

## Meet Joseph Gonyeau

*Inspired by the bustling markets of Thailand, a dream for Victoria's Ship Point was born*

"I have always felt a natural connection to the water." Growing up in Ontario, Joseph Gonyeau spent many happy hours on the shores of Lake Ontario. While vacationing in Vancouver in 1988, he fell in love with BC. "I was shocked. I realized that I could live all the way out here where the weather is good and still be in Canada. I came out here and it's fresh, ocean air." The next year, after selling his contracting business, he packed up his car, his cat, and everything he could fit in his vehicle, and made a commitment to a new life out west. After 25 years in Victoria, he has never looked back.

A natural entrepreneur, Joseph has tried his hand at many successful business ventures—from general contracting, to real estate, to retail. In 1997, he decided to shift focus. "I got interested in community markets. Took a year off, decided to try something new and started to make soap. I joined a bunch of people who were really happy with what they were doing. Started selling at James Bay Market. A few years later, I heard that the Bastion Square market was going to be shut down, so I signed up as chairperson and worked to rebuild it. I like challenges."

As his role shifted from a vendor to an organizer, his success soon attracted the attention of the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority, newly formed the year before. "It was the fall of 2003 and when GVHA took over the causeway vendor program, they were looking at operating it in a new way. I saw the opportunity to make it manageable and



see the room to grow. I was, and still am dealing with people who are passionate about their work."

At that time, the roster of vendors and artists in the Inner Harbour was a small, but committed bunch. "I think we had eighteen artists, eighteen musicians, nine jugglers and three food carts and that was it. I saw the potential of the space and I wanted to make the program grow."

Joseph had taken a memorable trip to Thailand the year before and had been amazed at the scale and vibrancy of the local night market in Chiang Mai. "They have one of the best night markets. During the day, there's nothing. At night time the town just came alive and there was this market that took up blocks and blocks. We couldn't see it all in one night, it took us three nights before we covered the whole market. It was so amazing to see that a little place can attract so many tourists just because of their night market."

Inspired by the Thai example, Joseph had a vision for the largely empty space at Ship Point. "I saw the cruise ships were coming in the evening and I put two and two together." In the summer of 2004, with a lot of enthusiasm, and an almost non-existent budget, he started the Ship Point Night Market.

"I took an ad in the paper, asked a couple of people to hand out flyers. We didn't even have power in the first year and had to use candles when the sun went down. We started with only six vendors and four of them quit, so that left me with two. It wasn't really a full market the first year but the potential was there."

**Knowing that the pier at Ship Point was available: "I saw the cruise ships were coming in the evening and I put two and two together."**  
— Joseph Gonyeau

## Harbour Profiles: Celebrating 10 years of the Ship Point Night Market (2004 - 2014)



The first years were a tough slog, but a small band of vendors stuck by and Joseph persevered. By year two, wiring was installed in the pier so that vendors could power and light their stalls. By year three, the market, although never run as a profit-making venture, was able to cover its costs and since then it has seen “phenomenal growth.”

“All of a sudden, it was not only cruise ship passengers, but locals who would stumble upon it and sort of discover it. And then people started thinking, wow, we have a market here, how about putting an event right beside it. The market became the

catalyst for the whole area around—the parking lot and lower causeway—to really transform into this event centre with events like the Busker’s Festival, Jump Ship and Ska Fest.”

From the initial two vendors who stuck it out the first summer, there are now 72 vendors on the list and the night market is celebrating a decade of success this summer. The

variety of wares for sale is impressively diverse and they are mostly handmade products sold by the artists themselves. “We have carvers. There’s beautiful jewelry for sale. We offer massages, or sell toys. We have some clothing like purses, bags and dresses. There’s soap and skin care products, glass blowing and pottery. Also, fresh fruit and confectionary like fudge and chocolates. And top musicians playing at the end of the pier. We’ve got it all.”

*“On a serene night, when you get the beautiful sunset and you have a guitarist down there, visitors wander in, just sit down and say, wow, this city is beautiful.”*

— Joseph Gonyeau

Asked to sum up the impact of the night market on visitors to our city, Joseph is passionate about promoting a positive experience. “On a serene night, when you get the beautiful sunset and you have a guitarist down there, visitors wander in, just sit down and say, wow, this city is beautiful. Later, sometimes years later, then they come back for a longer stay. So we’re actually promoting Victoria as a tourist destination at the same time—turning a memorable four hours into a future week’s stay.”

Joseph is focused on how he can build upon his successes. “I’d love for there to be a theme each week-end of the summer. This year we’re hosting a special fashion show called Fashion Splash. The theme is West Coast Naturals and it will be featuring locally designed and manufactured bathing suits, yoga wear, summer and fall fashions.”

And that venture that got Joseph involved in markets all those years ago? “I’m still making soap by hand. That little market stall turned into a store on Johnson Street—Free Spirit Botanicals. My wife and I run it now and we have great staff to support us.”

— by Ivan Watson

*The Ship Point Night Market runs every Friday and Saturday evening from June 13 to September 13, 2014.*

*Fashion Splash, the centerpiece of this year’s 10th anniversary celebrations, is on Saturday, August 23rd at 7:30pm.*

*Watch a video interview with Joseph on [YouTube](#) For all event details: [victoriaharbourfestival.com](http://victoriaharbourfestival.com)*

