

Town of Bridgewater

There is no shortage of challenges that confront communities in rural Nova Scotia in these, the still early days of the 21st century. Outmigration, rapidly aging infrastructure, and an all-too-often stagnant economy have made it very difficult for many communities, small and large, scattered along the coastlines and in the hills of our province.

Because of this, it has become – perhaps more than ever – fundamentally necessary for the leaders and citizens of villages and towns throughout Nova Scotia to find ways to connect with each other, to nurture hope, spirit, and inclusion; encouraging residents to invest their own time and energies in making the place they call home a beacon – one that radiates and pulses with life, with friendship, camaraderie, promise and potential.

That ability to embrace and engage, to be strong yet diverse in our strengths, is part of what has set apart the Town of Bridgewater.

As one of only three communities in all of Nova Scotia with a growing population, according to the 2011 census, in the first decade of this new century, Bridgewater has become the exception rather than the rule. Not only is the economy of the community growing, but also equally importantly, Bridgewater has undergone a dynamic new shift in culture, redefining the ethos of our community.

Long positioned as the “Main Street of the South Shore,” Bridgewater lacked a unifying sense of identity and purpose. But a rising tide of civic pride has been evident in everything from small projects, such as the community garden on Aberdeen Green, to the rousingly successful annual Bridgewater Community Christmas Dinner. So fresh is the buzz here, that The Chronicle Herald recently acknowledged Bridgewater is the best place in Atlantic Canada to raise a family. As pride in the community has increased, so, too, has citizen engagement on multiple levels. During the last municipal election in 2012, the council of the day introduced electronic voting to make casting a ballot on Election Day more accessible, with a sharp uptick in voter turnout the result.

On a community level, our residents have become more involved than ever in the 115-year history of the town, supporting a wide range of projects from the immense construction of the \$35-million Lunenburg County Lifestyle Centre to smaller but equally valuable social projects, such as Ripples2Waves, a community blog started by Cate de Vreede and Brian Braganza.

As co-founders of the Bridgewater Community Christmas Dinner, after the first dinner Brian and Cate noticed a new story emerging in Bridgewater – one that spoke of community connections, vibrancy, sustainability, and citizen action. Ripples2Waves (www.ripples2waves.wordpress.com) was created to collect and share those stories, through a breathtaking catalogue of photos, videos, and written tales of what makes Bridgewater remarkable and, truly, unique among Nova Scotian communities.

As the hub of Lunenburg County and the beating heart of the LaHave River Valley, the positive projects that have taken root in Bridgewater have also begun to extend their reach, bringing in citizens across boundaries from surrounding communities and neighbouring municipalities in a show of unity that is unprecedented on the South Shore and, perhaps, in the entire province.

Over the past 10 years, Bridgewater has emerged as a leading community for sustainable initiatives and citizen engagement, while still continuing to recognize and respect its rural and historic roots. The result, we believe, is a community creating a bold and positive new legacy worthy of recognition and celebration.

Moving the Library

In December 2013 the Bridgewater Public Library moved from its King Street location to its new digs in the Lunenburg County Lifestyle Centre (LCLC) on North Park Street. After over thirty years on King Street in the heart of the town of Bridgewater the library's move to the outskirts of town was a big change for the library community.

In an effort to encourage long time library patrons to embrace the move staff asked for the community's help to move the library's collection from King Street to the new Margaret Hennigar Branch in the LCLC. Through the use of social media, library staff put the call out to the community to come pick up a couple bags of books. Residents were asked to check them out in the old location and drop them back to the new location. For their efforts they could keep the re-usable shopping bags were given a spiffy South Shore Public Library tuque.

This "crowd sourced" move was a huge success. Within a week folks flocked to the library and checked out almost 10,000 items. Library staff was overwhelmed by the community's response to this call to action. The library quickly ran out of bags and hats and had to order more as people came from all over the area to say good-bye to the old library and say hello to the new space. After one week, less than 2000 items were left for staff to move when the doors to the King Street branch were closed for good. Chief Librarian, Troy Myers said he has never seen such enthusiastic support and community participation for a library move before. "It was truly a heart-warming experience in community engagement. It was an honour to be part of it."

Sustainability and Community Engagement Story

Since 2008, the Town of Bridgewater has demonstrated environmental leadership and community spirit through its "Sustainable Bridgewater" program. Starting with a 2-year consultation process, the Town worked with many community members, businesses and organizations to craft an inspiring vision for a sustainable future for the community. In this vision the Town identified a critical role for itself through improvements in public policy, programs, infrastructure, and community partnerships. To implement the plan, the Town retained a full-time Sustainability Planner, the only municipality in the province

to do so, thereby demonstrating a high degree of commitment to sustainability and community building. In addition to infrastructure improvements such as shared bicycle lanes and solar panels on public buildings, the Sustainability Planner coordinates the Community Sustainability Network (Bridgewater and Area) which brings together families, individuals, organizations and businesses to promote sustainability and identify opportunities for local action. The Growing Green Festival is the Town's flagship annual celebration that demonstrates the value of this collaboration. The event is unique in Atlantic Canada. So is the South Shore Sustainability Expo, held each year in partnership with the Nova Scotia Community College.

Through its sustainability program, the Town is able to consistently mobilize community volunteers and many partners to bring success to these many initiatives. The Town has noticed that these activities have resulted in positive synergies that have generated other citizen-based initiatives working in parallel to the Town's efforts – collectively these are breathing new life into the community, and raising the collective sense of civic pride. The Town has also demonstrated its belief in the spirit of the broader community, reaching beyond its own municipal boundaries to actively include people and businesses that feel connected to Bridgewater and want to see the town thrive. In doing so, it is shifting the local and regional community's image and story of itself to become healthier, more vibrant, and more sustainable.

The Bridgewater Community Garden Network

As an outcome of the Town's Community Sustainability efforts, the Bridgewater Community Gardens Network (BCGN) was established as a program of the Town in 2010. Using donated materials and supplies, to augment Town funding, two dozen volunteers helped build the garden. Individuals, families or community groups utilize these 20 beds. Each year facilities were added including a tool shed, picnic tables, compost bins and a water collection system. A flowerbed has been transformed to a food source by planting hascap, blueberry and rugosa rose bushes.

In 2012 Incredible Edible Bridgewater (IEB), a new program of the BCGN that envisions an edible landscape in Bridgewater—food growing in places where people gather and spend time each day—was established. The gardens located at workplaces, businesses, a church and the hospital, are tended and the food harvested by the people who live, work and play there. People of all ages learn about growing and enjoying fresh, healthy, local food. There are now IEB Gardens in six locations around town.

Another new program, Edible Trees Bridgewater, was started in 2013. This program aims to introduce and promote locally grown fruits and nuts to the citizens of Bridgewater and area and to visitors to the town. This program has introduced fruit and nut trees on public land in town. This initiative will increase the community's understanding of and access to fruit and nut trees. With a \$3,000 grant from Tree Canada we planted 33 fruit and nut trees.

The BCGN holds events for the community each month from April to October with as many as 100 persons of all ages in attendance. The Community garden is seen as a

successful model. Other towns and municipalities have requested information to start their own community gardens, including Lunenburg, Canning, Windsor, and Halifax. The garden was filmed as part of a Department of Health & Wellness video.

Bridgewater Community Christmas Dinner

In 2009 a group of citizens came together to organize the first Community Christmas Dinner for Bridgewater, a full and free turkey (or vegan) dinner on Christmas day for community members. At the first volunteer meeting over 30 people attended; clearly volunteers, their families and potential guests alone would be too large for the space originally planned. The first year of the BCC the volunteer numbers grew to over 180 and over 350 people enjoyed a delicious Christmas dinner. The dinner has continued over 5 years to become a tradition in the community. Now a volunteer team of more than 200 people serves more than 400 people each Christmas Day.

The intention for this event is *community building*, bringing people together to share joy, company and food in an atmosphere where all feel welcome and included. To achieve this we developed four core values that guide our actions:

Celebration: We're here to celebrate our community, each other, have fun, and eat good healthy food.

Inclusion: We will strive to create an atmosphere that is inviting, welcoming and accessible to the diversity of people who may attend or volunteer for this meal. The meal is free and our intention with this event is to include families, couples and individuals; to be multi-generational; accessible; to be interfaith as well as welcoming to those without a faith.

Service: Our gift for the season will be through service to each other, rather than material gift giving.

Green: We will strive to create a green event through prudent use of resources, and minimal waste. Local foods will be sourced where possible.

Since the dinner began, some of the benefits we have noticed are:

-An event that inspires, empowers and engages a diverse group of citizens in a volunteer initiative

-Increased social capital through: building relationships among individuals, groups and other communities; skill development in volunteers; community pride and celebration

The BCC has generating proceeds to support other community development work.

The Senior Friendly Story

Bridgewater has been recognized as the first official Senior Friendly town in Nova Scotia. The designation was presented October 28, at a town council meeting by the executive director of the Alberta Council on Aging, the group that trademarked and owns the Senior Friendly program. The program is a unique initiative designed by seniors to foster greater knowledge, understanding, and support for our rapidly expanding older population.

However, the achievement, and the three years of work it represents, is already being acknowledged. The Bridgewater and Area Age-Friendly Communities Committee has

been working to deliver the program since April 2010, teaching businesses and organizations how to better meet the needs of the growing population of seniors. Volunteers have conducted check ups at more than three-dozen locations and trained more than 250 people. This designation for Bridgewater speaks to the fact that the Town of Bridgewater really values seniors and encourages their participation and leadership in the community.

Kinship Story

Kinship was established in 2012 for young adults to connect with each other and have a conversation about pluralism—appreciation for diversity. In particular the group explores the diversity of worldviews: religious, spiritual and secular. The intention is to raise awareness, knowledge and respect for each other as well as the larger community.

Most participants come from the immediate Bridgewater area and meet on a weekly basis for approximately 6 months. In the first year the group took photographs, wrote stories and interviewed others to capture a diversity of worldviews. These were transformed into 17 life size freestanding banners. The second year the group created paintings and two more banners from the photos of these paintings. These banners define words such as spirituality, secular, ethnicity, and pluralism.

In addition the group has created a play with the assistance of a local director. The play is both humourous and poignant. Through song, poetry and dialogue it touches on a spectrum of themes, from compassion and acceptance to bias and bullying. In addition to four lead actors, several others representing a range of diversity are brought into the production.

Both years the group made field trips to diverse places of worship in Halifax, such as a Mosque, a Synagogue and a Hindu temple, and engaged with local speakers. This gave participants an opportunity to meet first hand with people from a broad range of religious beliefs. Participants have said these were life enriching, if not, transforming experiences.

We all long to connect with others and feel accepted. Being genuinely curious about people, including their spiritual and secular worldviews makes the circle bigger. The purpose of Kinship is to have these essential conversations with young adults. Such conversations help to build a healthier, safer and more peaceful community.

In addition to Kinship, Bridgewater welcomes diversity through the South Shore Welcoming Communities initiative, which works in partnership to honour local heritage and to embrace a culture of inclusion and diversity for all who visit, work, live and play on the South Shore.

Recreation Rocks

The Town of Bridgewater shows amazing community spirit when it comes to recreation services in the community. Recently there have been some incredible sporting and recreation opportunities for the town.

One of the highlights was that Bridgewater was chosen as the winning community in the Kraft Celebration Summer Tour following a passionate wave of online voting. Part of the prize was \$25,000 to put toward upgrading the town's sport field's drainage system. This included a party at Shipyard's Landing that was attended by an estimated 2000 people.

Community members support sport and recreation throughout the year. The Bridgewater Barracudas, our summer swim team, fielded a huge number of swimmers last season and had some exceptional results achieving the provincial championship. The Bridgewater Bulldogs is a community based baseball club that has teams in various age and skill groups that compete throughout the province. Several of their club members have represented Nova Scotia at national championships.

Bridgewater also supports several other community based sports clubs that include football, volleyball, triathlon, soccer and athletics. Community members also support tennis courts, an arena, an outdoor pool, and the new Lifestyle Centre.

Residents are also very proud of the local Olympians and the support the community has given them. Jenna Martin, a sprinter in the summer Olympics and Alex Duckworth, snowboarder in the winter Olympics, have both been given amazing send offs, well wishes and welcome homes by local citizens and politicians. Recreation in Bridgewater is active and very well supported by community members.

In 2013 a group of citizens founded "Fresh Air Films". During the summer months this program brought free films on Friday nights to Shipyards Landing in downtown Bridgewater. Family friendly and barrier-free, this project that receives support from the Town of Bridgewater, the local business community and other local organizations has already become a Friday night tradition.

United Way Story

Since its inception in 2003 the United Way of Lunenburg County has invested over \$1.2 million dollars in over 100 Lunenburg County community and groups and programs. For many of these programs United Way funding is the difference between a good program and great program and in some cases no program at all.

This money was invested in Lunenburg County kids, youth, families, seniors and communities and is mostly preventative in nature. In Bridgewater the United Way has supported many programs including the Adult Learning Network, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Bridgewater Interchurch Food Bank, Pro Kids, Senior Wheels, Youth Arts Week and Grinders Square Skateboard Park to name just a few.

One program the United Way is proud of is “Bikes for Kids”. A simple rite of passage for many Canadian children is the opportunity to own or have access to a bike. Independence, self-confidence, and a healthy lifestyle are just some of the benefits a child gains by owning his or her own bike. In 2013, the United Way of Lunenburg County saw this as a local need and an opportunity to bring summertime fun to some Lunenburg County families. By rallying the community they assembled dozens of volunteers and secured numerous in-kind donations. Working with local organizations they were able to distribute bikes to 67 kids and 9 adults who might not be able to afford one. This program was achieved with no financial cost. They are currently working toward another successful year. Another flagship program funded by the United Way is the YMCA King Street Youth Centre that offers 7 days of free programming for youth in the community and surrounding areas. From creative cooking to art, from discussions about social issues to sports nights, there is something for everyone.

Opportunities to enhance leadership skills through the Youth Leader Program are available as well. In 2013, Youth Leaders volunteered 3,011 hours. These Youth Leaders are highly sought after because they work together to take ownership of an important opportunity to build a healthier community.

Youth Engagement

A number of innovative youth engagement projects have emerged in Bridgewater. All these projects have been spearheaded by the Lunenburg District Office of Community Services and facilitated by the HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development. These projects have benefited young people as well as the entire town by bringing together a unique group of partners including: Lighthouse Media Group, Public Libraries, Town of Bridgewater staff and council, Digital Fusion (a web design and marketing company), the Desbrisay Museum and the United Way among others. The projects have created some exciting and long lasting effects for the community, and are recognized as innovative youth development in other municipalities. Highlights include: Place-making Bridgewater Place-making is the concept of reclaiming and beautifying public spaces to make them more pedestrian friendly. During this project 6 town benches were artistically designed and painted by youth, displayed at the town’s Sustainability Festival and then placed in prominent locations downtown.

Heritage Skills Video Project The Desbrisay Museum had a desire to video-record heritage skills in the community for their archives. A group of young adults trained by HeartWood, partnered with Lighthouse Media Group, to learn about video and interview skills and then proceeded to collect archival quality footage of the various heritage skills.

FutureStart Website In partnership with Digital Fusion, this website was developed, researched and written by young adults on an employment development project. The website contains youth employment related resources for Bridgewater and the county, and helps young people develop skills towards realizing their career goals.

Youth Arts Week Bridgewater As part of National Youth Arts Week, Bridgewater youth hosted a number of events in 2012 and 2013. These events include two arts shows, a

Free-range Art event which involved making art out of junk, sidewalk chalk art at local schools and a coffee house of poetry, song, music and other performances. All of the teenagers involved volunteered their time.

All of these projects have built community spirit, included young people in the decision-making and implementation, built stronger relationships between youth and adults, youth and local business/organizations and youth and government.

Afterglow

AfterGlow is a free Arts Festival established to celebrate the creativity of residents from Bridgewater and the surrounding area. The event showcases local artists and their work through pop-up galleries, installations, theatre, dance, music, projections and video, all in a safe, downtown night-time environment.

Bridgewater, and the county, is rich with talent of all kinds. AfterGlow was born to provide a public venue for artists and for those who appreciate art, and to help to build a greater sense of community. To celebrate and maintain one's heritage and culture it needs to be seen and experienced, so the festival provides an event where new and experienced artists; people of all ages from infants to seniors; locals as well as visitors, can come together in a night where creativity is celebrated and the work of each artist is experienced, respected and appreciated. Many of the activities are interactive welcoming the participation of the audience thus building a bridge between artist and community where all can experience and enjoy the richness and diversity of this area's art and culture.

The festival enlists many volunteers who help organize the event and implement the many activities. Feedback gathered by volunteers helps to understand what people appreciate most and what they would like to see included in subsequent years.

Last year, the second annual event, included the participation of over 100 artists in 25 different venues with an estimated attendance of 1500 people. All artists who are aligned with AfterGlow's core values are accepted. These core values include: family friendly; locally focused; and safe and accessible.

AfterGlow brings life to King Street in downtown Bridgewater. The hope is that AfterGlow can be a spark that rekindles the spirit of Bridgewater's downtown and subsequently builds greater community spirit with the appreciation of our arts, culture and heritage.

Bridgewater Fire Department Band

The Bridgewater Fire Department Band has been performing for audiences in Bridgewater, across Nova Scotia, and as far away as the United Kingdom for nearly a century and a half. Operating as part of the Bridgewater Fire Department since 1952, the band currently has 37 volunteer members, with an age range spanning seven decades; students and retirees, professional engineers and professional musicians,

university professors and everything else in between.

Between rehearsals, concerts and parades -- including community events such as The Big Ex parade, Canada Day celebrations, the Relay for Life, Christmas on the LaHave, and our annual summer concert series -- the band meets nearly 80 times per year. Recent highlights include hosting the band of the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Bradford, UK, in 2010 and 2013, a return trip to the United Kingdom in 2011 with another planned for 2015. The Band is also honoured to be invited to represent fire services across Canada at the Canadian Firefighters Annual Memorial Ceremony in Ottawa in September 2014.

Lighthouse Publishing

Video Submission – Spirit of Bridgewater produced by Lighthouse Publishing

Link to video - <https://vimeo.com/89626582>

The video is available in .mp4 and .mov formats

Community Spirit in Numbers

Community Events (attendees)

- Christmas on the LaHave (10,000+)
- Whimsical Children's Store (500+)
- Canada Day (2500+)
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Citizen-led Initiatives

- Community Christmas Dinner (400 guests, 200 volunteers)
- Hodge Podge Community Garden (20 beds)
- Incredible Edible Bridgewater (6 hosted garden beds)
- Inn from the Cold
- AfterGlow (1500 attendees)
- South Shore in Motion
- Outdoor rink
- Open Air Film Series (300/showing)
-

Citizen-sponsored programs for children, teens, and/or seniors

(All of these are driven by non-profits using many volunteers of all ages.)

- Big Brother Big Sisters Go Girls
- Big Brothers Big Sisters In School Mentoring
- Big Brother Big Sisters Kids n Kops
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Bridgewater Interchurch Food Bank
- Bridgewater Senior Wheels
- YMCA Youth Centre

- YMCA Friday Night Youth Zone
- YMCA Leadership Corps
- YMCA Multi Sport Night
- Sport Teams
 - Minor League Hockey
 - South Shore Soccer Association
 - Minor League Baseball
 - South Shore Sea Hawks Football
- Volunteer Agencies +/-150 groups; approximately 3000 board volunteers.
- Harbour House Community
 - Support programs
 - Shelter
- Better Together Family Resource Centre
 - Dozens of support programs
- Bridgewater Seniors Centre
- Seniors Kitchen Parties

Town of Bridgewater Museums

Desbrisay Museum in 2013

- 4,387 visitors
- 1204 volunteer hours
- 1195 people took part in programs

Wile Carding Mill in 2013

- 1,969 visitors
- 5 school groups
- 2 youth group

-