluent parents but for the world. We want to be reflected as a learning intensive University that's accessible to everyone."

In order to assist with the website redesign and redevelopment project, TRU has hired the Vancouver-based digital media and marketing agency Dare.

During the last few weeks of September, TRU, in partnership with Dare, kicked off the discovery phase of the redesign project, which determined and documented specific deliverables required to achieve the institution's branding and marketing



and communications expectations for the new website. As part of this phase, Dare took several days to meet staff from Divisions and Departments across campus and immersed themselves in the University's working practices and culture.

Dare has compiled intensive research and established follow-up meetings with representative student groups to help them gain further insight into TRU's audience's requirements.

The project, which represents the first ever pan-campus plan of any type, is scheduled to run for approximately eight months. Key architecture and design phases began in the late fall. ■

# Making HEADLINES

## Online learning featured in TD Insurance Magazine

Online learning is making headlines and Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL), through its partnership with the Canadian Virtual University (CVU), is part of this breaking news.

In an article published under the Careers section of TD Insurance's bimonthly e-Newsletter *The Smart Life*, CVU's Executive Director Victoria Busch highlighted the rising prominence of online and distance learning in the post-secondary sector.

"According to CVU records, in 2010, at least 100,000 students took an online course from a Canadian university," Busch said in the article. "The majority of those students are working adults over the age of 26."

"Career advancement is the most common reason why adult students enrol in an online college or university course. Some enrol to earn a missing credit to complete a degree or decide to earn a graduate degree."

Busch told *The Smart Life* that students decide to school themselves online for a variety of reasons including the following:

### Great selection

"Just about anything you can take at a traditional campus is now offered online as well," Busch said in the article. "You may not find online programs in some professional disciplines such as medicine, dentistry or engineering; however, others such as nursing, veterinary studies, architecture and social work are offered. With these programs, students complete the practical components in their home communities."

### Open admission

"Some offer open admission, which means anyone 16 years of age or older can register in university courses," Busch said in the article. "This gives adults who never completed high school the opportunity to try university-level studies. It also gives high-achieving younger students a chance to get a head start on university before they finish high school."

## CVU Membership



[www.cvu-uvc.ca](http://www.cvu-uvc.ca)

TRU-OL is a founding member of Canadian Virtual University (CVU), a collaboration of 12 Canadian universities specializing in distance and online education. Students enrolled in a program offered by TRU-OL that is listed on the CVU website may take courses at any other member university without paying additional admission fees or Letter of Permission fees. This gives students greater course selection - over 2,000 courses in English or French - to best meet their schedule, interests and learning style. Credits earned at a member university can be transferred to the distance program a student is enrolled in, provided the course meets the program requirements.

### Convenience

"You can work at your own pace, take as many or as few courses as you want and do your coursework when and where you want to," Busch said in the article. "There's no need to go anywhere or be somewhere at a particular time. That's a big plus for people who work full time and are raising a family."

### Tuition

Generally speaking, students pay the same amount for an online course as they would for a traditional on-campus course, but they save on any commuting costs, according to the article.

To read the full article and uncover "6 ways to online education success," visit <http://thesmartlife.ca/1110/article.php?lang=en&version=tdmm&article=2&s=1&associationid=athabasca> ■

## Eggnog

The first eggnog was made in the United States and was consumed in Captain John Smith's 1607 Jamestown settlement.



# Breaking Borders

International borders dissolve where Open Learning through Thompson Rivers University (TRU) is concerned. Providing proof to this point is the story behind the winner of Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL)'s second annual TRUe Story contest.

Lee Davidson, just one of the 24 entries TRU-OL received, is an expat living in Oslo, Norway, and winner of \$1,000 credit towards a TRU-OL education.

While the contest elicited stories from students describing their struggles juggling families and full-time jobs alongside their coursework in addition to stories of students living in remote communities and relying on dial-up Internet as well as stories of a few highfliers travelling all over the world, taking courses in order to stay competitive in an overseas job market, it was Davidson's story that took the prize.

Davidson is a father and coach who started his undergraduate degree in 1996 at TRU (Cariboo College at that time). However, a serious health condition derailed both Davidson's athletic career and his academic studies, forcing him to rethink his goals. Now, after a 15-year hiatus, Davidson is once again taking courses and is back on the trail of his initial degree through TRU. Read on to discover the story behind Lee Davidson's educational journey.



# The Life of Lee

By Lindsey Norris

For Lee Davidson, earning his university degree hasn't been like running the 40-yard dash. Instead, his journey to the end zone has been a 15-year process, involving a health crisis, a continental move, fatherhood and a host of other life changes.

Today, Davidson lives in Oslo, Norway, where he holds a full-time coaching position, raises his two children and studies through Open Learning. While you might think he has enough to keep him busy, he plans to complete a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, focusing on sports psychology.

"I have finally decided to finish my degree because I'm interested to blend my interest for psychology with my experiences in sport," he explained. "I was looking for distance education, because the flexibility was the biggest draw and Thompson Rivers University was a natural choice."

It was a natural choice because Davidson had once been an on-campus student at the university in 1996, when it was still called Cariboo College. Then, he was a young athlete and student just beginning his university studies. Like many others, Davidson wasn't sure what he wanted out of his college experience. He did know that he wanted to play football.

So he dabbled in a few Arts courses and joined the junior football team in Kelowna, spending half his time there and the other half in his hometown of Kamloops.

But he was forced to put both his football career and his academic pursuits on hold when he was diagnosed with cancer. For two years, he underwent treatment. When he was declared cancer-free, he had to reassess his goals. His interests still lay with sport, but this time around, on the coaching side. He also hankered to live abroad. He did some research in Europe, where most people think football is a sport played with the feet, not the hands, and knew the growing fan base for American Football offered tremendous opportunity to those who could bring their experience to a new market.

"So it was coaching (football) that brought me to Norway and now I actually coach hockey," he said.

That was 11 years ago. Since then, he has learned to speak Norwegian ("The hardest part is that everyone speaks English, so it's easy to get lazy," he said), raised a family (he has a daughter, eight, and a son, seven) and finally resumed pursuing the university degree he started many years ago.

He acknowledges the difficulty in coordinating all his obligations. He is no longer married, and while he shares parenting responsibilities with his ex-wife, it means he often juggles the role of single father alongside his job and coursework. However, unlike the young student he was 15 years ago, today he knows what he wants and where he wants to go.

"I believe this sets a good example for my children, in that no matter what the circumstances are, if you really want to do something there is always a way to make it happen if you are willing to work hard and see your goals through to completion," he said. "I need 10 courses to finish my degree. If that takes two or three years, that's okay. The important thing is to jump in and get started." ■



# Breathing *Life* into *Learning*

## A strategic partnership translates into educational and career advancement

By nature, we as humans desire recognition of our efforts. Kudos that might come in the form of a thank-you card for a kind gesture, a raise for a job well done or, in the case of Ashley Gudmundson, credit for hard work put into a past post-secondary credential.

After completing a Respiratory Therapy diploma through the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) and attaining a full-time position as a Respiratory Therapist at VitalAire Healthcare in Red Deer, AB, Gudmundson found herself in a challenging field requiring constant effort towards advancement.

"As I am just starting my career, I am finding it challenging to earn the respect of my colleagues," Gudmundson said. "It can be very stressful trying to make a good name for yourself in the health care field."

In order to breakthrough in health care, Gudmundson decided to build on her education and obtain a Bachelor of Health Science (BHSc) degree, which would further advance her career.

The dilemma Gudmundson faced however was discovering a way of studying towards her degree without having to leave the workforce for an extended period of time as she could not financially support herself through post-secondary without maintaining a full-time career.

A strategic partnership between her alma mater, SAIT, and Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) provided her a solution. Not only did the partnership allow her to fast track her degree, but TRU-OL's flexible approach to education through online and distance studies allowed her to continue working while studying at her own pace.

"I learned about TRU-OL's BHSc program through SAIT and it stood out to me as a possibility," she said. "Thompson Rivers has an exemplary reputation for providing online courses that are supportive, challenging and high quality."

The calibre of TRU-OL's offerings impressed Gudmundson who was also delighted to discover that the existing partnership between the two institutions allowed her to gain recognition for her diploma in the form of credits towards her BHSc.

"My previous diploma in Respiratory Therapy contributed 84 credits toward the 120 credit degree," she said. "This leaves only 36 credits to complete, which looks a lot less scary than the full 120."

Don Poirier, Director, Strategic Partnerships at TRU-OL explained that the successful articulation agreement between TRU-OL and SAIT provides qualified students,



who are looking to add value to their academic and career-oriented aspirations, a clear and consistent path towards their continuing studies.

"Our (TRU-OL's) relationship with SAIT represents one of the finest examples of a concerted attempt to provide students with such opportunity," Poirier explained. "The success of the agreement comes from the fact that both institutions have created an environment that listens to current students' academic needs, anticipates student wants and supports student choice through promotion and engagement. In short, it is a culture that thinks about its students first."

Gudmundson said the quality of her experience with TRU-OL has been 100%.

"The program plan I received was clear, concise and helped break down what classes I needed," she explained. "Open Learning has helped me in my educational endeavors by constantly challenging me to try harder. I can already see how my skills and knowledge base are expanding. My time management, writing and mental preparedness has already improved dramatically since the start of my course with TRU-OL."

Gudmundson hopes that the support from TRU-OL and the jumpstart she has received through its partnership with SAIT, will help her realize the goal of completing a BHSc degree within two-and-a-half to three years.

"Degrees are becoming more and more imperative," she said explaining that she anticipates her credential through TRU-OL will provide her more opportunities for career advancement "to a managerial or supervisory position" or perhaps a teacher in the field of Respiratory Therapy. ■

# Welcoming Canada's Newest Law School



Photo: TRU, Marketing and Communications

**NEW SCHOOL LAUNCHED:** Dignitaries cut the ribbon to officially open the TRU Faculty of Law.

By TRU, Marketing and Communications

Thompson Rivers University (TRU) officially opened Canada's newest and most forward thinking law school on Tuesday, September 6, 2011 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held in the Irving K. Barber British Columbia Centre in the Brown Family House of Learning.

Government officials and the Honourable Chief Justice S.G. Finch and Chief Judge Thomas Crabtree joined Chris Axworthy Q.C, TRU Founding Dean of Law; Honourable Wally Oppal, QC, TRU Chancellor; and Alan Shaver, TRU President and Vice-Chancellor, in the official opening of TRU's Faculty of Law.

The September 6 occasion marked the first day of class for 75 new law students at the first new Canadian law school in over 33 years.

"Today we mark the official opening of the Thompson Rivers University Faculty of Law and begin a journey that seeks to redefine both the study and practice of law in Canada," Axworthy said. "Our Faculty will focus on the practical application of Canadian law to important issues facing society."

TRU's Faculty of Law welcomed the students to an academic program that pays particular attention to legal issues

facing energy, natural resources and the socio-economic challenges confronting Canada's First Nation and Aboriginal communities.

"Our graduates will be a new kind of lawyer – well rounded, critical and socially conscious thinkers and does prepared to lead in an ever-changing world," Dr. Shaver said. ■



## Christmas Trees

Each year, 30-35 million real Christmas trees are sold in the US alone. There are 21,000 Christmas tree growers in the US and trees usually grow for about 15 years before they are sold.

# TRU Joins Council



## Research Universities' Council of BC welcomed TRU as a new member

By TRU, Marketing and Communications

Dr. George Iwama, President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) and Chair of the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia (RUCBC) announced on October 4, 2011, that Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and Victoria, BC-based Royal Roads University (RRU) were the newest members of the Council. Other members include the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria and UNBC.

"On behalf of my colleagues, I am delighted to welcome Thompson Rivers University and Royal Roads University to the Council," Dr. Iwama said. "Both are exciting institutions delivering excellent post-secondary education and research to students from British Columbia and beyond."

"This is great news for Thompson Rivers University and the community it serves," TRU President and Vice-Chancellor Alan Shaver said. "We are a young university, so being able to work closely with other members of the Council will support our exciting future and recognizes our progress as an institution."

"Over the last 16 years Royal Roads University has distinguished itself by providing quality teaching and research, resulting in career and life success," Allan Cahoon,



Photo: TRU, Marketing and Communications

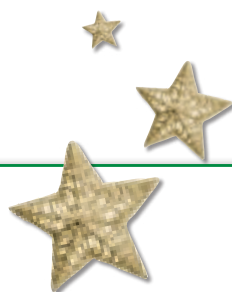
**MEMBERSHIP ANNOUNCED:** Dr. Alan Shaver, (left), President and Vice-Chancellor of Thompson Rivers University; Allan Cahoon, (middle), President and Vice-Chancellor of Royal Roads University; and Dr. George Iwama, (right), President, Vice Chancellor and Chair of Research Universities' Council of British Columbia (RUCBC), acknowledge the new association with RUCBC.

President and Vice-Chancellor of RRU, said. "Our unique educational model, guided by labour strategy and market need, connects to opportunities in British Columbia as well as globally."

RUCBC represents the collective interests of its members in support of common issues facing its members and provides leadership in the development of relevant public policy and also provides a coordinating forum for its member universities. ■

## Christmas Cards

In 1843 the English civil servant Sir Henry Cole commissioned the British illustrator John Callcott Horsley to create the first Christmas card. The tradition of sending Christmas cards was thus popularized when Horsley began producing small cards featuring festive scenes and a prewritten holiday greetings. Newly efficient post offices in England and the US made the cards nearly overnight sensations. At about the same time, similar cards were being made by R.H. Pease, the first American card maker, in Albany, New York, and Louis Prang, a German who immigrated to America in 1850.



# Educational BOUNTY

## Farming, fostering care and studying towards a BA define this OL student

With a pioneer spirit, you can move mountains. Part of an entrepreneurial family, a caregiver and a student, Naomi vanGinkel Wilde can attest to this and prove that obstacles do not have to interfere with one's goals if determination and hard work are your guiding ethos. However, vanGinkel Wilde may also suggest that when educational advancement is your goal, enrolling in an institution that fosters the pioneer spirit is key.

Residing in a small rural community on Vancouver Island where she toils to develop her family's small, organic farm, vanGinkel Wilde needed to find a post-secondary institution that would support and encourage her multifaceted life while facilitating her coursework.

"I chose Open Learning (Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning) because of the flexibility and suitability to the complexities of my life and the wide range of courses and opportunities that Open Learning provide me with," vanGinkel Wilde said.

Directly out of highschool, vanGinkel Wilde took on the extra responsibility of working toward her Bachelor of Arts, Psychology program through Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL), while she also continued to provide primary care to her disabled mother and actively work on the family's organic farm, all while dealing with "several health challenges" herself.

"I must frequently balance these responsibilities with my studies," vanGinkel Wilde said. "I am attempting to prioritize my coursework which will help me pursue my goal of a B.A. in psychology and provide me with the foundations I'll need to continue on to graduate studies and pursue the career of my dreams."

vanGinkel Wilde dreams of eventually becoming an educational psychologist and working with special needs



and gifted children. Her BA through TRU-OL is the first step towards her ultimate goal and while she knows it may take time to ultimately reach her graduate studies, Open Learning allows her the flexibility to continue her education on her own time and her own terms.

"My Open Learning education and experience have cemented my goals ... and have encouraged me to believe that I will be able to reach them despite the challenges of juggling my other life priorities and responsibilities," vanGinkel Wilde said. ■



## Rudolph

The "most famous reindeer of all" was the product of Robert L. May's imagination in 1939. The copywriter wrote a poem about the reindeer to help lure customers into the Montgomery Ward department store.

Thompson Rivers University, Open Learning (TRU-OL) welcomes **Marjorie Budnikas** to her position as the new Manager of Admissions and Advising. Budnikas brings to this position a PhD and BA from the University of Toronto and a Masters from the University of British Columbia. Most recently, Budnikas served for five years as Registrar at Corpus Christi College and St. Mark's College. Prior to this position she worked for two years at the same institution as the Director of Admissions and Enrollment Services.

Admissions and Enrolment Services welcomes **Hilary Parsons** to the permanent position of Manager of the department. Parsons has worked for Open Learning since April of 2007 and has served in the following positions: Enrolment Services Officer; Coordinator of Strategic Partnerships; Service Coach; and, most recently, Acting Manager of Enrolment Services. The department also welcomes **Greg Link** to the position of Director, Admissions and Enrolment Services. Link holds a Master of Arts from Gonzaga University, a Bachelor of Education from Notre Dame University and a Diploma of Technology from BCIT. Most recently, Link held the position of Manager of Enrolment and Client Services for eight years at BCcampus and prior to that position he served as Registrar for Vancouver Island University from 1988 until 2003. Link brings to his position at TRU-OL, a wealth of experience with online learning having co-designed the BCcampus Connector and collaborated with the BC Registrars Association on a project to build an electronic transcript exchange. Enrolment Services also extends its congratulations to **Razu Mann** in his new position as Service Coach and to **Andrea Rhodes** who is the department's new Business Analyst. Rhodes will be working closely with Business Intelligence and IT Services.

Curriculum Services welcomes **Naomi Cloutier** to the position of Associate Director of the department. Prior to taking on her newest role, Cloutier, who has worked with TRU-OL since 2007, worked within the Curriculum Services group of Business Intelligence and Operations as a Course Editor and, for the past two years, as Curriculum Administrator. She also served as Interim Director of Business Intelligence for five months.

Admissions and Advising welcomes **Annie Magdalenich** to the Records team in her position as an Admissions and Records Assistant. Previously, Magdalenich worked with TRU International Admissions for over four years.

The Records department welcomes **Yvonne Loewen** to the position of Admissions/Records officer. The department also extends a thank you to **Cathy Morris** who worked with OL Records on a temporary basis until July, at which point she began a new permanent full-time position with the School of Social Work.

The Business Intelligence department welcomes **Greg Ero** to the team in his position as a Business Analyst. Ero relocated to Kamloops from the lower mainland and comes to Open Learning with a wealth of Business Analysis experience from the telecommunications and banking industries. He is a graduate of Simon Fraser University's School of Business with a degree in Business Administration, specializing in Business Management Information Systems and Human Resources Management. Initially, Ero will be working on the requirements analysis for Plan B, Open Learning's project to improve the Registration, Materials Management and TAP system. The department also welcomes **Jaime Jung** to her position as a Business Analyst in the Metrics and Analytics team. While Jung has worked as a Business Analyst since April 2010, it wasn't until later that she became part of the Metrics and Analytics team. Her focus has shifted from project related business analysis to finance and enrolment reporting related business analysis.

Program Delivery welcomes **Barb Loucks** to the Delivery Support team. Loucks will serve as a Delivery Support Associate and will oversee course and materials coordination and management from the Delivery perspective in order to ensure a smooth transition to new and revised courses.

The Intellectual Property Office (IPO) bids a fond farewell to **Desseri Clowater**, who recently resigned as Supervisor of the department. Clowater joined TRU-OL in August 2007 as the sole Intellectual Property Officer and became the IPO Supervisor in November 2008. During her time at TRU-OL, Clowater has worked across the campus to ensure third-party copyright clearance for courses.

The Instructional Design team would like to thank Instructional Designer **Dr. Robert Lawson** for his contributions to TRU-OL. Lawson leaves Open Learning to begin his new role as Instructional Designer at the University of Manitoba.

Congratulations go out to **Dr. David (Dai) Griffiths** who is the most recent recipient of the TRU Open Learning Scholar Award. The goals of the Open Learning Scholar program are to bring expertise to the TRU campus to support and reinvigorate research and scholarly work into open, distance and online education at TRU-OL. The scholarly exchange and resulting collaborations are expected to further enhance the vibrancy and diversity of the research community at TRU-OL and at TRU generally. Dr. Griffiths is Professor of Educational Cybernetics at the University of Bolton and specializes in research and development in the area of learning design, or in the creation of instructional plans and activities. He has been a key player in several European Union Seventh Framework Program Research Projects examining the way learning activities can be efficiently documented, re-purposed and re-populated with new content. He has examined learning designs in several different contexts: children and adults, and for different modalities of distance learning including mobile platforms. He has many recent publications in the area of learning design and is an international leader in this field. Prior to his tenure at Bolton, Dr. Griffiths completed doctoral studies at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. Dr. Griffiths lives with his family in Mallorca and commutes to the UK as required. Dr. Griffiths spent July 1 to October 15, 2011 working at TRU-OL. ■

## OL Award Winners



**Anna Machaj**,  
Acting Director,  
IT Services  
*Non-OL Award*,  
nominated by  
Barbara Hubert



**Gordon Rudolph**,  
Open Learning  
Faculty Member  
*Open Learning Faculty  
Member Award*,  
nominated by  
John Patterson



**Hilary Parsons**,  
Manager, Admissions and  
Enrolment Services  
*OL Executive Award*,  
nominated by  
Gord Tarzwell



**Brant Westran**,  
Open Learning Faculty  
Member Support  
*Peer-to-Peer Award*,  
nominated by  
Tracy Dembicki,  
Mary Kruger  
and Terry Power





## Caroling

An ancient tradition through which groups of people gather and sing religious or seasonal Christmas songs at the houses of different people. It was believed that if someone turned carolers away without offering them food, money or drink, they would experience bad luck for the rest of the year. It is thought that caroling began in England as an old English tradition called wassailing, through which neighbours would be toasted to a long life (Wassail comes from the Old Norse term *ves heill*, which means "good health"). Wassailing in England is described as wandering musicians who would travel from town to town, visiting castles and homes of the rich. In return for their performance, the musicians hoped to receive a hot meal or money.

## Christmas and Reformation

In the early 17th century, reform changed the way Christmas was celebrated in Europe. When Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan forces took over England in 1645, they vowed to rid England of decadence and, as part of their effort, cancelled Christmas. By popular demand, Charles II was restored to the throne and, with him, came the return of the popular holiday. In 1620, when the pilgrims, English separatists, came from Europe to America, they did not recognize Christmas. In fact, from 1659 to 1681, celebrating Christmas was actually outlawed in Boston. Anyone exhibiting the Christmas spirit was fined five shillings. Christmas wasn't declared a federal holiday until June 26, 1870. In the 19th century, Americans reinvented Christmas, changing it to a family-centered day of peace and nostalgia.



# WHAT'S NEWS

## IN OPEN LEARNING

A report on online learning in Canada indicates that **distance learning is continuing to grow and is now available in all 13 provinces and territories.** The annual report, entitled *State of the Nation: K-12 Online Learning in Canada*, was released by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) at iNACOL's annual conference, which was held November 9 -11, 2011 in Indianapolis. "Canada was one of the first countries to embrace technology and the Internet to deliver distance learning courses to students in remote locations and growth of online learning in Canada has been significant," iNACOL President and CEO Susan Patrick said at the Virtual School Symposium conference. The report indicates that the total number and proportion of K-12 students enrolled in distance education has increased from year to year, with British Columbia leading the way with the most structured regulations and highest number and highest percentage of student participation. Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba also reported notable growth in online and distance learning. "Unlike in the United States, K-12 online learning in Canada is still primarily seen as a substitute when face-to-face learning is not feasible or not available," Wayne State University Assistant Professor Michael K. Barbour, the author of the report, said. "However, this is beginning to change in many urban centers and more populous provinces where online learning is seen as an alternate way to deliver education to students who have not had success in the traditional school environment." To read the full report visit iNACOL's website at [www.inacol.org](http://www.inacol.org).

According to a new *@Issue* paper from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, **the most common barrier for adult learners is finding time to schedule education around family and work commitments.** As a result, adult learners are more likely to engage in education opportunities that are flexible, require a shorter time commitment and are relevant to their employment or career goals. The paper observes that a higher proportion of adult learners use non-government sources of financing for their education as opposed to government loans, which may be an indicator that the current public financial aid system is not meeting the needs of adult learners.

According to a recent survey commissioned by the DeVry Institute of Technology, **seven out of 10 responding Calgarians believe employers see value in online education**, with 49% ranking it moderately valuable and 21% as highly valuable. 47% of those surveyed believe online education has become more credible over the last five years. More than three-quarters of respondents says current online education offerings are moderately or highly credible.

According to new survey data released by the Pew Research Center, in association with *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, **delivering courses online has gained broad acceptance among top US college leaders**, but the public is not as convinced of the quality of online education. 51% of the 1,055 college presidents surveyed say an online course provides an equal education value to one taken in a classroom, while just 29% of 2,142 American adults queried agree. 77% of college presidents report that their schools now offer online courses. 15% of college leaders say most of their current undergraduates have taken a class online and 50% predict that a decade from now most of their students will take classes online.

**A new partnership among Alaska schools could help improve "distance education" in the state**, ultimately providing students in remote areas the classes they need to qualify for a new state scholarship program. The next steps for Alaska's Learning Network, the school consortium that has begun offering online classes, will be discussed by an advisory board later this month. Significant challenges remain, including the needs for funding to maintain and expand the program, now working under a one-year startup grant. Less than reliable Internet connectivity in parts of rural Alaska also remains an issue. But the network's director of distance learning, Woody Wilson, said the program is necessary if Alaska is to improve quality of education. The network is offering 19 web-based courses through the Anchorage and Wrangell school districts, including classes students need to qualify for Alaska Performance Scholarships. Wilson said about 140 students, from 20 schools are enrolled in classes through the network this year, even though districts received late word about the program.

American news magazine *U.S. News & World Report* is **applying its rankings to the realm of online colleges.** "With the rapid growth of online programs in higher education, prospective students are asking for more, and more useful data to make informed choices," Brian Kelly, Editor of *U.S. News*, wrote in a memo. "We are creating a site that will bring the same quality of information to online consumers, and the same opportunity for schools to connect with those students, that we've brought to brick and mortar institutions." *U.S. News* is taking aim at just a few types of online programs this time around: Masters programs in business, computer information technology, education, engineering and nursing; and Baccalaureate programs. The publication will not be ranking institutions overall, as it does with traditional colleges and universities. *U.S. News* hopes to provide a tool for evaluating online programs based on "old-fashioned" data collection and analysis, Robert Morse, the director of the rankings, said. The plan is to solicit a wide range of data and then decide on criteria based on a combination of what makes sense, according to scholarly research into online course effectiveness and interviews with online education authorities, and what comes back, Morse said. Some examples of the type of information used for the rankings are related to questions about the degree to which faculty members are trained to teach online; whether the same faculty members who teach the online version of a course teach the traditional classroom version; what proportion of faculty are adjuncts; the extent to which a program polices cheating on online tests; how much debt the average student takes on and job placement and salary upon graduation (it will not be asking about program-level loan default rates); and a number of traditional metrics, such as graduation and retention rates.

Eduventures, Inc., a higher education research and consulting firm, recently released a second update to its January 2011 report entitled *Online Learning Across State Borders*, which includes commentary on the July 12, 2011 U.S. District Court ruling which threw out the Department of Education's (DOE) rule on state authorization specifically as it relates to distance learning across state borders. Eduventures anticipates that federal involvement is likely to continue despite this ruling and advises schools to proceed with review and compliance efforts. The "Program Integrity" rules from the US DOE, which went into force July 1, 2011, originally required **all Title IV-eligible schools to be able to demonstrate, upon request, that they have or are actively seeking any necessary approval in every U.S. state in which they operate, including by distance learning.** Subsequently, the DOE extended the deadline for this aspect of the rules to July 1, 2014, but required "good faith" compliance efforts from July 2011. Despite the District Court decision, state enforcement remains a significant business risk to a school's online or other affected operations, even if federal action and prospective loss of Title IV eligibility are now in question. Many states have explicit requirements that distance education providers enrolling students or otherwise judged present in their state must first obtain authorization and states have the right to enforce their regulations at any time. "It is important to note that the District Court ruled against the DOE on lack of due process and did not address the substance of the DOE's position on state regulation and distance learning," Richard Garrett, author of the report and Managing Director at Eduventures, said. "The fact that the court upheld the DOE's stance on incentive compensation, misrepresentation and other aspects of state authorization, suggests that the DOE is in a strong position to reassert its case. This court ruling is unlikely to be the end of federal involvement on this issue." Schools are advised to carefully assess their regulatory exposure in states where they enrol students through distance education, or engage in related activities under state jurisdiction, and to take the necessary action to come into compliance. "Not all states require action," Laura Boothroyd, Director of Consulting Client Services at Eduventures, said. "Others have requirements but minimal penalties and some cite penalties of US\$500/day per violation. Schools with a significant investment in distance learning, and in particular states, should still move quickly to come into compliance in those states where the need for authorization is clear."

In the spirit of the holiday season, the Marketing and Communications department of Open Learning would like to offer a special prize to the sixth individual to correctly answer the following questions.

**Questions:**

- ▶ What page number in this newsletter references the ICDE?
- ▶ What does the acronym ICDE stand for and define what ICDE is?

Answers should be sent to [OLMarketing@tru.ca](mailto:OLMarketing@tru.ca) by 4:30 pm on Monday December 12, 2011. The winner will be informed by 4:30 pm Tuesday December 13, 2011. Details about the prize will be sent to the winner thereafter.

**CONTEST**

**Autistic students will have access to an online degree** designed especially for them beginning January 15, 2012. The Achieve Degree, offered at through the Sage Colleges in Albany, NY, is a new all-online bachelor's degree program that is designed specifically for students with autism or learning disabilities. The program is the first of its kind; the first to focus on autism in particular (while not excluding students with other conditions) and that will award a bachelor's degree. "There's no reason that we can't accommodate people with a range of differences or needs, or strengths or resources," Dana Reinecke, from the department of applied behavior analysis at Sage, said. While Sage is investing the necessary funding to provide technology, individualization and mentoring specific to the new program, Reinecke said it comes at a price as tuition is US\$27,000 for the first year, followed by a "modest increase" the second year. The third year will cost US\$43,000 and be followed by another small increase.

During a recent conference at Pennsylvania-based liberal-arts college Bryn Mawr, Candace Thille, Director of Carnegie Mellon University's Open Learning Initiative (OLI), made the case that **integrating the OLI's online courses with traditional classroom teaching can actually strengthen the relationship between students and their human professors.** The OLI's open courses, Thille explained, "analyze and distill click-stream data that are automatically collected from the student's interactions with the OLI system in order to communicate key information on the class' learning and progress that will help guide instruction in real time." She explained that unlike reports from traditional course management systems, the OLI Learning Dashboard presents instructors with a measure of student learning for each learning objective. "The dashboard also provides more detailed information, such as the class's learning of sub-objectives, learning for individual students, and the types of tasks with which the students are struggling the most," Thille said. Looking at a course dashboard will indicate to a professor the concepts of an assignment that students understood easily and those that they did not. This information will allow the professor to adjust the next class plan to focus on the material that needs more explanation. Ultimately, this reporting on how students learn can help teachers understand their students better. The learning dashboard is part of the instructional intelligence system that can support a new level of effectiveness for blended mode instruction. "We're trying to give students and faculty better tools to support student learning outside of class, so that you, the faculty, can concentrate on classroom interaction," Thille said. Although Thille's session on OLI's work opened

the discussion, the project's investigation of blended learning will embrace more than the use of OLI software, Bryn Mawr Provost Kimberly Cassidy said. "We have approached this as an inquiry that welcomes many perspectives and many definitions," Cassidy said. "We want to find out how blended learning can be adapted to your institution, to your college culture." The project focuses on integrating electronic teaching resources into core introductory courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines - courses that serve as "gateways" to majors in those disciplines.

**In order to get rid of over regulation in the distance education system** it is necessary to make the Distance Education Council (DEC) an independent body under the Ministry of Education, according to Swati Mujumdar, director of Symbiosis Centre for Distance Learning (SCDL). DEC, the authority regulating distance education in India, was formed under the clause 16 of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Act, 1985, at which time it received a go-ahead to promote and monitor the quality of distance education in the country. Mujumdar said that the government in India is not doing enough for the growth of distance learning. "The question remains if the monitoring mechanism has been effective and unbiased in its functioning," Mujumdar said, doubting whether there will ever be a unanimous legislation on distance education monitoring. "The DEC is an authority under the IGNOU, without any power and they keep comparing other distance learning institutes with IGNOU.

They lack manpower and there are so many pending proposals with them." Mujumdar also pointed out that since the DEC chairman is also the vice chancellor of IGNOU, the DEC decisions and actions are always enacted by IGNOU. "If we want to extend the geographic reach of distance education, the DEC must have a separate status as the apex organization for monitoring, accreditation and regulation of distance education, under the Ministry of Education, and not as a department under IGNOU," Mujumdar said. "There are around 130 books, which we have designed and sent to DEC for inspection. For the last five years we have not received any reply from them. If the quality is not good, let them give us the parameters. Unless they don't give us the parameters on how the quality is judged, how are we supposed to know?" As a representative of India and South Asia on the executive committee of Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU), Mujumdar said that the international council is of the opinion that DEC is not playing an active role in India.



**Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), located in Uttar Pradesh, India, recently sanctioned the establishment of five study centres of distance education in different parts of the country.** The centres are slated to be developed in different educational establishments at: Saharsa, Bhagalpur; Muzaffarpur, Bihar; and Badaun and Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh. According to Mohd Rizwan Khan, Director, Distance Education Centre, AMU, the establishment of these centres falls under the ambit of the Centre for Distance Education.

Data from Mumbai University's Institute of Distance and Open Learning shows that a majority of those enrolling in graduate and post-graduate correspondence courses are between 18 and 25 years. In 2006, 30,838 students between 18-25 years enrolled for distance education programs. The figure for the same age group doubled to almost 60,000 students in 2010. **The total enrollment for correspondence courses has also gone up by 23% from 58,967 in 2006 to 72,666 in 2010-2011.** However, the number of students in the 26-35 age group enrolling for distance education has steadily fallen in the same period. "In the 18 to 25 age group, the maximum enrollments are in BCom (21,521 in 2010) and MCom (18,984 in 2010), which are career-oriented courses," D Harichandan, Director of the Institute, said. "Most students in this age group are employed. Arts is more popular among older students."

The House of Representatives in the Philippines recently approved the third and final reading of a **Bill that will expand access to education through open learning and distance education in post-secondary and tertiary levels.** House Bill 4883 applies to public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) and post-secondary technical/vocational schools in the Philippines which have existing open learning and distance education programs and to others which will later be authorized as qualified implementors of such programs. The Bill, to be known as the Open Learning and Distance Education Act of 2011, is expected to pave the way for the creation of delivery platform and open learning philosophy to "assure equivalence or comparability with existing standards in both the traditional or alternative education systems," according to Mark Villar, a principal author of the Bill. Under the Bill, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) will be the respective regulators of HEIs and post-secondary schools involved in open learning and distance education. The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) will be tapped by the CHED and Tesda to conduct an independent evaluation of the state of open learning and distance education in the Philippines.

The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) hosted the third International Africa Council for Distance Education (ACDE) Conference and General Assembly this year from July 12-15. The conference, held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, explored the theme "Bridging the development gap in Africa through open and distance learning." Elifas Bisanda, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of OUT, said this was the first such summit to be held in the country, further noting that different countries attended in addition to a total of 350 delegates from various institutions in the continent, including some of Africa's Education Ministers. **The main agenda of the summit was issues about the importance and the benefits of distance learning in today's world.** "This is our chance as Tanzanians to know the importance of distance learning education in this globalized world, rather than attending classes," Bisanda explained. Keynote speakers included Asha Kanwar from ACDE member institution the Commonwealth of Learning and Olugbemiro Jegede, Secretary General of the Association of African Universities (AAU). Sub-themes highlighted at the conference included: Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Education; E-learning and Open Educational Resources; Capacity Building and Partnership; Professional Training and Development through ODL; and ODL for Special and Vulnerable Groups. ACDE is an African-wide organization that aims to promote open and distance learning, flexible and continuing education in Africa and support development in the field. The organization was established in 2004 at Kenya's capital, Nairobi, where it is headquartered. Its first summit was held in South Africa in 2005.

Hamdan Bin Mohammed e-University (HBMeU), based in the Dubai, United Arab Emirates, is slated to host the 2012 International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) Standing Conference of Presidents (SCOP). HBMeU's winning bid to host the event over five other contending proposals from Asia, Europe and Africa marks the first time that the prestigious annual SCOP meeting will be held in an Asian country. The announcement of HBMeU's winning bid was made during the SCOP 2011 meeting that was recently held at the State University of New York Empire State College in New York. During ICDE SCOP 2011 (an international meeting of executive heads from open and distance teaching universities) in New York, leaders representing institutions from **30 countries on every continent held discussions on why universities have not advanced political and societal acceptance for the open and online delivery of education.** ICDE is a network of 100 educational institutions worldwide working to promote open and distance learning and provide opportunities for exchange of educational best practices between countries and regions. SCOP is an annual event organized by ICDE for high-level, confidential exchange of information, quality enhancement strategies and policy directions.

**The 27th Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning** in Madison, WI, held August 3-5, highlighted a session entitled *Fostering Better Instructor Presence in Online Programs*, presented by Deltak edu, Inc., a provider of online higher education services. Community of Inquiry research shows that a higher degree of faculty engagement positively influences student satisfaction and retention. However, online faculty members often report a shortage of time and resources to engage their students. For the past five years, Deltak has been developing and testing methods of faculty engagement that are effective and efficient. This session offered quick and easy solutions that should establish impactful faculty engagement and results. The Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning provides an exchange of current resources, research and best practices from around the world that are relevant to the design and delivery of distance education/training. The conference hosted approximately 900 attendees, predominantly faculty and instructional designers, from over 400 organizations.

**Blackboard, the dominant online learning platform provider, recently announced its sale to a private equity firm for \$1.64 billion.** It was after years of growth through acquisition of smaller companies and competitors that Blackboard was sold to an investor group led by Providence Equity Partners, a private equity firm with a portfolio of education companies. The deal closes in the last quarter of 2011. While company officials assured their customers that it is business as usual, with no changes to senior leadership, analysts observed that private equity is usually more focused on profit. Some speculate that Blackboard will ease off on acquisitions and potentially divest itself of less profitable products, such as Blackboard Mobile or Blackboard Analytics, or exit less profitable markets like K-12 education. The president of Blackboard Learn said that without the need to manage the perceptions of a few dozen institutional investors, Blackboard will be free to serve client interests first and foremost.

**A recently published book is designed as a guidebook to navigate non-traditional pathways to advanced learning.** The book entitled *The Edupunks' Guide to Guide to a DIY Credential*, written by Anya Kamenetz, author of *DIY U*, was sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Reviewers describe it is "a comprehensive guide to learning online and charting a personalized path to an affordable credential using the latest innovative tools and organizations."



### Story ideas or a Questions...

If you have a story idea or a question about Open Learning that you would like answered, please send an email with your ideas or questions to: [edesjardine@tru.ca](mailto:edesjardine@tru.ca). Watch for your story or answers to your questions in the next issue of *The Open Standard*.

# THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

## *Around the World*

### Scandinavia

Here, the Norse historically celebrated Yule or Yuletide (originally a pagan winter festival) from December 21, the winter solstice, through January. In recognition of the return of the sun, fathers and sons would bring home large logs, which they would set on fire. The people would feast until the log burned out, which could take as many as 12 days. The Norse believed that each spark from the fire represented a new pig or calf that would be born during the next year. Tradition says that a yule log should be lit by a piece of log used the previous Christmas as this prevents evil spirits from entering the home. The yule log was considered lucky and would ensure a good harvest in the next year.

### Europe

At the end of December, in most of Europe the majority of the cattle were slaughtered so the animals would not have to be fed during the winter. For many, it was the only time of year when there was a supply of fresh meat. In addition, most wine and beer made during the year was finally fermented and ready for drinking.

### Germany

Here, people historically honored the pagan god Oden during the mid-winter holiday. It was believed that Oden made nocturnal flights through the sky to observe his people and would then decide who would prosper or perish. The Viking god Oden is a precursor to the modern Santa Claus as according to myth, he rode his flying horse, Sleipnir (a precursor to Santa's reindeer), who had eight legs. In the winter, Oden gave out both gifts and punishments, and children would fill their boots or stockings with treats for Sleipnir.

Decorating evergreen trees was a part of the German winter solstice tradition. The first "Christmas trees" explicitly decorated and named after the Christian holiday, appeared in Strasbourg, in Alsace in the beginning of the 17th century. After 1750, Christmas trees began showing up in other parts of Germany. In the 1820s, the first German immigrants decorated Christmas trees in Pennsylvania. After Germany's Prince Albert married Queen Victoria, he introduced the Christmas tree tradition to England. In 1848, the first American newspaper carried a picture of a Christmas tree and the custom spread to nearly every home in just a few years.

### Rome

The Romans celebrated Saturnalia, which was a holiday honoring Saturn, the god of agriculture. Saturnalia began in the week leading up to the winter solstice and continued for a month. At this time, food and drink were plentiful and the normal Roman social order was turned upside down. For a month, slaves would become masters. Peasants were in command of the city. Business and schools were closed so that everyone could join in the fun. Also around the time of the winter solstice, Romans observed Juvenalia, a feast honoring the children of Rome. ■

