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C O W I C H A N N E W S



# LEADER PICTORIAL



Friday, August 27, 2010



## Here's Johnny

**Iconic performance:** Meet a Cowichan Bay impersonator who has the Hollywood superstar down to perfection with one important twist — this Johnny Depp is a she

Krista Siefken  
News Leader Pictorial

**Y**ou'd be hard-pressed to guess Cowichan's professional Johnny Depp impersonator isn't the real deal.

And until Denise Pearson starts to speak, it's unlikely you'd realize this impostor isn't a man, either. In fact, since Pearson improved her facial hair the only real giveaway is her feminine hands.

"If I'm able to put doubt in someone's mind and make them ask, 'Is that him?' then I've done my job," said Pearson, a Mill Bay mother of two.

She'll be the first to admit her rise to Deppdom was unexpected and even unlooked for.

It started, strangely enough, with *The Addams Family*.

It was 2001 and the Pearson clan decided to stage a Halloween show for their neighbours rather than offer the traditional trick-or-treating experience.

Pearson, her husband Bob, daughter Victoria and son Spencer, started with a show about the macabre family and

an audience of about 10 kids.

That grew to about 150 kids by 2002's Harry Potter-themed Oct. 31 show.

And that was also the year Johnny Depp's blockbuster *Pirates of the Caribbean* hit theatres.

Pearson began planning 2003's Halloween show immediately.

"I saw the movie five times that year, and would sit there in the theatre sketching and designing (Depp's) outfits," Pearson said.

With simple makeup and a costume compiled of Salvation Army finds, Pearson performed as Captain Jack Sparrow for about 240 kids on Halloween night.

"The neighbours were in shock," she remembers. "They all kept saying I had an uncanny resemblance to Johnny Depp."

In fact, the Mill Bay wife and mother looks nothing like the movie star. A feminine blonde, she admits the only attributes she shares with Depp are height and age.

But with make-up and a few simple costume pieces, all of a sudden she transforms into one of Hollywood's great thespians.

She can impersonate Depp as Sparrow plus the Mad Hatter, Willy Wonka and Sweeney Todd, but can also imitate Depp himself.

It helps that the shy celebrity often wears hats and sunglasses, and that Pearson possesses similarly hollow cheekbones.

She was such a success as Sparrow that when the Pearsons performed the following Halloween, they drew a 300-person crowd.



Denise Pearson: unlikely Sparrow



Cowichan Bay impersonator Denise Pearson says playing Johnny Depp's Jack Sparrow character (above) is much easier than playing the actor himself (right).

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## Depp act went pro in 2005

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"That's when I decided to run with it," said Pearson, who has theatre experience.

She began doing tons of research on impersonators and learned all the tricks of the make-up trade.

By the time the Tall Ships arrived in the valley in 2005, Pearson's Sparrow impression had enough steam to become a professional gig.

Now she shows up at events, festivals, fundraisers and more, and has even attended an impersonators convention in Las Vegas.

She's considering working with a voice coach to learn how to lower her voice, and has booked at least a gig a week this summer.

"As soon as the costume is on, I completely go into character," Pearson said.

She loves imitating Sparrow — "the beauty with Jack is you can do anything" — but said the Depp character can be more difficult because his personality is far from obvious.

And after a few years of impersonating him, Pearson can see why the actor shies from the limelight.

"It's really interesting portraying an icon so highly thought of," she said. "I want to respect him, and I know that if someone



The Mad Hatter is part of Denise Pearson's act.

were to emulate me, I'd hate for them to sleazify it. So I refuse to go that route and keep it professional as much as I can, because he's an incredible artist."

And maybe impersonators like Pearson keep Depp's many fans at bay.

"All the time," she answers to whether she gets hit on as Depp and his characters.

"In fact, once (audiences) find out I'm a woman, it gets worse. I guess it makes women more comfortable to know I'm really just another woman."