



Community Spirit Award Nomination

Port Morien

Names of Groups within the community who have joined together to put forward this nomination:

1. Port Morien Development Association
2. Branch 055, Royal Canadian Legion, Port Morien
3. Port Morien Volunteer Fire Department
4. Homeville Women's Institute
5. Port Morien Community Fair

Introduction

In October of 2007, a number of volunteers representing various community organizations, under the initiative and sponsorship of the Port Morien Development Association, gathered together to prepare a proposal for consideration for the Lieutenant-Governor's Community Spirit Award. After a number of meetings and exchanges of emails, we decided on the following format.

We begin with a brief history and introduction to our community, and then take you on a journey entitled "A Year in Our Village". We begin in the winter and take you through four seasons. We will introduce you to community activities and initiatives, and in doing so, give examples of how the community meets and exceeds the criteria for consideration for the award. In order to maintain a flow for the reader, we have decided not to outline the criteria as they are met. We believe that the identification of the criteria is inherent in our presentation.

The last section is simply entitled "Our Stories". We wish to highlight six stories that we feel indicate that our village identifies the essential criteria of uniqueness, citizen participation, community pride, and an enduring community.

Who We Are

But blood and bone of Morien
Unfaithful cannot be
So in their dreams they wander back
To where she meets the sea.
--Leah Matheson (Circa 1920)

Port Morien is a small seaside community of 700 people in Southeastern Cape Breton, first settled by our Aboriginal people. Indeed, a well known Mi'kmaq Chief Ben Christmas, the first Chief of Membertou, was born at the head of Morien Bay. The Portuguese occupied a fishing station in the 16th century. Later, the French called the area "Le Baie De Morienne".

In 1720, the French mined coal to supply its garrison at Louisburg. Following the siege of Louisburg, the British mined until 1760. Mining, over the years, has played a crucial role in the history of the village.

Early coal mining also brought with it people from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Many people from across the continent can trace their Port Morien ancestry back to England, France, Ireland, Wales, Italy, and Scotland. A number of the original settlers were United Empire Loyalists. All were welcomed and blended together to create the sense of community that contributes to the quality of life enjoyed in our village today.

In the 18th century, the area was called Cow Bay. Legend has it that a gentleman on his way to Sydney from Louisburg lost his cow in the area. In 1895, the name was changed to Port Morien.

Port Morien is, indeed, a unique community. It can boast, for example, of having the first commercial coal mine in North America (founded in 1720 by the French) and the most successful privately owned coal mine in the 19th century, the Gowrie Mine, operated by industrialists from North Sydney, the Archibalds. As well, Port Morien was the site of the first Boy Scout troop in North America, founded in 1908 by William Glover, the chief book keeper of the North Atlantic Colliery. In addition, Morien has the first Community Access Program (C@P site) in a Legion in Canada.

In the past 450 years, the primary industries in Port Morien have been fishing and mining. In the 19th Century, during the mining boom, the village had a population of 3000 and could boast of 40 businesses. Fishing is now the primary industry. Seafood processing has had a presence around old Cow Bay since the 19th century. There has been a fish processing plant operating continuously by one family since 1941. A local store has endured for the past 66 years, managed by the same family, thriving despite the proximity of a large urban area. A boat-building business, tourist accommodations and a restaurant with craft shop, are also significant industries today.

One needs only to drive to this community to experience its spirit and friendliness. One out-of-province visitor to our new restaurant, Dock Y'ur Dory, stated that when he entered Port Morien he became more friendly. The residents greet people on the street whether they know them or not.

No community of its size has such a disproportionate number of organizations which have operated continuously for over 50 years – the Royal Canadian Legion, the Masonic Lodge, the Homeville Women's Institute, the Port Morien Fire Department, the Port Morien Community Fair, the Port Morien Wildlife Association, the Port Morien Red Cross, and all our major churches. There has been a religious presence in the community since 1846. Christ Church, in South Head, across the bay from Port Morien, is the third oldest Anglican Church in Nova Scotia. Today, St. John's United Church, St Mary's Roman Catholic Church and St. Paul's Anglican Church serve the spiritual needs of the people of Port Morien and area. These institutions have endured here because of the community spirit which has existed through the generations.

As a community, Port Morien has excelled in education and the arts. It has graduated at least one Rhodes Scholar, three university professors, a moderator of the United Church of Canada, world class organist and a well known opera singer.

In addition, no community has produced as many writers per capita as Port Morien. At least 14 authors have published books in the community, both fiction and non fiction.

Authors from the village have demonstrated their community pride by writing histories of Port Morien. In 1995, the University College of Cape Breton Press published *Port Morien, Pages of the Past*, a history of this village. It was written by a local resident. Also, at that time a slideshow, *Port Morien: the Time of our Lives* was produced. In the same year, a local group produced a video entitled, *A Day in the Life of Port Morien*. It was a cooperative venture with Seaside Cable

and was shown on local Channel 10. A history of Gowrie School was written, and in 1996, two local authors wrote *Beautiful Harvest*, the history of the community fair. Both commemorated 50-year anniversaries.

No community of its size has such a high degree of human capital in the form of volunteerism and creativity. In fact, the spirit of volunteerism is alive and well here and it comes together, as we shall see, during numerous occasions. Indeed, there is a high degree of citizen participation in the village of Port Morien, and citizen participation has become a part of the culture and fabric of life in this village.

Here is a more specific example of community spirit. In the year 2000, a group of citizens came together to form the Port Morien Development Association. It was a revival of an organization that had existed in the 1960's and 70's. The new association was readily embraced by a core of citizens, many of whom attend meetings to this day. In the past seven years, the organization, working with our local councilor, has leveraged approximately \$1,000,000 to develop the infrastructure of Port Morien—an entrance sign, a town square with a mining theme, light standards, 12 historic plaques, a picnic park, paving, curb, gutter and sidewalks—such that our little village is a model for other rural communities. Indeed, our neighbouring villages have either formed, or are in the process of forming their own development associations, all following the Port Morien model.

A Year in Our Village

This seaside village has a certain “ebb and flow” that changes with the seasons. The village adapts and embraces each season with a change of activities, each exhibiting citizen participation, community spirit, sense of pride and sense of place. Follow us as we journey through the seasons in our beloved village of Port Morien. Allow yourself to be immersed in the experience of living in a small Nova Scotian village.

With the arrival of winter, the residents of Port Morien are not ready for hibernation. Early in December, we look forward to the annual Christmas Tree Light-Up sponsored by the Homeville Women's Institute and the Port Morien Fire Department. Carols fill the air, homemade cookies and hot chocolate fill our stomachs and the arrival of Santa on the fire truck fills everyone's heart with joy. This event is a social gathering in the village that is as popular with the seniors as it is with the young families.

The churches provide opportunities for spiritual growth. The three churches are busily preparing for the Christmas season – decorating the churches with fir boughs and holly berries and hosting their annual “tea and sale” events.

The Port Morien Fire Department organizes a Christmas Dinner for local seniors. This event has been one of the highlights of the season for them for the past 10 years.

Our generosity of spirit is evident both abroad and in the village. The Legion members ship shoe boxes of gifts to the troops in Afghanistan and they supply goodies to the children of the village. The Legion also demonstrates the spirit of the season by delivering a substantial cheque each December to support the Cape Perce Sea Cadets in Donkin, now in its 26th year.

The community takes pride in the annual Christmas concert by the students of Gowrie Memorial School. Each December for the last number of years a committee of the Port Morien Development Association has volunteered to enter the Christmas tree decorating contest sponsored by Casino Nova Scotia. This year the theme was “Christmas by the Sea” and the entry came home as a first place winner.

The arrival of spring brings the community alive.

On May 15, the local wharf bustles with activity for the opening of lobster season. The wharf is also home to a colony of feral cats that control the rodent population in the village. A dedicated group of cat lovers make sure that these cats are fed throughout the year and the group raises money for a "spay and neuter" program to control the population of these felines.

A theatrical group, the Port Morien Players, entertains eager patrons from near and far with three nights of dinner theatre each spring. In the spring of 2007, the group celebrated its tenth anniversary with sold out performances.

Every spring, the Port Morien Wildlife Association hosts a popular fishing derby to develop a love of fishing and the outdoors among the younger generation.

Spring also signals the return of the historic plaques on the history and culture of Port Morien from winter storage. In 2005, to preserve the heritage of the village, 12 historic plaques were designed that depicted the history of the village.

Research has shown that rural residents tend to exhibit less healthy behaviours than their urban counterparts. To improve the over-all health status of the residents, several initiatives take place every spring in the village. Every spring, an informative health presentation takes place at the Legion along with a nutritious low-fat lunch.

The new well-lit sidewalks on the Main Street combined with the walking track at the ball field have created a recreational walking facility that is well used year-round. It was for this and other improvements in the community that the Port Morien Development Association received the "Gary MacDonald Award" in 2006.

Walking is a popular pastime in the village. Each spring, there is an Easter Bunny walk that is appealing to the younger children.

The arrival of summer is eagerly anticipated in this seaside village.

Port Morien is unique in its spectacular beauty. It looks out on a busy commercial wharf and a beautiful bay framed by two headlands, Cape Morien on the right and Cape Perce on the left. In the middle is the jewel, Flint Island, first manned in 1859. Tourists are high in their praise of the beauty of landscape. There are also two beautiful beaches in the area, one in the village and one a little further south that is a barrier beach and a bird sanctuary. This bird sanctuary is one of the finest in the Maritimes and attracts avid bird watchers from all over North America.

The village beach is the locale for the Red Cross Swim program which has taken place in Port Morien for the past 35 years. Generations of local children have braved the chill of the Atlantic Ocean to earn their coveted swimming badges.

In 2001, the Port Morien Development Association created the Summer People Festival. The plan was that the residents would use their imagination to create interesting characters to display on their lawns for a two-week period. The response from the community was tremendous. People come from all over Cape Breton to view the displays. The residents create their characters for the simple reason of making people happy as they drive through the village.

A few years ago, there was a student exchange with a school in Alberta that happened to take place during the hockey playoffs. One of the hosts was watching a game with his billets when the students told him a story about their teacher who was an avid hockey fan but definitely not a Leafs fan. The teacher posted a picture on his classroom door of a skeleton wearing a Leafs jersey holding a sign "Waiting for the Stanley Cup!" The host was amazed and showed them a

picture of his Summer People display. Yes ...that was the one! The host resurrected the display and the students gathered around for a photo to give to their teacher on their return to Alberta. What a coincidence! It also made us wonder what other Summer People have shown up on the internet all around the world.

Six years later, the two-week festival is bigger than ever. Last summer, the local Legion hosted a Celebrate-our-Community event. Various groups displayed their contributions and their history. Our newly formed camera club presented a display of their pictures and a local film maker, a Port Morien native, showed his documentary *Voices from the Coal Fields* on the history of coal industry in Cape Breton. For the occasion, a group of citizens volunteered to meet at the local legion to paint unique banners with a seafaring theme, which were displayed on the light standards. The Summer People Festival illustrates the truth that a single idea may have resonance, can burgeon so as to add to an already existing community spirit.

The community reaches out to newcomers through a welcoming brochure and there is no shortage of newcomers to the area. In the past three years, a number of Americans have bought properties in the area and plan to move here permanently upon retirement. As well, German families have bought land and are developing their properties. Both of these groups are embraced by the community and feel very welcome in their new environment. They are eager to fit into their new surroundings and to become good citizens.

They participate in the community recycling project with the rest of the village. The local store, Hopper's, is the drop off centre for recyclables. They are counted and bagged by volunteers and delivered to the enviro-depot in Glace Bay. The store offers a rent-a-read program where you can rent a "good read" for \$0.25.

Hopper's is an old-fashioned general store where people gather to chat and see what is new in the village. The store is a clearing house for community organizations selling tickets, books, and merchandise, as well as accepting donations and displaying local photographs. In addition, the store is a virtual museum of local sports memorabilia.

In the fall, the foliage is brilliant and there's a chill in the air that signals a change in the activities in the village.

Every fall public notices announce the registration for the various guiding groups. Port Morien has managed to sustain the guiding movement for our young girls due to the dedication of the guiding leaders. Sparks, Brownies, Girl Guides, Pathfinders, and Rangers all meet in our village. No girl is turned away for financial reasons.

In 2007, the Port Morien Development Association worked with the Legion to sponsor a Celtic Colours concert in October. The event was a cultural success in past years and we were not to be disappointed this year. The show was a sell-out and we welcomed visitors from all over the world. On the day of the concert, a craft show featured the talents of the local artisans and a local church group provided a dinner for the visitors.

The Port Morien Fair has been part of the fabric of our village for over 61 years. One of our stories tells of this annual event.

November 11 is a day when the community gathers to honour the veterans. There is not a spare seat in the building and often not a dry eye.

A year is coming to an end and with the passage of another year; the fabric of the village continues to change. Some of our residents have passed away, new babies have entered the world and the rest of the residents are happily enjoying their life in the village.

The future looks bright for the village. We continue to look ahead. Plans are underway for our village to host the Davis Day activities for the first time in our history. Next June, our village will welcome coal mining families from all over industrial Cape Breton to highlight the importance of the coal industry as well as to commemorate the sacrifices of coal miners in the face of exploitation.

The Port Morien Development Associations is drawing up plans to initiate Phase II of our infrastructure improvements. A citizens' committee is currently working on the 100th anniversary celebrations of the scouting movement in North America. It plans a weekend of activities involving scouting troops from all over Nova Scotia in the fall of 2008.

The village believes in itself and there is an overwhelming feeling that we can do anything. Our motto is to think positively. At the 2005 official opening of the Town Square, "Port Morien Place," the president of the Port Morien Development Association remarked that our community has 700 citizens and 3000 volunteers. This sums up the spirit of this little village. Come visit us and feel the experience!

Our Stories

The Port Morien Community Fair

Since 1946 the Port Morien Community fair has been a thriving entity in this community, an opportunity for people to gather from all parts of the community for a two-day event.

Over the years, locals have displayed their produce and livestock, crafts, home baking and fancywork, as well as school work. However, this community event is much more.

The Community Fair has been defined by a number of staple events, including a parade, concert, dance and supper. In earlier years, school students marched in the parade and competed against students from other neighbouring communities for the Dr. Patton Shield. The fire department ladies auxiliary has sponsored a ham and scallop supper for many years, and the Masonic Lodge has offered a breakfast for the community. The annual dance, once held at the Orangeman's Hall, is now sponsored by the local legion.

Even the location has exemplified community spirit and co-operation. Once held at Gowrie Memorial School, it was moved to the central part of the community. Every church group offered its facilities as a venue for various activities, and for the last 25 years, the legion has welcomed the fair.

The hundreds of volunteer tasks are varied. They include concert committee, judges' assistant, parade organizer, assembly, dismantling and storage of display stands, and organization of exhibits.

Events over the years include a husband calling competition, a rolling pin toss, children's sports day, a little league baseball challenge game, and the cutest vegetable competition.

Most community organizations, as well as countless individuals, have worked tirelessly to maintain the fair as a successful community event for the past 61 years. It indeed embodies all that defines community spirit in a small rural village.

Gowrie Memorial, Our Village School

The story of how the present Gowrie Memorial School was built and financed by local citizens and volunteers is a compelling story of community commitment and spirit.

Committees met and the citizens volunteered to financially support the construction of the new school. A local contractor with a crew of local workers displayed exceptional craftsmanship in completing the building in 1950.

After the Second World War, the Home and School Association consisted of 50 parents and even bachelors, one of whom was the local trustee for years and another bachelor was the president of the organization. The concept that it takes a whole village to raise a child was understood early in this village.

Throughout the past 20 years, the school board has attempted to close our small school on various occasions. The community wanted to maintain the elementary school in the village and each attempt at closure faced stiff opposition. The villagers, many of whom attended the school, let the school board know, in no uncertain terms, that we wanted our children to experience attending school close to home.

Gowrie Memorial School, the heartbeat of our community, contributes to community giving and heritage throughout the year. The children plant flowers for local seniors, they participate in a heritage walk in the village and they clean the beach every year. They actively participate in the annual Remembrance Day service at Branch 055. These are activities that encourage community pride of place and foster community endurance with the next generation of Morienites. Clearly, the community takes pride in Gowrie School.

The Veterans' Memorial Computer Site

The founding of the Veterans' Memorial Computer Site at the Legion/Community Centre in 1999 illustrates the uniqueness of this community and the extent of human capital in the form of volunteerism. That year, Industry Canada granted the Legion \$11,439 through an initiative called the International Year of Older Persons to purchase computer equipment. The Legion provided the space. Dozens of seniors and youths were trained at the site during several initiatives. In 2000, Industry Canada granted the Legion \$9,998 in order for the site to become a bonafide C@P site. Thus, the Veterans' Memorial C@P Site became the first C@P site housed in a Legion in Canada. Since 2000, the site has become a clearing house for our community. It has trained clients, created brochures and tickets, and partnered with most local organizations to develop our village socially and economically. In that time, it has produced a monthly community newsletter. A glance at the long list of meetings in the newsletter gives a visual representation of the spirit, commitment to volunteerism, and sense of community in this village. In 2005, the site designed 12 historic plaques that grace our village yearly, and produced at least three books: *Memories Etched in Gold* (the history of Gowrie Memorial School); *Morien Remembers* (a compilation of the biographies of veterans), and *They Shall Grow Not Old* (a history of Branch 055). Numerous volunteers and summer students worked on these books. As well, the newly-formed camera club used the site to edit pictures. On the tenth anniversary of the C@P movement in Nova Scotia in 2006, the computer site's supervisor was awarded a plaque by the provincial government for exceptional volunteer service to the community access program. To this day the Veterans' Memorial Computer Site is about partnership and community spirit.

Saving the Legion

As with many small rural villages the Port Morien Royal Canadian Legion/Community Center is the heart of the community. Unfortunately, our Legion ran into financial difficulties, threatening its closure. An overflow crowd attended a meeting at the Community Center with members of the Provincial Command in attendance. After an explanation and discussion among the residents, it was agreed by those in attendance that they would sign promissory notes in an amount equal to the funding being sought, to help secure the loan. This resulted in the building being able to remain open. The loan was paid off in full, one year early. Following the last payment, a

community reception was held to thank those who had enabled the building to remain a vital part of our community.

Since that time the Legion has partnered with the Port Morien Development Association to secure funding to do updates to the building. The building is now a showcase for the area containing two levels, an upper and lower bar area, full kitchen facilities, a stage complete with sound system and lighting, a new floor, air conditioning and a paved parking lot. An outdoor deck, constructed with volunteer labour, has recently been added. This should prove very popular for the coming summer season.

Utilizing only volunteer labour, the community centre now hosts a dinner theater, weddings, special event dinners, an annual volunteer appreciation night, school concerts, anniversaries, as well as extremely well attended events to honour Veterans, War Brides, and the Legion's own 70th Anniversary.

First Day of Lobster Fishing

One of the most significant days of the Port Morien calendar is May 15th, locally known as "settin' day". In the weeks previous to "settin' day," fever mounts as the wharf is transformed into a colorful maze of lobster traps, ropes and buoys of every color. Boats of all sizes and colors are tied at dockside. Even the squawking of the sea gulls is amplified as they sense a banquet of herring, mackerel, red fish and flounder in the on coming months.

With their red and green running lights shining, boats parade through the mouth of the harbour and fan out across the bay towards their favorite fishing holes.

Generations ago, the fisherman had identified the choice fishing areas with such names as Shag Roost Mark, Sailor Dan's Field, Curries Cove, Sunken Rock, Wadden's Cove, Duck Hole, Coal Hole, Cow Reef, Kuckle Bank, Powder House Point, Ferguson's Beach, Campbell's Pond, Herring Rack Point and Loon Shoal.

There's no shortage of volunteers to lend a helping hand loading boats as they return trip after trip for traps, ropes and buoys. To witness this pre-dawn event, locals and members from surrounding communities gather at every advantage point to witness the roar from this armada of boats funneling down the bay like a swarm of fire flies. To further promote this tradition, our local restaurant, Dock Y'ur Dory has gladly provided its cliff side location for onlookers. It opens at 4am and no matter what the weather, people can watch in comfort.

By day's end, the shoreline is polka dotted with the brilliant colorful buoys. The excitement continues until sundown as the fisherman wait in anticipation for good landings and high prices. Celebrating your traditional first feed of Port Morien lobster is definitely something to look forward to year after year.

Morien Memories

The community of Port Morien has maintained a unique relationship with former residents of this village. It began with a suggestion from two senior visitors who wished to have a reunion with former friends and neighbors. A committee of seven dedicated citizens began the first Morien Memories event in 1985, to be held every five years. The idea of a home coming can actually be traced to 1970, when the community came together to celebrate its 250th birthday. Former residents came from all over the world because they have a deep pride in this community. Many of these people can trace their history for several generations. The enjoyment experienced by those attending encouraged the committee to proceed with this celebration.

A committee of seven has since joined with other organizations to ensure an army of volunteers. Slide shows, videos, interviews, and scenic pictures have been a legacy of Morien Memories.

Presentations and historical documents have been placed in the local school and the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University. Souvenir booklets have also been produced with great success and sentimental value.

The week of Morien Memories is abuzz with activities. Historical walks are organized, fishermen donate their boats and time to provide free harbor cruises, street and hall dances are organized, activities for children are continuous, concerts are held and many former residents are eager to display their talents. Food is abundant. Churches, firemen, legion and community groups provide meals. Pins and other memorabilia are available, each expressing a pride in Port Morien. When asked a tradition question where are you from? Any Morienite is proud to say "I'm from Morien."

Conclusion

We do hope that you enjoyed our presentation, and thank you for giving us the opportunity to spotlight our community. Regardless of our success in winning this award, we wish to take this opportunity to invite you, the panel of judges to visit our community. As well Lieutenant Governor Francis has an open invitation to return again at any time. In that way, you can experience for yourself the spirit and uniqueness of life in the village of Port Morien.