

# OAK BAY NEIGHBOURS

## TRANSFORMING LIVES:

### Michael Peirone and the Victoria Hand Project

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In a world where access to healthcare can be a privilege rather than a right, the Victoria Hand Project (VHP) stands as a beacon of hope, delivering 3D-printed prosthetic arms to amputees in low-resource settings. At the helm of this transformative organization is Michael Peirone, a dedicated engineer and now CEO, who joined as a co-op student at VHP's early research project stage, and who helped grow it into the global force for good that it is today.

By Audrey Wang | Photos by Kevin Light Photography





**M**ichael Peirone, now 32, grew up in Vancouver but found his true calling on Vancouver Island. In 2010, he enrolled in the University of Victoria (UVic) to study biomedical engineering. This program, the first of its kind in Western Canada, opened doors for Michael to explore his interests in science, technology, and human health.

"One of the great things about UVic was the opportunity to engage in extracurricular activities," Michael recalls. "That's how I discovered the Victoria Hand Project, which was then a brand-new research initiative." At the time, VHP was focused on studying how prosthetic hands could be made using 3D printing and testing these prosthetic devices in Guatemala. Intrigued by the technology and its potential, Michael began volunteering in VHP's laboratories at UVic in 2014.

His passion for the project deepened during two internships with VHP. The first, in 2015, involved advancing the organization's operations and prosthetic designs. The second, in 2016, took him to Nepal, where he saw firsthand the profound impact of prosthetics on amputees. "A Nepali amputee traveled over 24 hours by bus to receive a prosthetic," Michael shares. "Seeing his pride and joy after fitting the prosthetic was incredibly powerful."

During a tour of the VHP laboratories in the Engineering Lab Wing of the university, we spoke with Michael about his work with the organization.

**Q: What inspired you to work with the Victoria Hand Project?**

**Michael:** Initially, it was the engineering aspect – the idea of 3D printing hands was fascinating, and I wanted to be a part of that. But the human side of it is what really drives me now. My trip to Nepal changed everything. It's one thing to design something in a lab, but another to see it change someone's life. Those moments stay with you.

**Q: How has your role evolved over the years?**

**Michael:** I started as a biomedical systems designer, working on prosthetic designs. Then, as Chief Operating Officer, I expanded VHP's reach to four new international clinics. Now, as CEO, my focus is on the long-term vision and strategic growth. I miss the hands-on design work, but I've embraced the opportunities to present, fundraise, and travel to teach people how to use our devices.

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**Q: What has been the most rewarding part of your journey?**

**Michael:** It's hard to choose just one. Travelling to places like Ukraine in 2023 and helping soldiers and civilians rebuild their lives was deeply moving. And seeing our partners who are trained in our methods, share photos and videos of happy recipients always reinvigorates our team.

**Q: What is VHP's mission?**

**Michael:** The VHP was founded as a research initiative at UVic, and officially became an organization to address the global need for affordable, accessible prosthetic care. Our mission is simple but profound: to promote health and relieve poverty by providing prosthetic arms to those who need them most.

**Q: How does the VHP work its logistics in so many countries?**

**Michael:** VHP partners with healthcare providers around the world to establish local 3D printing centres. These centres

are equipped to produce prosthetic devices, empowering local clinicians to deliver care. The process includes measuring, fitting, and training recipients, ensuring they gain independence and confidence. Receiving a Victoria Hand is transformative. It helps recipients confront physical, social, and emotional challenges, and for many, it's a second chance at life.

VHP now operates in Nepal, Cambodia, Haiti, Egypt, Uganda, Rwanda, Pakistan, Kenya, and Ukraine. Each new clinic brings unique challenges but also immense rewards.

**Q: How has the local Oak Bay community supported VHP?**

**Michael:** One of the most promising projects is in Rwanda, initiated by a member of the Rotary Club of Oak Bay. The momentum is incredible. Community support, particularly from Oak Bay Rotary Club members and other Rotary Clubs in the region, has been key to making this project a reality.




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**Q: How has VHP engaged the community in fundraising efforts?**

**Michael:** Our fundraising efforts have been both creative and community driven. In 2023, a "Mayor Challenge" between Oak Bay Mayor Kevin Murdoch and Saanich Mayor Dean Murdock raised significant funds for VHP. It was a fun way to engage the community and raise awareness for our pilot project in Ukraine. As Dean's community raised less in the fundraiser, he rose to the challenge of using a prosthetic device in the Mayor Teacup Race. Victoria Hand Project also ran an Evening of Impact fundraiser event this past December, with amazing silent auction prizes from local companies.

**Q: Tell us about your team and VHP's upcoming plans.**

**Michael:** The team comprises two full-time engineers, co-op students, and several dedicated volunteers from the community. We are focused on refining workflows to expand into new regions. Plans include providing care in Middle Eastern countries affected by conflict. We're constantly innovating. The technology has to be adaptable, and the partnerships need to be strong. The ultimate goal is to ensure that no one is left without access to prosthetic care.



**Q: When you're not leading VHP, what do you enjoy doing?**

**Michael:** I love the great outdoors. Growing up on the North Shore, I developed a love for hiking, backpacking, rock climbing, and bikepacking. I try to balance my adventurous spirit with my work at VHP.

The travel and connections we make through VHP are incredible. We're often in places off the usual tourist track, and people are always so warm and welcoming. Those interactions remind me why we do what we do.



The Victoria Hand Project's impact goes beyond prosthetics; it's about restoring dignity, independence, and hope. With Michael Peirone at the helm, the organization is poised to expand its reach and continue changing lives around the globe. To learn more about the Victoria Hand Project, visit [www.victoriahandproject.com](http://www.victoriahandproject.com).



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