

Record year for Slow Food

2,300 PARTAKE IN RIDE TO PROMOTE PEMBERTON FOOD

by **Jesse Ferreras**

Organizers of the Slow Food Cycle are declaring the Aug. 17 event a success after 2,300 people from all over the world gathered in Pemberton to tour the region's farms and the food they produce.

This year's cycle, the fourth annual, drew more participants than ever, up 1,100 from the 2007 event. That's compared with 800 participants in 2006 and 400 participants in 2005, the first year it took place.

Cyclists in this year's event included Pemberton residents and people from as far away as New Zealand and Kazakhstan. Chief organizer Anna Helmer is particularly proud that 40 per cent of participants came from the Lower Mainland, a figure up 10 per cent from last year.

The Slow Food Cycle began in 2005 at a time when there were development pressures on the farmland in the Pemberton Valley, Helmer said. This was particularly concerning for her because she feels that Pemberton has some of the best soil in North America.

"We hoped that if people knew why it was so important to keep the land available for vegetable production, there'd be a lot more support for it," she said. "It's been formed by just about everything that makes good soil, like flooding rivers and receding glaciers and volcanic actions, it all has gone into making that soil and there's not a lot of that left."

The central mission of the Slow Food Cycle, Helmer said, is to show people why it's important to protect and celebrate farmland and the food that comes from it.

"We do that by showing the farmers that there's a lot of interest in what we're doing and a lot of support," she said.

The Slow Food Cycle begins with registration at the Pemberton Community Centre. From there follows a bike ride up Pemberton Meadows Road and several stops at farms where participants can pick up coffee, vegetables and natural beef burgers along the way.

"We want people to leave their money in the meadows," Helmer said. "In the first five kilometres, you'd come to Pemberton Valley Coffee Company, so you'd get some coffee.

"Then you'd go along and by kilometre six there's some fresh vegetables and fresh salads, then kilometre 10 and 11 had all kinds of potato tasting."

Overall she said the event was a

good time, but it wasn't without a few ironic twists.

"There was no cell connection in the second half of the ride," Helmer said. "That connection was broken and other ones were formed."

A blessing from Martina Pierre, a Lil'wat elder, at the Helmer family's organic farm, kicked off the event.

"It's like saying grace before a meal," Helmer said. "She had plates of food and vegetables from our farm and she asked the ancestors to bless the food.

"She talked about how her people had helped our white settlers with farming and how there's always been a connection between the two cultures and how proud we both were to be part of the food production."

The Slow Food Cycle Sunday had support from groups such as the Pemberton Valley Supermarket, the Community Foundation of Whistler and the Village of Pemberton. Pemberton Search and Rescue kept watch over the ride to ensure all participants were safe.

The cycle, however, wasn't the only event held this year that drew attention to Pemberton's agricultural production. The Slow Food Cycle Sunday Society held the Anything Grows event at MY Millennium Place on Aug. 14. That event brought together 13 people involved in food production who gathered to talk about the work they do. Ninety people attended the event. ■

Drive-In, Squamish style

Dark nights, big screens and cool breezes – drive-in culture is back from the past and rolling through Squamish this weekend, with a fundraising event for the Squamish Coast Guard Auxiliary Unit (SCGA).

The new unit honed its skills all winter, and, with the summer winding to a close, is looking to supplement its Canadian Coast Guard funding with a few donated dollars.

The unit was cobbled together last fall in response to predicted growth at the north end of Howe Sound.

"Everyone remembers the fun of going to the drive-in, so we are setting up a giant outdoor movie screen down at the Squamish oceanfront and just like the real thing we will have an outdoor concession," said SCGA unit leader Ron Drewry in a press release.

"Bring your family, bring a date or a car full of friends and cruise in for the first Drive-In Event in Squamish."

The movie is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 23. Gates open at 6:30 p.m. and the reels roll at dusk. ■