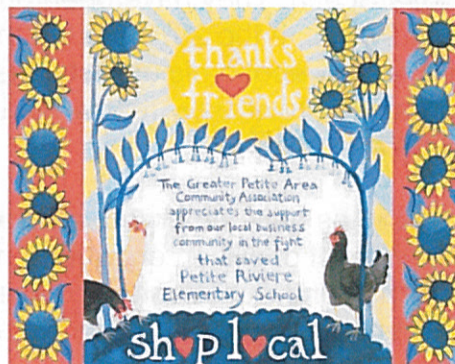


An Application to The Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award



Submitted for the Communities Served by Petite Rivière Elementary School

*(Voglers Cove, Cherry Hill, Broad Cove, Petite Rivière, Crousetown,
Green Bay, Crescent Beach, Lahave Islands, West Dublin,
Mount Pleasant, New Cumberland)*



Submitted by:

***Greater Petite Area Community Association with the Broad Cove Community Association;
Petite Rivière Community Park Association; Lahave & Area Refugee Support Committee;
Petite Rivière Elementary School & School Advisory Council***

Introduction

This application was inspired by the collaboration and community spirit that was so evident in the campaign where our community challenged the school board's decision to close our award-winning school. After trying to find compromise on a local level, we eventually took the South Shore Regional School Board's to the Nova Scotia Supreme Court. In February of 2018, we learned we had won!

These stories represent our entire community, including many organizations, businesses, churches, clubs, and societies not specifically mentioned by name.

There has been a long history of groups working together to support and protect our local school. Nevertheless, this recent campaign brought our community together in a way that emphasized the power inherent in the phrase "the sum of the whole is greater than its parts."

As Petite Rivière resident, Karen Wentzell, has suggested, "Not only did the campaign increase community inter-cooperation, it actually formed us into more of a broad-based community with a collective identity."

We hope the stories we share with you here demonstrate how community support is the "leavening" for our neighbourhood. Like bread proofed on the counter and waiting to be baked, the area surrounding the whole community served by the Petite Riviere Elementary School s on the rise and ready to take on more challenges in the future.

Carpe diem!

Unique Strengths: *It's the People that Make the Place*

The shoreline and inland communities surrounding the Petite Rivière Elementary School represent one of the oldest settlements in Nova Scotia. They have been built on a foundation of resourcefulness, resilience, and hard work. In the 20th century, the area increasingly became known for adapting traditional skills to new economic opportunities, such as the world-class creations of Covey Island Boatworks, the provincially renowned Lahave Bakery, and many successful enterprises based on arts and culture.

Over the past twenty years, new strengths have emerged: a creative, multi-dimensional, and diverse population; an extremely high level of citizen engagement, participation, and volunteerism; openness to new marketing approaches and opportunities; respect and emphasis for environmental initiatives; and the strength coming from intergenerational relationships that are the *norm* rather than the *exception* along the South Shore.

The area's openness to embracing change while holding fast to core values has proven to be a magnet for community growth. Bucking the trend of declining population in rural Nova Scotia, we continue to enjoy an in-migration of young families and emerging businesses, as well as an increasingly diverse population. In the 1970's, we saw an influx of "back-to-the-landers." Now there is a local resurgence of young, small-scale farmers, organic producers, and creative entrepreneurs. These range from a water-buffalo dairy to a producer of beeswax wraps to artisan

furniture makers, and everything in between. New residents are drawn by the drumlin soils, the “can do” spirit of the region, the award-winning school, and the reputation of a community that supports and celebrates innovation, creativity, and resilience.

“We have a very vibrant and welcoming community, and now we have a whole new generation of young families and entrepreneurs who will carry us through many years to come.” (Catherine Bell, Petite Rivière Fire Department Auxiliary)

Recreational and Cultural Activity: Something for Everyone ... & Always a Crowd!

Local citizens volunteer and support a higher-than-average number of community and recreational events. The bulletin board at the popular local hub, The Petite General Store, has posters for, on average, twenty-five activities each month. These include fire department breakfasts, weekly playgroup sessions, coffee mornings, fitness classes, suppers, brunches, teas, concerts, monthly meetings, art shows, Canada Day celebrations, farmers’ markets, lectures on local history, craft sales and flea markets, and beach sweeps.

Some activities may only require two or three volunteers, others upwards of fifty. Whatever the need, organizers know that people will step forward to volunteer at the event, and come out to make it a success.

*“Our hall is the ‘glue’ bringing people together to socialize, to learn, to entertain and be entertained, and to get to know each other better. Socials, suppers, art shows, concerts, lectures, dances, weekly playgroup sessions, and seasonal events populate the calendar. Many events are free or low-cost to ensure that everyone, no matter their income level, can participate. In a province with an aging demographic, our association prides itself on its intergenerational nature. Our popular Rockabilly Picnic often sees toddlers dancing side-by-side with silver-haired seniors.”
(Phyllis Price, Broad Cove Community Association)*

Citizen Participation in Community Initiatives: The Numbers Don’t Lie

Our area is rich in its level of community participation, with no fewer than sixteen active organizations: two fire departments; three community associations; two environmental protection groups; five church congregations and auxiliaries; a refugee support group; a seniors’ club; two park societies; and a number of groups connected to supporting the local school.

Informal sessions include weekly coffee hours, fitness classes, quilting sessions, and stitching groups. A common refrain of new residents is, “I had no idea there would be so much to do, and so many ways to get involved!”

Local organizations don’t often tally up the number of volunteer hours they put in, but a quick calculation for the two fire departments paints a compelling picture.

Each of the United Communities Fire Department and the Petite Rivière Fire Department have, on average, twenty firefighters giving approximately 180 hours monthly to active duty (fire calls and medical and accident first response), practice drills, equipment maintenance and organizational meetings. Add in effort needed for the monthly breakfasts (often attended by 300 people) held in each fire district and you easily come up with another 150 volunteer hours. When the United

Communities put a large addition onto their fire hall, eighty percent of the work was done by volunteers.

When the Greater Petite Area Community Association (GPACA) reviewed their successful campaign to keep the school open, they compiled the following statistics:

- More than 100 public and community meetings;
- Sixty-three print and radio news items generated;
- \$20,000 raised in bake sales, bottle drives, and concerts;
- More than 1500 signatures collected on a petition to the Provincial Legislature;
- More than 200 "Save Petite Elementary" lawn signs purchased and displayed.

Clearly, citizen involvement in community initiatives is a high priority in our area.

Ability to Form Partnerships:

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

This wise African proverb could easily be the motto of many individuals, community organizations, and businesses in our community.

In addition to the broad-based coalition to save Petite School and the fire departments mentioned previously, there are many other formal partnerships. In the Lahave and Area Refugee Committee, local church congregations worked together with community volunteers to support the relocation of Syrian families to the area. Businesses and artists join forces annually in the Petite Rivière Arts and Craft Society to promote and showcase our local, cultural and recreational assets.

With a sense of "we're all in this together" and a culture of sharing and collaboration, informal partnerships thrive in this area. Tom Alway and Peter Blais, owners of the unique studio/gallery, Maritime Painted Salt Box, transform school children's art into beautiful cards that the school uses as a fundraiser. Voglers Cove Hall's "Read and Share Corner" raises money to buy books for the school. The Broad Cove Hall has hosted fundraising dinners where proceeds are shared with Petite School. The Petite General Store acts as a ticket agent for local events. Elementary students help with beach sweeps organized by the Friends of Crescent Beach Society. It's all a big circle of mutual support.

"Last fall, area parents of pre-school children were looking for a site to host a weekly playgroup. We asked the Broad Cove Community Association (BCCA) if they could help. By partnering with Bridgewater's Better Together Family Resource Centre, and Petite Rivière Elementary School, and with support from the Lunenburg County Community Health Board, they were able to start a new babies' and tots' playgroup. Now, every week, Broad Cove Hall is filled with happy kids and appreciative parents."

(Jennifer MacDonald, parent, West Dublin)

Finding Solutions to Community Challenges by Working Together: *Coming Together for a Cause ... Whenever Needed*

Much has been written about how our community rallied to save the local school, bringing together individuals, organizations, churches, businesses, municipal representatives, and school groups to face the challenge. Less obvious to much of the media and the broader public is how this collective effort can trigger an increase in civic engagement and show the power of collective effort.

For example, this past year the Provincial Electoral Boundaries Commission released an interim report suggesting that part of our catchment area should be moved into the neighbouring Queen's constituency. Many residents felt it was both unnecessary and detrimental to split up a well-functioning and unified "community of interest." People worried that it might hamper efforts for effective advocacy, with some community residents having one MLA while others had another.

Although residents were worried about the slim chance of reversing the plan, they took the opportunities to offer input. Led by a group response from GPACA, individual presentations at a commission hearing, and important collaboration with the municipality, our collective concerns were voiced. In mid-April, we learned that the Commission was changing its recommendation. Our area would stay within the Lunenburg West constituency.

No single group or person might have had this impact. However, by working together, we secured a positive outcome for our community. People in this area feel empowered. They know they can take on, and win, battles both large and small within our area, and help to shape the future.

Listening to One Another to Make Better Decisions: *The Importance of How We Work Together*

Residents in our area are very aware of the significant benefits we can achieve through collaboration. But there is also a vibrant understanding that *how* we work together is equally important. People are willing to volunteer their time, energy, and skills to make lasting progress. We are fortunate to have many residents versed in community development, group process, mediation, and achieving consensus. This helps to ensure that people really listen to one another. Our model is simple: demonstrate mutual respect and a shared goal of making the best decisions possible.

"While 'community' often implies strength found through connectedness or similarity, through the campaign to save Petite School we learned that it can also be found within diversity. Our key contributors to the united effort came from all walks of life. It took an enormous amount of time to work together to build a grassroots movement, to listen and find common ground and agreement on difficult decisions, and to develop a plan we could all support. But, through time and effort, we became a strategic, highly effective, community-led, grassroots movement. The 'motley crew' that formed our Board of Directors was a true reflection of our greater community. It was as varied as the smaller communities that comprised the whole but were united in our cause."

(Stacey Godsoe, Greater Petite Area Community Association)

Welcoming Newcomers, Retaining Residents, and Embracing Diversity: *An Inclusive Community is a Sustainable Community*

Our area tries hard to model well attributes of a welcoming community... a place where diverse populations, young and old, newcomer and established, and those of diverse genders and sexualities work side-by-side to achieve our goals as a team.

Recognizing the richness in diversity, residents came together in the Lahave and Area Refugee Support Committee to welcome Syrian refugees to the community and set them up for lasting success.

The same welcoming nature is evident in Voglers Cove, where residents recognize that *keeping* residents is as important as *attracting* them. The ever-growing, and much loved, Maggie's Playground is well used by local residents, and helps to entice young families to stay in the area. When a respected senior couple was challenged by a bureaucratic mix-up that threatened them with deportation, neighbours organized a fight to ensure they could stay.

At Petite School, children, inspired by their parents' and teachers' attitudes, are excited to become friends with new classmates, whether they've moved from a nearby town, another part of Canada, or from another country far away.

The Broad Cove Community Association has a standing monthly agenda item to recognize newcomers to the village and make specific plans to welcome and involve them.

A personal account from a local entrepreneur also illustrates this welcoming attitude. When Sean Sears and Barbara Thomson bought Petite Rivière Vineyard in Crousetown, it was much more than a business prospect. It was designed to help them recover from a life-altering car accident, and to work outside to soothe long-standing concussion issues. The move here made a bigger difference than they could have imagined:

"We sometimes say we bought the farm to save it; surprisingly it saved us. Whether our community hosts understood our predicament or not, their embrace was what made the difference."

(Sean Sears, Resident, Crousetown)

Authentic Respect for Seniors: *An Inclusive Community Approach*

Another unique feature of this community is the intergenerational way in most groups and activities operate. The approach is more one of *integration* than *separation*. Although there is a senior's club, there are also all-ages yoga classes, crafting workshops, volunteer groups and church activities at which senior members of our community are fully engaged, sincerely respected, and appreciated.

With so many new and younger families moving here in recent years, the older members of our community are sought out as unofficial mentors, whether it's in group organization or traditional skills. Longtime quilters, knitters, or rug hookers, old and young, share lessons with enthusiastic

newcomers, keen to learn from masters. Both old and new gardeners and farmers exchange techniques on new approaches to their vocation.

Take a seat at a local fire hall for one of the popular breakfasts and you will see teenagers serving alongside retirees. Meanwhile, an equally diverse clientele enjoys the food and conversation, eating “communal style” at long tables.

The Petite School Advisory Council (SAC) recently launched a community-wide newsletter to ensure they were being as inclusive as possible when seeking volunteer participation. Everyone, whether they had children at the school or not, received the newsletter in their mailbox. Within a week, the editors were hearing positive feedback. Residents were excited to learn even more about the innovative projects at the school. Grandparents wanted to bring visiting grandchildren to help tend the chicken coop in the summer. Other locals were offering to drop off magazines and scrap wood for school projects.

This outreach and receptive response is all part of a deep belief that there is a role to play for everyone at our school and in our community. We continually seek out ways to engage seniors in connecting with younger people, to enormous mutual benefit.

Engagement of Youth: *An Investment That Yields Community Dividends*

Our children benefit greatly from the abundant energy from all age groups within the community. Nevertheless, it is still tough to find positive and productive pastimes for teenagers. Once again, local residents stepped up to meet the need. Several years ago, Trish and Matthew Dagley created a Friday night youth group at the Voglers Cove Hall. It continues to thrive today.

Both fire departments have a long tradition of mentoring young people through their Junior Firefighter Program. At age 16, students are eligible to learn new skills, responsibilities, and civic duties from community leaders. They can apply these essential skills throughout their lives.

The emphasis on youth in our community was at the heart of the successful effort to save the local school. There is wide-spread community awareness that the investment we make in children today will pay dividends for years to come. This is also why the Petite SAC has long been known for its active and engaged membership.

“I think one of the main reasons our SAC works so effectively is the inclusive approach we take. People of different ages, stages, and backgrounds bring their vast and varied experiences and differing perspectives to the table. Whether we are chatting, laughing, strategizing, fundraising, or sharing a meal or a cup of tea – we are a community in the very best sense of the word. It’s the same way in our broader community. There is a seat at the table, and a voice in the conversation, for everyone, with all community members, of all ages, benefiting from the collaboration.”

(Sarah Tingley, Petite Riviere Elementary School Advisory Council)

History, Tradition and Cultural Heritage: *Building on our Past to Shape our Future*

Our community has a deep history, from the original Mi'kmaq settlements to the early fishery, farming and milling operations, and now to a renowned tradition of arts and crafts. Although our water-mills no longer operate, we have carpenters and craftspeople who create furniture, art, and buildings from the wood in our forests. We also have multiple, small-scale organic farms, offering high-quality produce to a growing and grateful customer base that cares passionately about where their food is grown.

Innovators abound, including such startups as West Dublin Buffalo Dairy (the first water buffalo dairy operation in the Maritimes), and Studio B, which creates beeswax wraps to reduce the use of plastic.

Our rich musical heritage continues with multiple musicians, varied and well-attended concerts, and a local recording studio to support them.

Arts and crafts are kept alive through many self-employed artists and artisans happy to share their skills. For example, Jane Steele of River House Rug Hooking is always willing to introduce a newcomer to the world of "hooking!"

Local museums highlight our marine traditions, and materials are being prepared for our community park to educate visitors on the Mi'kmaq roots of our community. School children are encouraged to interview and learn from community elders for the annual Community Writing Project. They also explore Mi'kmaq culture through art and music. It's a beautiful experience to hear them perform the Mi'kmaq Honour Song with voice and drums.

The school garden and chicken coop (a Nova Scotia first) are prime examples of how we, as a community, encourage an awareness of heritage and history while pressing forward with the times. The coop is powered by modern solar batteries, while the garden is fertilized by seaweed gathered and delivered by horse drawn wagon, just as it would have been a hundred years ago.

Resilience and Adaptability: *When Life Gives You Lemons ...*

Sometimes the way forward involves innovative solutions, rather than trying to recreate something that has been lost. When Covey Island Boatworks burned to the ground in 2008, it left a gaping wound. Its loss was felt in the lives and livelihood of the many local people who worked there. There was also a wound in the landscape, with ashes and debris left on the site of an historic building dating back to the early 1900s. Yet it wasn't long before the community began to imagine something new on this property, and to mobilize to renew it.

Led by Christopher Gill and the newly formed Petite Rivière Community Park Association, volunteers and professionals worked tirelessly to complete soil tests, consultations, site assessments, and remediation. They applied for major funding from all three levels of government, as well as private foundations. They also generated 10% of the project's \$170,000 budget from local donors and fundraisers.

Today, this once sad reminder of “what had been” is a new source of community pride. The park has been a resounding success. It is used extensively, with thousands of visitors each year arriving by foot, car, bicycle, canoe, kayak, and even inner tube!

“Each year, more and more visitors enjoy the space, and new activities have emerged there, including a music festival, an international food festival, a welcome event for our Syrian refugee families, and a chamber of commerce event showcasing local artisans, crafters, food trucks, and others.”

(Leif Helmer, Petite Rivière Community Park Association)

Embracing Positive Change: *It's All in How You Look at It*

Change is inevitable. *Positive* change requires initiative, perseverance, and collaboration.

The story about Petite Community Park gives a compelling example of how imagination and innovation can turn even a devastating event toward a positive conclusion.

Looking around our broader community, it is easy to see many such success stories that arose from huge challenges, to become examples of resilience and sources of community pride. The decision to close Petite School was another such event. By facing the challenge creatively, we are now even stronger than before. The school has received accolades and recognition since that decision was first announced, and the appeal of this innovative and award winning school acts as catalyst for community growth.

When a federal wharf was decommissioned, local fishermen took ownership and donated part of the property back to the community for use as a United Communities Marine Park. Now the public is welcomed to enjoy a beautiful recreation space where boaters can access the water and people can savour spectacular scenery.

Located far from urban centres such as Halifax and a distance from nearby towns, our area has faced the same challenges as many rural Nova Scotia communities. Our population was aging, and we were considered “remote.” We could have started to shrink, and to fail. Instead, we have not only survived, but we are *growing* and *thriving* in every sense of those words.

We have done so by facing change and challenge, and adapting as needed, attracting and welcoming newcomers, and working hard to make sure that those who live here continue to feel included. This requires optimism, innovation, collaboration, and creative thinking.

The local mantra appears to be: *We embrace change with a positive outlook and an open mind.*

Respect for the Environment: *It Sustains Us All*

One of the reasons our community continues to grow is the influx of young adults from other parts of the country and beyond. Many move here to live a life more connected to nature, and to a place where they can grow their own food, get involved at their child's school, and walk in the woods every day. This mindset brings with it a respect for the natural environment and an appreciation for our beautiful surroundings.

It is no coincidence that Petite Rivière Elementary School has become known for its outdoor education programs, environmental stewardship, energy awareness, and healthy food initiatives. Last year it was awarded a prestigious national \$20,000 prize from Staples and Earth Day Canada for its "outstanding sustainability efforts and environmental initiatives." In April of this year, Petite student Neco Steele was featured in the provincial media for his petition to get rid of single-use plastic bags.

This environmental activism and awareness is both a product of the community culture *and* a contributor to it. Children bring home their knowledge about better practices, and their home life further enhances this awareness.

Students at Petite School raise salmon to populate the Petite River. They also join members of the public in activities such as the clean-up and sand-dune protection initiatives organized by Friends of Crescent Beach. Twice yearly, people of all ages join the Broad Cove Community Association to scour the roadside as part of the provincial Adopt-a-Highway program.

The Petite Rivière Community Park was landscaped with a "living shoreline" to re-naturalize the land in a sustainable way, using native plants and trees. It is a perfect setting for locals and visitors to appreciate the natural beauty of the area, while demonstrating the value of working "with" our natural environment in order to better preserve and protect it.

Evidence of Community Pride: *So Much to Feel Good About*

Organizational consultant Margaret Wheatley says "there is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." We agree. This quote speaks to the way our broader neighbourhood was strengthened and enhanced by individual communities working together to support not only our school but our collective future. Each village played a critical role in the successful effort. Collectively, we share, in an ongoing way, an abiding and heartfelt pride in all our community has to offer.

"Traditionally, the eleven small communities in this school district have each demonstrated their community pride and commitment. They make a remarkable effort to maintain and support community organizations and community-owned structures such as fire halls and community halls. Citizens from this area are proud of the natural coastal beauty, their homes, their work together, and their profound sense of community. The recent battle to preserve the local elementary school has broadened the scope of this pride to a new level."

Eric Hustvedt, Municipal Councilor

"I am proud to be part of this community. Almost eleven years have passed since I was asked, by phone, to lead a worship service at the United Church in Petite Riviere. Not knowing a single person, I arrived that Sunday morning only to immediately experience a relaxed and "at home" feeling. There is a special and unique spirit that bonds people together easily, not only in the church but also in the school, at the country store, at community breakfasts, and the many other settings where people gather. This little community thrives in its uniqueness. As more and more people (especially young parents with children) continue to be drawn to the area, we will be able to take even more pride in what happens here."

Rev. Vivian Moores, Petite Rivière Pastoral Charge

Creating a Sustainable Community: We Are Here To Stay!

Early on the "Save the School" campaign, reflecting what everybody was working toward, adopted the name "Petite for the Future." This wasn't just about a school. It was about the children who represent our future. It was about a community that supports and relies on the school to ensure a sustainable future for all of us.

That's why, on a cool Sunday morning this past April, more than thirty people showed up at a schoolyard work party. They brought tools and ladders, saws and sledge hammers. Some volunteers had children at the school. Some did not. Some were young parents keen to make a difference at their child's new school. Others were retirees, eager to contribute time and expertise. Children and dogs played in the field and forest nearby. Over the course of several hours, the chicken coop was repaired, the greenhouse was upgraded, a new fence was built from local wood, a garden was prepped, hand-crafted benches were installed in the outdoor classroom, and a storage shed was framed in to house the many odds and ends the children use in their outdoor creative play.

Looking around, you could see the sustained effort and enthusiasm, the laughs and smiles, and the impact of camaraderie and hard physical work. It was an image of endurance and of optimism for the future.

This is a community that bands together in tough times, and celebrates joyfully in good times. We know there is no time for complacency. We take nothing for granted, except for the strength and goodness inherent in our residents, who pitch in whenever they are needed.

