

Frank Turner Award Winner 2013: Garry Schaefer

The Frank Turner Trophy is the most prestigious award given by the VCC. This award was created to honour Frank Turner, a long time member of the club. Frank Turner was an accomplished photographer who won many awards for his art, but he was also an important and vital member of this club in several positions including President over a number of years and also taught and shared his passion and talent for photography selflessly with other members. When he passed away, his Pentax camera was made into the trophy that honours both him and his remarkable contributions to the club.

The selection committee, the last three recipients of this award, had little difficulty agreeing on this year's recipient. The recipient has provided dedicated service to the club since he moved here from Winnipeg in 2005 and joined VCC that year. A former member of the Manitoba (Winnipeg) Camera Club, Garry Schaefer served as their President and Webmaster from 2003 to 2005. He then continued his service to our club as Webmaster.

Garry's journey in photography started when he was a teen with a simple "Box Camera" and then progressed via a Rolli to 35mm film. He moved to digital in 1998 with a Nikon CoolPix 900 and has not looked back since. He is currently using an Olympus E-5 system camera.

Garry has been most open to suggestions for changes and improvements and the occasional "bug fixes" and has pursued his role as Webmaster in a most efficient and timely manner since 2006. Not only that, he has found the time to work with his camera and produce excellent images that have featured in our club competitions. Garry has been a key member of the "Tuesday Group" and freely volunteers his time to assist others in the club. As a member of the club's leadership team, Garry has provided valuable input to discussions, not only on the website, but also on other aspects of the club's operations.

To provide the background to the award this year, Garry was asked to provide some notes on the history of the website as an article in Close-Up. What follows is largely Garry's own description of his involvement in the development of this key service of the club.

Garry inherited the original website created by Roy Smyth, the club's first Webmaster, who registered our domain name and established our presence on the net on December 10, 2002. Later, Dave Thomas took over the reins with assistance from Richard James during Dave's times award from the city.

In 2006, our president, Gary Ford, brought Garry Schaefer on board as Webmaster. He had expressed a willingness to maintain operations while he learned more about the arts and sciences behind managing the site. It wasn't long, though, before a more ambitious proposal arose.

What did the club's existing website lack? Many more images, the heart and soul of a camera club, deserved to be front and centre. There were additional items to consider as well, and he soon found himself channelling the visions of Gary Ford and other club members. The basic menu system needed to be simplified to make it easier to locate items. Setting to work during the summer of 2007, drafter versions were brought by laptop computer to coffee meetings at the Moka House. The feedback received often sent him back to the drawing board. The opening date for the fall session loomed ahead.

In August, 2007, just days before our September meeting, the redesigned website went online. Our approach was to feature members' images and to provide timely information on all club activities and schedules. A new horizontal menu bar provided better navigation to linked pages with further detail. Image galleries were redesigned, particularly those for our competition results. The feedback received from members indicated that we had taken a strong step in the right direction. With minor changes, that basic design was maintained for the next few years.

Inevitably, the goalposts shifted and Garry happily got to work again. Our program had grown in scope; workshops and field trips and become prominent alongside competitions, speakers' and members' nights. A full-blown calendar was added that soon became the 'go to' location for information on all the Club's events. The top menu was replaced by the current vertical menu bar, with its drop-down lists of linked pages. Ready access was provided to a greater number of pages.

Further development of the website continue, tracking the evolution of our club's programs. Mike Wooding started the ball rolling with his proposal for a Nature Photography Forum which evolved into a SIG and was followed by the Lighting and

Creative SIGs, forums and blogs. More image galleries and blogs were established, using Coppermine and WordPress, to meet our growing needs.

A major challenge faced by the club was how to manage the expanded scope of our club competitions, which had gone from a single level to a new three-tiered system, often involving out-of-town judges for the digital categories.

Looking after all the steps required was often more than the volunteers on the competitions committee desired. The solution was once again to utilize the Coppermine galleries program.

The program was tweaked and modified to provide a platform for image uploads, judging, presentation of results and, finally, public browsing of completed competitions. Experience over the first year of operation points to the success of the venture, with the proviso that we will remain open to improvements that can be made going forward.

Things that grow in an organization regularly need some pruning and reordering to keep them on track. Previously, input from Scott Laird had led to placing Buy & Sell up front on the main menu and, later, to the establishment of an RSS feed from our Club News page. This time the concern was the obscure placements of recent additions on SIGs, photo forums and blogs. A restructured menu bar has been set up to address those issues.

Recently the Victoria Camera Club re-established the club membership in the Photographic Society of America. That opened the way to our entries into their annual competitions for club websites. We are grateful to the PSA for hosting those competitions and are happy to note our placements. In 2011, the VCC was awarded Third Place in the Website Competition of Large Clubs. In 2012, we advanced to a Second Place award. Checking our progress against the detailed criteria established by the Photographic Society of America is one way to keep "on track" as changes are made to the website.

Not only did Garry receive input and support from the Executive and general membership, he expanded his team to include two assistants to share the load. Our website team looks forward to the continued development of the site as needs are identified. Input from club members, through general surveys and through spontaneous discussion, is a key to that end. What better source of direction can there

be than feedback from the users of the website, particularly from those at the centre of things – our Victoria Camera Club members!

Garry, your exemplary efforts to support the club are truly worthy of the Frank Turner Trophy.