

# University of Victoria Awards Honorary Degree to Library Advocate

By Percilla Groves

Amor de Cosmos himself turned up at the University of Victoria Fall 2012 Convocation to deliver the Oration for the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, awarded to Dave Obee, current editor-in-chief of the *Times Colonist* and author of more than a dozen books including BCLA's own *The Library Book*. Amor de Cosmos, the first elected premier of BC and founder of the *British Colonist*, was channeled by Will Weigler, theatre instructor at the University of Victoria, and authentic even to accent and top hat.

The Doctor of Laws citation highlighted Dave Obee's many contributions to BC life: regular inclusion of historical subjects in the *Colonist*; a dozen books on history and genealogy, among them *Making the News*, *Destination Canada*, *Finding your Canadian Ancestors*; the mentoring of young people interested in history and journalism, and his contribution to the digitization of the *British Colonist*. Obee is also the founder of the Times Colonist Book Drive, which has raised over one million dollars for education and literacy projects on Vancouver Island.

Obee's acceptance speech was a model of library advocacy: "... I received a remarkable education here – not in a classroom, but in the library. I have spent countless hours there over many years, digging through all sort of materials to understand more about our history, and how to research it."

Obee explained also that his interest in BC history was inspired and nourished by his father during travels and household moves. "Living in small towns around the province made me aware of the challenges they face, in terms of providing education. Information is a precious commodity. In cities, it's taken for granted that access is easy. That is not the way it is in smaller towns in the middle of nowhere." Understandable then, that Obee was instrumental in ensuring that the University of Victoria received the right to digitize the *British Colonist* 1858 – 1910, the predecessor of today's *Colonist*. The paper is now available at [www.britishcolonist.ca](http://www.britishcolonist.ca) province-wide and beyond as a primary document for historical research.

Looking back over this moving ceremony, I wish that I had counted the number of times the word "library" was spoken by various participants, beginning with Cabinet Minister Ida Chong's reference to *The Library Book* in her introductory remarks.

Whenever planning to honour a citizen or donor or dignitary, consider [The Library Book](#) as a gift.

*Percilla Groves is a retired SFU Reference Librarian who continues to be regularly asked for information and directions.*