

2014 Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award Submission

Town of Amherst

98 Victoria Street East, P.O. Box 516

Amherst, Nova Scotia B4H 4A1

902-667-3352

www.amherst.ca



Amherst is the largest town in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia with a population of 9,800 and growing. Located approximately two hundred kilometers northwest of the provincial capital of Halifax, and three kilometers from the Nova Scotia / New Brunswick border, Amherst is positioned in the geographic center of the Maritime Provinces. Amherst demonstrates a degree of significance to the local transportation industry particularly with imports/exports going through the New Brunswick/ Nova Scotia border. There is a strong sense of community as a direct result of local government creating informal partnerships with local organizations and offering support as these organizations work to increase community engagement, causing Amherst to truly have “faith in our people, pride in our products”.

Festivals & Events

For many years Amherst struggled to create and maintain a culture of festivals and events until groups of dedicated residents worked as a team to accomplish their common goal of community development.

The installation of Amherst’s ‘season of festivals’ is the result of strong leadership of Amherst citizens and their dedication to bringing a sense of community to Amherst. Community involvement combined with true passion for the arts led to the final product of high quality events.

Over the past few years, various individuals formed groups to coordinate their effort to address the challenge of lack of festivals in Amherst. All initiatives had the common theme of wanting to breathe new life into our revitalized downtown, and presenting a family friendly festival so all members of our community could be engaged.

The *Fibre Arts Festival* began in 2007 to engage those that have a passion for all things fibre. During the October 2013 festival, approximately 3,500 residents and tourists took part in this 4 day festival.

The *Maritime Rockabilly Shakedown Society* presented a Rockabilly Festival for the first time in September 2012. This was community driven initiative that has garnered international recognition, bringing people from around the world to take in this music festival. In August 2014 this group will hold their 3rd festival and have now distinguished themselves as the Rockabilly Capital of Eastern Canada.

The *Festivals and Events Committee* was formed in 2012 as a sub-committee to the Downtown Business Advisory Committee. They started small, presenting the Downtown Street Party in the autumn of 2012. Their concept of downtown festivals grew to a large scale when they coordinated the return of the Blueberry Harvest Festival to Amherst in August 2013. This festival was delivered beyond expectations and was well received by residents and the business community. So successful, in fact that plans for the 2014 Blueberry Harvest Festival are now under way.



Finally, a smaller group of only 2 individuals worked together to present four different *Artisan's Markets* in the downtown. These markets were held on Saturdays to increase foot traffic in the downtown for local merchants while also working to showcase the talent of local artisans. This concept has now evolved into a weekly "Market at Dayle's" to have the feeling of community every Saturday in a historic, downtown department store.

All of these initiatives have been community driven which facilitated their positive outcomes. They have also attracted outside recognition that brings tourists to our town or may cause individuals to want to relocate to our vibrant community. All of these organizations that host festivals were honoured in 2013 by the Amherst and Area Chamber of Commerce for their community connections during their Small Business Week Banquet as their efforts supported economic development in Amherst. Through these initiatives, it is evident that when a community works together as team and invests in the development of the community it will have a lasting impact. The creative and innovative ideas of our local residents have developed our community by engaging citizens and ultimately restoring community pride.



Youth Engagement



With approximately a third of Amherst's population being youth; the Town of Amherst wanted to strengthen the relationship with community youth. Therefore, in 2009 the Amherst Youth Town Council (AYTC) was formed to communicate more effectively with youth. This was also a means to address voter turnout, at less than 50 percent, the implementation of AYTC could increase interest for the voting process and in turn increase voter turnout when AYTC members and other community youth they engage turn 18.

Youth involvement in local government is a fairly new practice in Nova Scotia therefore making this a unique strength of our community. This group is comprised of 12 local youth ranging from grades 7-12, a broad spectrum of perspectives is encouraged to create a diverse group that is more representative of the population. This group acts as a realistic advocate for their peers, identifying and bringing forward issues to Town Council or acting in an advisory capacity to Council for matters that have impact on local youth. Members are actively involved in the community, working with other local organizations and through this involvement will foster a positive image for all young people. Ultimately, members will become more familiar with the workings of local government through education, involvement and participation.



In an attempt to create a meaningful experience for AYTC members, a unique and lasting partnership was formed with local law enforcement. In August 2012 and again in August 2013, AYTC partnered with the Amherst Police Department (APD) to present *Cops for Kids*. This program was offered free of charge to youth aged 8-11. It was essentially a mini police academy with the program objective being to open communication with this age group, breaking barriers between law enforcement and local youth and ultimately to establish a solid relationship with at risk youth. AYTC members acted as squad leaders for the week, therefore building leadership skills as well as forming a valuable partnership with local police officers that act as an additional resource for them or their peers. APD members treated AYTC members as their equals, which enabled this program to be an incredibly meaningful experience for these youth. AYTC members now look forward to this program on an annual basis despite the many volunteer hours involved for the week long camp.



These youth initiatives involve a high degree of citizen participation as all their work is on a volunteer basis. This facilitates these youth to become more active participants in our community. Youth initiatives address such advantageous aspects as youth retention and crime prevention which work to strengthen our community. Community support enables youth to gain a positive attachment to our community; a community that is invested in their positive development, creating an environment in which they can thrive and prosper in.



Amherst Youth Town Council (AYTC) members after the 2013 *Cops for Kids* closing ceremony.

Left to right: Brandon Sutherland Metz, Madelynn Carter, Jon Cheverie, Forrest Dawe, James Gaudet, Chelsey Borne and Peter Woo.

Recreational Activity

A shining example of a community driven recreational activity in the Town of Amherst is the Cross Border Challenge that began in 2009. Cross Border Challenge is a race, with a route that proceeds across the Tantramar Marsh and includes the two provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The race is facilitated by the Cumberland “Y” Service Club, which is affiliated with the Cumberland YMCA. The race had a great response right from inception, with almost 200 participants in the first race in 2009. Recently at the most recent edition of the race in July 2013, 500 participants took part.

Originally the race only offered a 10km, but has now expanded to offer 5km, and half marathon runs. This program has increased recreational activity within our community and most importantly promoted physical activity and healthy lifestyle. *Amherst Striders*, the local running club has evolved as a result of these races and the number of runners in Amherst increases on an annual basis as a result of the installation of the Cross Border Challenge.



In 2013, the Cross Border Challenge expanded to become the *Cross Border Point Series* which offered 6 runs throughout the year across Cumberland County. Aside from the health benefits of these races in our community, it also draws racers and their families to our region for the weekend and thus impacting our local economy. Some of the races during the annual point series recognize history, tradition and heritage such as the *Four Fathers Run* in September that brings awareness to the Four Fathers of Confederation that resided in Amherst.

The Cross Border Challenge and its point series is beneficial to our community on many levels and also acts as a major fundraiser for the Cumberland YMCA. Most importantly, the annual point series of races would not be possible without community by-in. The community supports and respects runners and the need for street closures as well as the volunteers that work to coordinate the races. At the July 2013 Cross Border Challenge 158 volunteers were utilized to make the event a success. The community response and involvement therefore has been immense, the amount of participants in the races continues to increase as too will the amount of local runners making this community developed and driven initiative a huge success and important component of recreational activity in our community.



Environmental Initiatives

After 30 years in the making, the Town of Amherst had the official opening of the Amherst Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) in October 2012. The main objective of this initiative was the environmental advantages the addition of a new WWTF would have for Amherst. Amherst had originally been discharging wastewater without treatment to a nearby watercourse.

The process to accomplish the end result of a leading edge facility involved numerous groups of professionals as well as citizens and business owners working together for one common goal. Citizen engagement was incorporated into the evaluation phase in order to gain direct feedback from citizens and business owners on their preferences.



The combination of various design features guided this project to be a leading edge facility as being both respectful to the environment and an asset to Amherst. The control building for the WWTF was given a “Marsh Barn Aesthetic”, considering the location of the building on the Tantramar Marsh. Traditionally numerous barns could be seen in this area and this upheld a historical component in the facility design. Tire Derived Aggregate (TDA) was historically considered to be waste but was used as a construction product as the engineered wetland media. TDA is a shredded rubber product and was used as subsurface flow wetland. A wind turbine was also incorporated into the design and serves to offset a portion of the WWTF’s overall electrical demand. The combination of the wind turbine, heat recovery, and variable frequency drive blowers allowed energy conservation to be a necessary component in the design.



The end result of this project is a sustainable asset to the Town of Amherst. This benefits the environment and residents of our community. The economic impact is also beneficial as the WWTF can be an asset to investment readiness for recruiting new industry to Amherst. Dillon Consulting, the Lead Engineer for this project has previously been awarded with the *Lieutenant Governor’s Award of Excellence in Engineering* for this project.

The WWTF is visible from the Trans-Canada Highway and is considered to be the product of innovation. It provides visitors with an example to recognize that Amherst is an area for excellence. The facility also blends in with its surroundings as a result of the “marsh barn” component design feature. Despite the many years in the making, it certainly paid off as this facility creates a benchmark for progression and sustainability in wastewater treatment.

Downtown Revitalization

Downtown Amherst has undergone numerous changes to increase traffic in the downtown. In 2011, renovations were completed in the downtown, specifically; in Victoria Square as well as aesthetics along Victoria Street, sidewalks and crosswalks. In addition to the physical changes, in order to create a good rapport with the business community, the Town of Amherst created the Downtown Business Advisory Committee (DBAC) in 2012. This strengthened the relationship between business owners and local government. The committee’s membership consists of local business owners.

Numerous subcommittees formed from the DBAC in order to start community driven initiatives. Subcommittees that were formed were: Business Retention, Marketing, Festivals & Events and Communications.



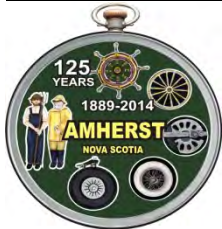
The Marketing Committee encourages cross promotion with local merchants, to increase bottom lines and exposure of their establishment. With this initiative occurring at the community level, the response and involvement of citizens and business owners has been outstanding.

The Marketing Committee has worked on numerous projects. One example being that in November 2013, for the second consecutive year, the *Downtown Passport* program was launched. This program encouraged residents and tourists to shop in the downtown, customers would receive stamps on their “passport” for making purchases at three local establishments then their “passport” would be entered into a draw.

Other initiatives facilitated by the Marketing Committee for the Christmas Season were the “Black Friday” and well as a “Community Spirit Day”. For the Community Spirit Day, local businesses and services offered various sales; then based on a percentage of their daily sale volume would make a donation to the local food bank.

Initiatives planned by this Marketing Committee, which is a committee that is entirely citizen and business owner driven has restored pride in the downtown core and businesses located there. These programs have increased sales for local merchants and through their marketing techniques they have also allowed residents to learn of businesses and services that they may have not known existed in our town, and thus ultimately creating an enduring business community.

Amherst 125



For the duration of 2014, Amherst will be celebrating 125 years as an incorporated Town. At the end of 2013, a committee was formed to oversee Amherst 125 celebrations. The committee consists of select community volunteers. An overwhelming response from community members wanting to be involved was received. While not all applicants could be appointed to the Amherst 125 Committee, all citizens, will have the opportunity to become involved and volunteer in various other ways throughout the annual schedule of celebrations. Numerous individuals and groups are inquiring each day in regard to assisting with the Amherst 125 celebrations.

The Town of Amherst hopes to showcase our diversity, community spirit and strength while celebrating 125 years of rich history. Each year, Amherst holds a Canada Day celebration in its downtown core. The celebrations this year will kick-off the summer season of events to raise community spirit and show residents what else we have in store for Amherst 125 celebrations. There are multiple events planned, with the goal of facilitating residents to become more active participants in the community. Most events will utilize community resources and will be at no cost to those who wish to participate.



All events will be community driven and will rely significantly on involvement from the community. In the past, citizens of Amherst have been more receptive to community driven events and support the efforts of these community driven initiatives. This is another way for more people to become more involved in their community.

Amherst 125 will be celebrated not only through events, but through history. Amherst has historic scenery, ranging from the First Baptist Church and Dominion Public Building, to Historic Victorian homes throughout the town that are registered heritage sites. The town also has a unique history of being one of Nova Scotia's boom towns during the industrial era.

Along with Town events that are part of the Amherst 125 brand, the Town of Amherst is strongly encouraging other community groups and organizations to hold events throughout the year to celebrate our history. The Town of Amherst will not only support these events financially, but will also offer in-kind assistance to ensure the success of each and every Amherst 125 celebration. This not only benefits individual organizations by gaining exposure in the community for their group; but also to encourage residents to invest in a community that is invested in them, thus increasing community pride.

Train Station Artisans Gallery



For some time the visual artists in Amherst struggled with how they could be one cohesive group in our community. In September 2013, the Town of Amherst and the local Artisan's entered into a pilot project of utilizing the local train station as a gallery for local artists.

The *Train Station Artisans Gallery* is entirely artisan led. All pieces in the gallery are from local artists, giving them exposure in the community that they reside in. It is also important to note, that this was also a great use of a historic building not only in Amherst but in the downtown, bringing new life to a building that is a focal point in the downtown. The use of this space with local artisans extends beyond the boundary of Amherst, numerous tourists are stopping into the gallery to view and purchase art.

The artists from the gallery have been immersed in downtown projects, such as being involved with the Downtown Marketing committee to promote their business. They also assisted in the design of the logo for the *Amherst 125*, which is the celebration of 125 years as an incorporated town. This way, the logo that is for a historically significant milestone in our community was designed locally by two of our artists.



The *Train Station Artisans Gallery* has been involved in the community and welcomed all residents into their establishment for hot cider during the Christmas Light Up that was held in November 2013. This added a component to the event and showed the community that local artisans are very much a part of our downtown community.

Tantramar Seniors' College



The Tantramar Seniors' College welcomes anyone over the age of 50 to take part in their assortment of courses being offered. This group is a not-for-profit organization with charitable status.

The college was established in Sackville, New Brunswick, but with the assistance of dedicated volunteers they were able to expand into Amherst in the Fall of 2009 and offer valuable courses and programs to our community. The college works on a membership basis, with an annual fee of \$100 from September to August and no previous higher education is required. The college does not intend to exclude anyone, and entrance scholarships are available.

The college offers a broad spectrum of courses and programs. The major emphasis is on academics and culture, however needless to say participants benefit a great deal more from the social interaction of going to these programs with other students their age. There are various history courses on our rich local history, chair yoga that is accommodating to participants to teach them to continue to be active at any level as they age, baking courses, and computer courses just to name a few.

The courses that are offered are in accordance with the college's mission "to further the intellectual and cultural interests of members in an enjoyable learning atmosphere". All courses are held in local facilities and instructors are all local residents. The college currently has a membership of 400+ students and registration increases on an annual basis. The Tantramar Seniors' College has a strong volunteer base and engages 100+ volunteers on an annual basis in Amherst to carry out their programs.

The Tantramar Seniors' College engages seniors through an authentic respect for seniors, continually encouraging and challenging each student to increase their intellectual, cultural and recreational capacity which is extremely beneficial to the aging community.

Culture of Hockey

Beyond the scenery of Victorian houses, a rich industrial history and the overall uniqueness of Amherst, there are many things that make the citizens beam. Hockey is a major part of the Town, with our Junior "A" Hockey team -- the Amherst Ramblers -- and an enrolment rate for minor hockey that increases on an annual basis, currently there are more than 350 registrants.



In March 2014, one of Amherst's youth spearheaded the effort to have Amherst become the next "Kraft Hockeyville". Amherst made the quarter-finals and although the Town did not advance to the finals, it wasn't due to a lack of involvement. Local businesses supported the applicants by using storefronts to advertise that people should vote, social media was also busy promoting this event and flyers were printed and distributed for each leg of the competition. Amherst received \$25,000 in stadium upgrades from being a quarter-finalist in Kraft Hockeyville 2014.

Sport and recreation events usually have a major involvement from the community. Each year in February, the Town of Amherst, in partnership with the Cumberland YMCA and Cumberland Health Authority host 24 Hour Physical Activity Day. This event promotes physical activity and has more than 3,000 individuals participate in February 2014. The Amherst Ramblers participated by playing hockey with community members and staying around for an open-skate.

In 2009, Amherst was selected to be part of the Kraft TSN Celebration Tour, in celebration of TSN's 25th Anniversary. Amherst won the contest after a nation-wide vote and going head-to-head with Dartmouth, NS. TSN anchors: Jay Onrait and Dan O'Toole came to Amherst to broadcast a special edition of SPORTSCENTER. The anchors did play-by-plays for the Amherst Canadian Tire Little League Selects and it turned into an event that the whole town became involved in. When the film crew showed up in Downtown Amherst, there was a major response from the community and a successful turnout, the Amherst Ramblers played street hockey with local children.

The Amherst Ramblers with a community sponsor of A&W have a 7th Player of the game each week for their home games. This consists of one minor hockey youth being selected from applications to be the 7th Player on the ice for the anthem. While this is a great sight to see, it is the joy on the face of the youth as well as their family as they aspire to be just like the Jr. "A" players they are surrounded by, their local "hero's".

Amherstonians love their hockey, whether it is supporting our local minor hockey Rambler teams or supporting the Jr. "A" Rambler team, hockey just draws Amherst residents together for one common passion. Any time the Jr. "A" Ramblers are involved in a community project it draws hockey fans and builds pride in the young men as well as the hockey club. Minor hockey up to Jr. "A" has a strong fan base combined with a strong volunteer base to make community involvement the success it has been.

