

Changing of the guard at base museum

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Two of CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum's longest-serving employees, with over a half-century of combined experience, have stepped down from their posts.

Museum Curator Debbie Towell retired in November 2021, ending a 30-year career at Department of National Defence museums. Exhibit designer Clare Sharpe retired Feb. 25 after 22 years at the museum. Sharpe will stay on part-time for a period.

Stepping up as the new Curator is Tatiana Robinson, former museum registrar.

"I knew it would be a big responsibility because a curator is a caretaker and custodian, not only of the museum and its archival collection, but also the history and legacy of so many people, and presenting it in a respectful way," says Robinson. "It is a privilege to be in such a position and share those stories with others."

A Dynamic Duo

Towell and Sharpe worked closely to revitalize the museum for over 20 years.

"We managed to become a first-class museum for visitors and researchers alike," says Towell. "I will really miss my co-workers and the museum's volunteers as they are such a great crew."

Towell worked as the Curator at the Canadian Military Engineers Museum at CFB Chilliwack before arriving in Esquimalt in 1996. She oversaw the transformation and centralization of the museum. This involved moving its artefacts and archive to one central location in Naden, collection had previously been stored in multiple locations around the base.

Sharpe began in 1999, after graduating from the University of Victoria, as the museum's Exhibit Designer, creating displays from start to finish.

She says her affection for the museum and its beauty was a big reason for staying on as a part-time contractor.

"I've always loved Naden and the historic buildings that house the museum in Museum Square," says Sharpe. "This is one of the most scenic, interesting, and beautiful sites in B.C."

New management

Both women agree that Robinson has the right stuff to do the job.

"Tatiana has a wealth of experience and professional expertise working in museums and cultural organizations," says Sharpe. "She is extremely well-qualified to lead the museum forward into the future."

Towell says Robinson has an unparalleled passion for the museum and is well-suited for the job. She noted that Robinson has a very strong resume in museum work, specializing in naval and military history.

Robinson's previous job as museum Registrar involved registering donations of objects and archival items into the museum's collection, documenting their history of ownership (provenance), researching the historical significance of artefacts, managing the collection, and keeping track of loans to other museums.

She worked closely with Towell to purchase a purpose-designed Cloud-based database to catalogue and record the museum's collection, which helped make the collection more accessible to staff and researchers.

Robinson was first recruited by the museum after taking courses with Sharpe in the University of Victoria's Cultural Management program. Sharpe asked Robinson to work on cataloguing the collection and updating the museums records and she instantly said yes.

Robinson earned her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Victoria in Art History and Visual Studies. She has worked at the Maritime Museum of B.C. as Collections Manager and for a time as Acting Curator, Helmcken House as a historic interpreter, and with the B.C. Archives.

To be successful at her new post, she says she will be relying on the museum's mandate: "To collect, preserve, interpret, and display the history and heritage of naval presence on Canada's West Coast and of the military on Southern Vancouver Island."



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