

# THE PARTICIPAPER

*An Inverness County Periodical*

*Spring 2024*

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## A letter from the editor

**DAVE MACNEIL**

[participaper@invernesscounty.ca](mailto:participaper@invernesscounty.ca)

People in urban areas of the province can sometimes take a lot for granted. When they find themselves in an emergency situation, they can expect a professional response from firefighters, emergency medical personnel or police officers – most times all three.

In rural parts of Nova Scotia, like Inverness County, that emergency response will often involve a brother, a sister, a neighbour, a friend. Many times, volunteer firefighters are the first on the scene, and while they've provided financial assistance from municipal and provincial governments, it's the commitment and bravery of these volunteer emergency responders which can make the difference between life and death.

In this edition of *The Participaper*, we feature the Lake Ainslie Volunteer Fire Department (LAVFD), one of the smallest volunteer fire departments in Inverness County. In its 52-year history, membership in this tiny department has remained constant, and that's a credit to the commitment of the men and women of that area.

Sometimes it's a family affair, as evidenced by the Gillis family. For the past three decades, the department has been led by either Michael Gillis Sr., who was a founding member back in 1972, or by his son, Mike Gillis, who has been chief since 2016.

But their efforts don't begin and end with responding to emergencies, as they spend far more time fundraising, training, and providing their community with services often provided in more urban areas by service clubs like the Lions or Kiwanis.

The LAVFD is typical of departments across Inverness County.

So, if you're not already a member of your local department, think about it. There's no greater opportunity to serve your community than this.



**Cover Photo:** The Lake Ainslie Volunteer Fire Department has had just four chiefs in its 52-year history. From left are Michael Gillis, Hugh Campbell, current chief Mike Gillis, and Hugh Cameron. See story page 17.

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## Chief Administrative Officer's message

**KEITH MACDONALD**  
**INVERNESS COUNTY CAO**

### Weather the Weather

After years of fairly calm winters, we have been facing the snowstorms of the “good old days” in the early months of 2024. February was particularly blustery with snow amounts making venturing out in the elements unsafe and travel an impossibility. For many, major weather events cause great stress and anxiety. Power outages, isolation due to road closures, and being blocked in your driveway are regular occurrences during blizzards. There is even more worry for those who are dealing with health issues. Concerns for missing medical treatments, lack of access to important medication and health care professionals unable to reach those requiring care are just some of the challenges created by extreme weather conditions.

We all have to become more aware of how to be prepared for emergencies as hurricanes become

stronger, rainfall amounts increase, and snow drifts heighten. Individual household storm readiness plans help relieve some of the stress of weather impacts and save time in emergency situations. Maintaining an emergency pack that has at least three days of supplies should be a priority. A battery-powered flashlight, tools for emergency repair, a first aid kit, a battery-powered radio, drinking water, ready-to-eat food, blankets and extra clothing are essential for an emergency pack. Additional items to meet particular family needs might include extra medication, baby items, pet food, cash and extra batteries.

Car readiness is also important. A full gas tank for your vehicle is important along with positioning it for the best opportunity of exit from the lane. Generators require extra fuel – and remember to never use one inside. Be sure to regularly check in with your neighbours and family to ensure that they are safe. Clearing snow can easily cause overexertion, so take your time, break regularly and warm up – and rest afterwards.

Yes, it is quite the lengthy check-list, but being prepared and mapping out a plan for weather events helps create less stressful situations and peace of mind. So, stay safe and hopefully the shovels can soon be put away until next winter.

#### *The Participaper*

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# Project to shore up salmon spawning area

BY DAVE MACNEIL

The Margaree River near Doyle's Bridge is one of the many areas of the river where the Margaree Salmon Association has worked to improve fish habitat. Photo: Margaree Salmon Association

The Margaree Salmon Association (MSA) plans to install 2,000 tonnes of armour rock this summer to help save one of the main salmon spawning areas of the Margaree River.

The project is the latest effort in the association's ongoing Habitat Restoration Program, and the work is being done at what's known as the Swimming Hole Pool, located near St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Northeast Margaree.

Bill Haley, past-president of the association, says there's a 125-metre stretch of the riverbank that's eroded, and that threatens the health of the river.

"The river becomes wider and more shallow," Haley explains. "You can lose your current, and you can increase your water temperature. The soil that gets washed into the river becomes silt, and salmon can't spawn in a silt-filled gravel bed. They need a clean gravel bed."

He says it's difficult to point to a single factor that may have caused the erosion.

"The river is always changing," Haley says. "We have some pools that used to be exceptional salmon pools that no longer have a drop of water in them. The river decided to go in a different direction."

"This river has been moving from side to side, from one side of the valley to the other, for thousands of years," he adds. "It's not going to stop because we put rocks somewhere. In the short term, we're just trying to have a healthy salmon population and do what we can during our lifetime."

The project was originally slated for 2023, but difficulty in getting the proper size stone pushed its completion to this summer.

"The stones have to be anywhere from one to two tons each, and most of the quarries in the area are focusing on small stone, clean stone and gravel for commercial purposes," Haley notes. "We managed to find stone late in the 2023 season. It was too late to complete the project, so we paid to have the stone transported from the quarry up to the site where it's going to be used."





The stone is being provided by Ocean Breeze Excavating of nearby Grand Étang, and the work will be completed as soon as the proper water levels are reached.

“We’d love to do it in June, depending on water levels,” Haley says. “You have to wait for appropriate water levels.”

The job comes with a price tag of approximately \$155 000, and while the Margaree Salmon Association is providing the majority of that money itself, they’ve also received funding from the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, the Unama’ki Institute of Natural Resources, the Municipality of Inverness County and several individual MSA members who combined to provide several thousand dollars.

In the past six years, the MSA has undertaken major work at the sanctuary at the Upper MacKenzie Pool, at Doyle’s Bridge in Margaree Forks, and Lake O’Law Brook. Haley says those efforts are paying off, as the Margaree River is “becoming the healthiest river in the Atlantic provinces.”

Above: The Margaree Salmon Association holds a ‘Learn 2 Fly Fish’ event during the Celtic Colours music festival each year.

Below: Shoring up riverbanks is one of the activities undertaken by the Margaree Salmon Association in recent years to improve fish habitat. Photos: Margaree Salmon Association







The Margaree Salmon Association is grateful to Pat and John Stinson for offering their property as the site of the association's annual Learn 2 Fly Fish event, which attracted 36 participants at its most recent event in October. Photo: Margaree Salmon Association

"As far as meeting escapement – and that's meeting the optimum number of fish in the river spawning and then leaving – we've met escapement since around 1987, every year," he says.

"The La Have River — which rises in Annapolis County and runs through the town of Bridgewater to the Atlantic Ocean — used to be the most productive in the province, but now salmon have really suffered there from invasive species."

"You take the Miramichi in New Brunswick," he adds. "They had more fish going in and out of that river than any other river in the Atlantic provinces. Now, with striped bass predation, their population of salmon has gone down something like 40% in the last couple of years."

Along with the ongoing efforts of the MSA, Haley points to several factors that have contributed to the health of the Margaree.

"We've never had heavy industry on this river, it's never been dammed," he says. "We have a very responsible First Nations harvest. The Mi'kmaq are very focused on conservation."

"We have a hatchery that's been operating since about 1902," he adds. "They put 100 000 to 200 000 small fish in the river every year. The commercial fishery (which closed in the 1980s) didn't decimate the stocks. When they stopped the commercial fishery, there were still sufficient stocks to rebound and populate the river with salmon."

Complementing the MSA's Habitat Restoration Program is a team of technicians who are hired each season to address other concerns that may affect fish stock.

"We have a crew of four technicians, and they are trained by the Nova Scotia Salmon Association," Haley explains. "

"We hire them every year, from spring to fall, and they do work in the tributaries of the Margaree," he says. "They put in structures that will benefit the fish that are in those tributaries."

"It may be a digger log that will put in a little waterfall, maybe a deflector, and what they do is provide more depth, more current and potentially more shade for the small fish," Haley explains.

"The reason we focus on the tributaries is that you have all these little fish in the big river where you have a lot of predators," he notes, from minks and seals, to mergansers and striped bass. "But up in those tributaries, where those nurseries are for the small fish, you won't find many of the marine predators you'll find elsewhere in the river."

"So they pretty well have a safe nursery, and we really attribute the health of the salmon population to those nurseries."

Haley is quick to point out that while the efforts of groups like the Margaree Salmon Association are important, it's still the fish who determine the direction of all that work.

"Humans think we know everything," he says. "We say the fish can't use this part of the river for habitat or for spawning. You go to the river in the summertime, and you see the water is low, and then you visit that same area in the fall, when conditions are different, and you see all the salmon that are spawning. So, the fish know what the fish need."

"Regardless of our background and training, we're not fish. Fish will go where they want to go." ■



# Local students raise their voices to musical challenge

The Canadian Music Class Challenge is the CBC's annual salute to music education, so naturally educators and students from Canada's Musical Coast had to get involved!

Every year, teachers and their students choose a Canadian song from a shortlist and record their best version of it. Thousands of students from every part of Canada, including at least two Inverness County schools, took part this time around.

Students at Whycocomagh Education Centre recorded a rousing cover of Charlotte Diamond's 1985 hit I am a pizza. Around 40 youngsters took part, and you can see how much fun they had learning and recording the tune.

"It only took us 3 days to learn the song, with Mr. MacInnis," says Nolan Walkins (Grade 3), "then on the day Ms. Campbell was there as well to film us."

"When we were on the stage getting ready to film the performance, I was nervous at first," says Nolan, "because we were going to be in a video that lots of people would see on the internet. But once we got started, it was fun! The best part was getting to sing together with a lot of my friends."

Bayview Education Centre got in on the action too. Penny Lou MacDonald is one of the crew that regularly gets together at lunch to hang out and make music, from Celtic tunes to Snoop Dogg beats or, in this case, a version of Call me maybe by Carly Rae Jepsen.

Penny Lou says it took the band about three weeks to learn the song. "The funnest thing was when we would mess up," she says. "We would all start laughing and get goofy when we made mistakes!"

"I would definitely do it again and I'd tell other students to do it too," she adds. "We had a blast!"



Props go out to Peter MacInnis, the music educator who helped to get these two groups rocking.

**"Our music class is all about the joy of creating music, and I wanted to capture that infectious vibe."**  
– Peter MacInnis

"We've got some seriously talented young musicians in both schools, and I'm always on the hunt for exciting opportunities to let their talent shine," Peter says.

"Whether it's during lunch breaks or after school, our bands are dedicated to perfecting their craft. Plus, it's always fun, and I can't wait for everyone to see what's next. Currently, we're working on original songs and a live set."

So watch this space! If any other schools took part, get in touch and we'll share your videos too. ■

Check out their videos at [participaperonline.ca/cbc-music-class-2024](https://participaperonline.ca/cbc-music-class-2024)

## Getting to know...

### Tanis Brear

*In this recurring series, we ask a municipal employee a few questions to get to know them better.*

#### Where are you from?

Originally Barrie, Ontario

#### Where do you live?

West Lake Ainslie

#### What's your role with the municipality?

I'm the solid waste administrator.

#### What's your service time?

I just had my six months on Wednesday (Feb. 28).

#### What's your favourite thing about Inverness County?

The beauty. We're real outdoorsy people, so it's like living in cottage country.

#### What's your favourite shop/store/service in Inverness County?

Brook Village Grocery. Their selection of cheeses is amazing.

#### Finally, coffee or tea?

I would have to say coffee.

It's pretty close. I've lived here – this August will be three years. They haven't turned me to tea quite yet.



Tanis Brear

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# Alternative routes to healing in Inverness County

BY JOSEFA CAMERON

To say Kelly Bernard wears many hats is an understatement.

As a mother of four, grandmother of two, and a yoga and fitness instructor, Bernard has set her mind on healing Inverness County through holistic practices.

Bernard is a reiki and reflexology practitioner from Lake Ainslie. She's been a resident of We'koqmaq First Nation, where her husband is from, for about 20 years. With a unique academic background in psychology and physical education, she has worked in the area of

sport, recreation, and wellness since graduating from Cape Breton University almost 30 years ago.

She feels that practicing reiki and reflexology, specifically, has always been her calling.

"The universe likes to line things up and nudge you very gently and sometimes very aggressively in a different direction," she explains.

Bernard was first introduced to reiki in 2010 at a women's retreat.

"It triggered a little seed that planted in the back of my mind," she says.

Reiki is a Japanese form of energy healing where practitioners use a technique called palm healing. According to practitioners, energy is transferred through the palms of the practitioner to the patient to encourage emotional and physical healing.

While working at the We'koqmaq Family Healing Centre as a women's support counselor, Bernard started to notice a dip in her energy. After discovering she had celiac disease, which was a leading factor in her energy loss, she decided to take some time off.

It was during this time that she decided to take a leap of faith and open her own business offering reiki services.



She began offering her practice part-time out of her house, but no one was coming through the door. In 2010s rural Cape Breton, reiki was still largely unheard of.

“Nobody really knew about it, or if they did, they thought it was like voodoo stuff,” Bernard chuckles.

So, she decided to try something different and train in reflexology.

Reflexology is a type of therapy that involves applying pressure to points on the feet, ears, and hands. It is based on a system of zones and reflex areas which practitioners believe reflect an image of the body on the feet and hands, with the premise that pressure on the feet and hands causes a physical change to those areas of the body.

In 2019, an opportunity arose for Bernard to practice both reiki and reflexology at Inverness Chiropractic. She also continues to practise at her home in We’koqma’q.

“It’s obvious that more and more people are interested in these kinds of services,” she says.

“Five years ago, there were only a handful of us working at Inverness Chiropractic, and now we’ve basically doubled or tripled in size with all the different types of healing services.”

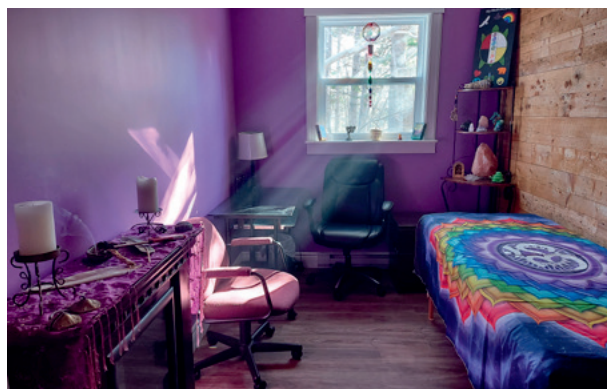
Bernard enjoys spending time with her colleagues almost as much as she enjoys her work.

“They’re the best group of people you’d ever want to work with,” she says. “We have a lot of fun and still get our work done.”

As the popularity of alternative healing practices increases, Bernard says it is still essential for Cape Bretoners to have a robust and accessible medical healthcare system.

“There’s definitely a time and place for the medical field, but I think people also need to know that they have an option to come and try these different services.”

People are realizing that there is more to their health, she adds, and they’re feeling empowered to take more control of it.



Bernard says her background in psychology informs her approach with her clients, noting that she gets to know her clients in order to heal them more holistically, “because it’s mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional. We are not simple beings. We’re very complex and everything is connected. When something is out of whack in one part of our body, it’s going to affect our complete body – and I’m talking about the holistic body.”

Seeing results in her patient’s health situations has been her most rewarding experience at the centre, she says, adding that the feedback she receives is immensely positive.

“I don’t give credit to myself, though, because it’s the treatments that they’re receiving that are working for them,” Bernard says. “It doesn’t feel like a job to me. I just feel privileged, honoured, blessed, and grateful to be able to do this kind of thing.” ■



## Lightening the load to improve your health

BY GLENNA CALDER, ND

Chronic stress can cause structural changes in the brain. It can lead to atrophy of the brain mass and decrease its weight. This can create changes to our memory and cognitive function.

Stress can also cause long-term effects on the nervous system by increasing hormones that have receptors in our nervous system. A little bit of stress can improve our memory, and help us with daily tasks, but too much stress can leave us feeling

overwhelmed and cause physical and mental health problems. High blood pressure, IBS, insomnia, and depression are examples of conditions that can be caused by stress. And there are many more.

To decrease our stress, we have to actively decide to make changes. Stress won't decrease on its own. I would like to suggest an exercise that anyone can do at home. You just need paper and a pen. Make two columns. Title the first "Friction," and title the second "What I love to do." You can do this exercise for your personal life, then do it again for your work life or your volunteer roles.

In the 'friction' column, list what is causing friction in your life. Friction can be defined as resistance or frustration. What are some things that you do not like doing but do often? Under 'what I love to do,' list what you love doing. Try to list at least 5-10 for each. You might be surprised with a few items on each list and how much they cause friction in your life or how little you do the ones you love.

If you can come up with solutions as to how you can eliminate the 'friction' items, or if you have an idea which could help decrease the friction, write

## Tips for a happier life

### □ Plan your week

A weekly plan will help you feel more focused and gain a better perspective.

### □ Make to-do lists

Creating a to-do list is the best way to keep track of everything you need to do.

### □ Prioritize self-care

Prioritizing self-care in your routine helps you recharge, reduce stress, and maintain your mental well-being.

### □ Do things that bring you joy

Prioritize activities that align with your interests and provide a sense of fulfillment.

these down. The goal is to try to increase the items in the 'what I love to do' list over the coming year, and decrease the items in the 'friction' list.

Some examples of items you may have in your friction list are shoveling, dishes, being late, saying yes when you want to say no, or how you don't see someone that you love spending time with.

Some solutions for the items on this list might include hiring someone to shovel, or reminding yourself that shoveling is good exercise: it's a way to get active and enjoy some outdoor time.

We can't really eliminate dishes from our lives, but we could decrease the friction by figuring out how to make them more enjoyable. Play your favourite music, reward yourself with some quiet after you finish each time.

Some examples of activities that you love to do may be biking, reading, walking, traveling or volunteering for a specific project.

If you focus on doing more of the items on this list, I guarantee you will decrease the stress that you are experiencing. When we step back and look at the list it can seem more manageable to make changes. Simplifying things by writing them down helps the brain to see solutions. This is how we can make our life more enjoyable and, as a result, decrease the stress in our life that is negatively impacting our health, relationships, and happiness.

Enjoy the Spring!

*Yours in health,*

Glenna Calder, Naturopathic Doctor



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Dalbrae Academy in Mabou has a large contingent of international students this term. Front row, from left, are Carlota Miralles, Spain, Mina Demirci, Turkey, Martina Tirana, Italy, Lou Palanque, France and Uxia Galache, Spain. Middle row, from left, are Robina van Roon, Germany, and Lily Salenbien, Belgium. Back row, from left, are Irena Renda, Italy, and Chiara Lamonea, Italy.



Robert and Margie Clark of Margaree Forks recently welcomed Justine Lumineau, from France, at Stanfield International Airport in Halifax.



Chris Penny, manager of the Nova Scotia International Student Program, joins students Lily Salenbien of Belgium, left, and Lou Palanque of France in the library at Dalbrae Academy.

# Host families building lifelong relationships

BY DAVE MACNEIL

With their second of two daughters leaving for university and their son graduating high school, the Clarks of Margaree Forks weren't quite ready to be empty nesters.

When a teacher friend of theirs brought two of his Saudi Arabian students back to Canada with him in 2017, the relationship they quickly built with those two students planted a seed that has seen them host eight students themselves with the Nova Scotia International Student Program (NSISP).

Margie and Robert Clark welcomed their first international student in 2019, and to date they've hosted kids from Italy, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Germany and France.

"It's hard when you have a family of five and then you're down to two, and you have all this food left over," Robert laughs. "It's hard to adjust." Sharing their home with the youngsters who are gaining valuable experiences of education and life outside their home country is very rewarding for the host family.

In 2022, with several years experience with the program, the Clarks decided they'd like to take in two students at a same time.

"We find it easier when we have two students in our home because they can hang out together," he says. "It breaks the ice for them."

"We became pretty close with all the kids we've had stay with us," he recalls, adding that they still regularly hear from many of them.

And that's the pay-off, as far as the Clarks are concerned.

"It's not just the five months you're coming for," Margie explains. "These are lifelong relationships you're building."

"You're learning about their cultures, learning about their food," she says, noting that they quickly become a member of their family. "We love the interaction. The students are involved in everything we do."

Robert says the students add so much to their family, recalling a French student named Elliott, who was a piano player.

"It was so nice to come home from work at the end of the day and hear the piano," he says.

The kids that are hosted by the Clarks attend Cape Breton Highlands Education Centre/Academy in nearby Terre Noire, where there are 18 NSISP participants currently enrolled. At Dalbrae Academy in Mabou, another 10 students from the program are enrolled.

Chris Penny, manager of the NSISP for the Strait Regional Centre for Education, says there are 13 countries currently represented in Inverness County and 18 across the Strait region.

"Italy, Germany and Spain are some of the biggest countries in the program just now in Inverness County," he adds, noting that provincially the program welcomes between 1 100 and 1 300 students from 36 to 42 countries each year.

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*The Participaper* asked four visiting international students about their time here.

Here is what they had to say.

# Q&A

## **Fleur Hanin** **France** **Cape Breton Highlands**

### **Q How much did you know about Nova Scotia before your arrival here?**

Before choosing to come to Nova Scotia, I didn't even know that this region existed. Before leaving I did a little research and learned the location and that it was near the ocean. I learned that there were some regions where French was spoken. I also knew that there was a lot of nature and uninhabited areas.

### **Q What has surprised you about your experience?**

I was very surprised to be in a very small village very far from the city. But I was also pleasantly surprised by the kindness and good vibe of the people here. And finally, I was also surprised by the speed at which I progressed in English. I didn't expect that.

### **Q What has been the highlight of your time here?**

One of the best things that happened to me here is all the friendships I made in a very short time. Now I have friends from all over the world and of all ages. I learned a lot about the world and different cultures thanks to this.

## **Uxia Galache** **Spain** **Dalbrae Academy**

### **Q How much did you know about Nova Scotia before your arrival here?**

I knew Nova Scotia had good beaches, that the capital is Halifax, and also that it is warmer than other parts of Canada. But, apart from that, I didn't really know a lot about it.

### **Q What has surprised you about your experience?**

Something that really surprised me when I came here is how far away everything is, and how every place I have to go I have to get a ride there, which is something really unusual for me in Spain, because the farthest I usually go is one hour away.

### **Q What has been the highlight of your time here?**

I don't really have one highlight, but I do have a lot of good experiences, like getting to go to the beach in September, or seeing so much snow and how cold it is here, also playing on the high school volleyball team and visiting Halifax.





Clockwise from top left: Fleur Hanin (France), Uxia Galache (Spain), LeAhn Tran (Lesley) (Vietnam), Martina Tirana (Italy)



**Marina Tirana**  
**Italy**  
**Dalbrae Academy**

**Q How much did you know about Nova Scotia before your arrival here?**

Before my arrival here I knew just some general information about Nova Scotia but now, thanks to my host mom and my friends, I know a lot more.

**Q What has surprised you about your experience?**

I'm really surprised by the kindness of people, starting with my super host mom and the teachers that are really kind and supportive to my friends that are making my time here magical. I'm also really surprised by the beauty of the skylines.

**Q What has been the highlight of your time here?**

I have many highlights here, but I think my favourite is hanging out with my friends and especially sitting at the pond and talking with them. The trips with my host mom are a special highlight too, they help me to explore the beauty of Cape Breton.

**Le Ahn Tran (Lesley)**  
**Vietnam**  
**Cape Breton Highlands**

**Q How much did you know about Nova Scotia before your arrival here?**

I had no clue about Nova Scotia until I stumbled upon an ad on Instagram for the NSISP program. The pics showed off amazing beaches and a killer marine history. I'm a sucker for beaches and seafood, so I thought, "Why not give it a try?" Did a bit of research about Nova Scotia before I arrived there. Found out it's got thousands of miles of stunning coastline. It's located on the east coast of Canada, pretty much surrounded by the sea. Heard about the Cabot Trail too, supposed to be one of the most breathtaking drives globally, cutting through the Cape Breton Highlands National Park.

**Q What has surprised you about your experience?**

I couldn't believe there's just one main road in my hood, but it's a lifesaver for a newbie like me, keeping me from getting lost. The teachers are super kind and friendly, making it much easier to ask questions. And the best part? When folks ask, "How are you?" they don't even expect me to answer.

**Q What has been the highlight of your time here?**

The best part of my time here was when I joined the Chéticamp choir and started singing in French. I'd never been exposed to French before. And I'd never been in a concert or sung in public. I can't even remember where all that confidence came from, considering I used to be super shy. However, the experience turned out to be incredibly memorable. I made some awesome new friends, and guess what? Turns out, I can actually sing!

When international students apply to come to Nova Scotia, the applications are received at NSISP's central office in Truro and they're divided up according to which will be the best fit.

"We see how many students we can accommodate based on numbers of host families, and we try to even out the geographical distribution of kids coming from each country."

Chris says that while applicants don't choose a specific location when applying, the info they provide on their application helps when deciding which region would suit them best.

"The program takes into account the students' likes and dislikes," he notes. "Our admissions officers read each application. If a kid wants to go skiing for example, well, there are no ski hills in the Strait Region. If they're into debating, and we know Antigonish has a strong debating club, that could push them in that direction."

"We can only place the number of students we have host families for. I can say we'd like to bring 1 000 students, but if we only have 100 host families, it makes it hard to place those 1 000 students."

But Chris says the number of host families is increasing in the region, and he attributes that growing interest to the NSISP's effort to help the visiting students integrate into the community by organizing outings for them each month.

"People are seeing the students in the community, and it sparks interest," he says. "They know there's a Spanish girl in their son's or daughter's Grade 11 physics class, and they're interested to know about the program that brought them there. Helping the students get out there has been a really big part of what we're trying to do to showcase the program."

"There's a lot of cool talents out there. International students bring a lot to a classroom. If you're studying the economy of Latin America and you have a student from Ecuador, Colombia or Mexico in your classroom, it adds that much more to the conversation."

One of the international students who is contributing to her school is Ahn Le Tran from Vietnam, who is enrolled at Cape Breton Highlands. She says she stumbled upon the NSISP program on Instagram, where she found photos of beaches.



"I'm a sucker for beaches and seafood, so I thought 'why not give it a try,'" she recalls.

"The best part of my time here was when I joined the Coeur du Havre choir in Chéticamp and I started singing in French," Ahn Le says. "I'd never been exposed to French before. And I'd never been in a concert or sung in public." New experiences like this are a major part of what makes the program such a draw for youngsters from around the world.

For Chris, the NSISP has become an unexpected career. He's been with the program since his grade 11 year at Riverview High in Sydney, when he and his father hosted a student from Mexico. In his graduating year, he was asked to be a student ambassador. Ambassadors are students trained by the NSISP to help participants adjust to their communities, their schools and their host families.

From there, he held various roles with the program, from airport greeter to student projects officer, before being hired into his current position in May 2022.

"I never expected this to be it, but when I became an ambassador, I loved it," Chris recalls. "It was interesting. You meet so many new people, learn so many new cultures and customs and languages. So, I tried my best to stay involved in the program and now it's my full-time job."

He says it's encouraging to see so many host families are having that same experience, as four in five are repeat participants in the program. But he says they're always looking for more hosts.

If your family might be interested in hosting students, head to the program's website – [nsisp.ca](https://nsisp.ca) – where you'll find lots of helpful information. You can also contact Chris directly at [chris.penny@srce.ca](mailto:chris.penny@srce.ca) or at 902.631.1570. And maybe you'll find the same experience that the Clarks found. ■





LAVFD members include: (Front L-R) Tyson MacLean, Ryan MacDougall, Chris Cameron, Adam MacDonald, Dale Gillis, Vince Jessome, Mike Gillis, Derek MacKinnon, Michael Gillis, Michael MacDonald, Jake MacEachern; (Back L-R) Ian MacDougall, Laura MacDougall, Marvin Delaney, Donald Kennedy, Colin Ogden, James MacLean, Johnie MacKinnon, DJ MacLean, Hugh Cameron, Wesley MacLean, Hugh Campbell, Hailey MacDonald, Steve Moores, Aldan MacInnis; (Top) Brittany Fitzgerald.



The Lake Ainslie Volunteer Fire Department has had just four chiefs in its 52-year history. From left are Michael Gillis, Hugh Campbell, current chief Mike Gillis, and Hugh Cameron.

## Committed membership bolsters Lake Ainslie VFD

BY DAVE MACNEIL

If you live in the area served by the Lake Ainslie Volunteer Fire Department (LAVFD), and you've got nine friends who are not members of the department, the math says you're likely a member yourself!

With a slate of 30 active members, the department serves the communities of South Lake Ainslie, East Lake Ainslie, Scotsville, North Lake Ainslie,





Kenloch, Upper Margaree and Gillisdale. That represents a population that department chief Mike Gillis guesses is somewhere in the vicinity of 300.

“Almost every family that lives within our coverage area has a connection to the department, either their brother, their sister, their mom or their dad, or grandfather are part of the department,” Gillis says.

“We’re fortunate to have a very well mixed group of people, from the age of 19 to 82, that are still active in some capacity,” he adds, noting that many volunteer departments in Nova Scotia are struggling to maintain their membership. “Our coverage area is very small. We’re one of the smallest departments in the municipality.”

That consistent membership has also been reflected at the top, as the department has had just four chiefs in its 52-year history. Hugh Campbell served as the first chief from 1972 to 1984, before being replaced by Hugh Cameron, who served until 1995. The present chief’s father, Michael Gillis, was chief for just over 20 years, before handing over the reins to his son in 2016.

Top photo: The LAVFD still has six founding members of its department who are active in some capacity. From left are Hugh Campbell, DJ MacLean, Hugh Cameron, Wesley MacLean, Aldan MacInnis, and Michael Gillis.

Middle photo: From left are Jake MacEachern, James MacLean and Brittany Fitzgerald, all members of the department’s rescue team, as they show off the rescue basket, which is equipped with skis for winter months and rubber tires for the other three seasons.

Bottom photo: From left are Ryan MacDougall, Derek MacKinnon, Hailey MacDonald, and Jake MacEachern, as they check out some of the department’s new SCBAs (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) and its scene lighting and generator which is all stored on the newest pumper/tanker.



While it may be one of the county's smaller departments, their acronym in the early years was anything but small, as the letters AUMVFD (Ainslie Upper Margaree Volunteer Fire Department) adorned their trucks.

"At the time, when the department was formed, we were trying to represent all pieces," Gillis recalls. "So in the 90s, we kind of had a refocus. You'd see the letters AUMVFD, and nobody knew what it stood for or where it was."

There were about 25 to 30 members in that initial department in 1972, when a group of residents met and decided that the area, previously served by departments in Inverness, Whycocomagh and Margaree, needed its own firefighters. The initial fire building was built on land donated by Murdoch and Mary Sarah MacDougall.

"It started out as one small building," Gillis says. "There have been several additions over the years."

"The MacLean family donated the first truck – a old oil truck of sorts from the '50s with a tank on it," he adds. "We've come a fairly long way. In 2019 we purchased our first new pumper/tanker which is pretty much on par with what all the neighbouring departments have for trucks now."

The department also has a 2000 GMC Tanker, a utility van, and a utility trailer, which stores their rescue sled.

"As far as equipment goes, we're very well off," Gillis says. "There's always some more firefighter gear, turnout gear that you've got to keep replacing, so that's always on the agenda."

Keeping the department well equipped requires a great deal of fundraising, and the Nova Scotia Firefighters Weekly 50/50 Jackpot, which raises funds for departments throughout the province, puts about \$15 000 a year in their coffers. He says the draw, which began in 2020, now represents the LAVFD's biggest fundraiser.

"It's been a huge, huge help, especially in the first couple of years with Covid and post-Covid, where fundraising activities were difficult to have," he explains. "You couldn't have gatherings, you couldn't have ceilidhs or dances, so it really filled the void for that."



Participants in the weekly draw select the department they want to support when they purchase their ticket, and a portion of those dollars go to that department.

"I think it's one of the most successful 50/50 raffle draws in the country," Gillis notes.

The LAVFD has a number of infrastructure projects on the go, as it hopes to complete installation of a metal roof on the firehall this summer. It's also soon going to serve as a comfort centre for the communities it serves, thanks to a program funded 100% by the provincial and municipal governments.

"The generator has arrived and it's in place, so we're just waiting on the electricians and some of the subtrades to complete the work, so we're hoping to have it completed by the spring," Gillis says.

He says with an aging population, it's even more important for his department to be able to offer a warm meal or a place to charge electronic devices.

"A lot of people in our area are pretty self-sufficient when it comes to power outages, but when we look at the bigger picture for any kind of natural disaster, if there's a wildfire and we have to evacuate, I think it will support other communities more than our own community," he explains. "If Inverness had to evacuate people from the hospital or the nursing home, we could support the other neighbouring communities as well as our own."

While it's difficult to predict when a crisis might arise, one thing is clear: members of the LAVFD will do what they always do, and that's serve their community. ■

# Fostering community resilience through strengthened bonds

BY BRETT HERSHEY

With the return of the sun and the days promising to get warmer, spring is a great time to look at the elements that contribute to a resilient community. Let's look at some practical ideas aimed at uniting neighbours, and the pivotal role of unity during challenging times. From clean-up initiatives to communal gatherings, collaborative efforts in Inverness County can strengthen the fabric of our communities.

Initiating community clean-up projects is a great place to start. With the melting of the snow, we know that forgotten treasures and other bits and bobs will start appearing in the ditches and corners of yards. Community clean-ups not only enhance the visual appeal of neighbourhoods but also instill a collective sense of responsibility.

Whether it involves picking up roadside litter with a couple of friends and neighbours, or orchestrating a large clean-up campaign, these endeavours make a tangible difference while fostering community pride. If you'd like to organize a community clean up, reach out to the municipality's waste services team for tips and support at [waste@invernesscounty.ca](mailto:waste@invernesscounty.ca) or call them at 1.866.258.0223.

Social gatherings will always play a crucial role in building connections among us, whether it's organizing a potluck supper in the community centre or putting together a themed activity evening. Establishing regular social gatherings helps develop traditions that cultivate a sense







of belonging. Sharing laughter, stories, and experiences helps to weave a fabric of memories, knitting our communities closer together and enhancing their resilience in the face of challenges.

What about a more ambitious undertaking, such as establishing a community garden? Gardening promotes sustainable practices, provides a reason for us to spend time outdoors and serves as a collaborative effort that everyone can get involved in. Beyond supplying fresh produce for donation or sale, community gardens instill a sense of collective ownership as we contribute our time and efforts for the greater good.

We can plan, plant, and nurture a garden that symbolizes our shared growth and resilience. (Look out for an article in the next *Participaper* about the Mill Rd Grows community garden that is going from strength to strength in the community of Inverness!)

Workshops and skill-sharing sessions offer another avenue to foster unity and enhance resilience. Local people can provide seminars on first aid, lessons on gardening, beekeeping, or practical skills such as cooking meals on camp stoves. These events empower folks, create support networks, and build confidence within our community.

Regardless of your chosen idea, effective communication and engagement are one of the keys for their success. Establishing an effective method of communicating across the community, such as a print or email newsletter, is a great way to keep everyone informed about events, updates, news, and preparedness.

The value of transparent communication throughout the community cannot be understated. It forms the basis for a united response if an emergency or crisis should occur. It's important to connect with everyone to ensure seamless information flows, fostering a proactive and well-informed community. Decision-making processes that allow the entire community to take part help avoid division and encourage connection.

What's more, facilitating communication between our communities and service groups, such as fire departments, Emergency Health Services, and other public and private organizations, can lead to information sessions, facility donations, volunteer support, or financial sponsorship for community events.

Building resilient communities in Inverness County starts with recognizing the significance of connections among neighbours and residents. Initiatives that bring us together create a stronger, more united community. By promoting a sense of belonging, transparent widespread communication, and mutual support during times of need, Inverness County can serve as a model for resilience, where the bonds among us form the bedrock for a thriving community.

**Be safe and be awesome to each other. ■**

*Brett Hershey is an emergency management professional who is committed to the development of community resilience and public safety.*

*Over the last 15 years, Brett has held multiple emergency management positions, spoken as a subject matter expert and collaborated on projects across Canada. In addition, he has served as a paramedic in two provinces, a firefighter and a paramedic educator. Brett's diverse background demonstrates his commitment to community well-being and dynamic approach to emergency management and leadership.*



## Gaelic song preservation: A grandmother's gift



"I suppose it's all nanny's fault," laughs Sheena Anderson-Geiger, thinking back to how her passion for Gaelic song came to be.

"Honestly, it's so humbling that people are interested in our Gaelic song preservation project. I love they want to get involved and share the songs and stories that are meaningful to them."

Sheena's recording project promotes and preserves traditional Gaelic songs that have been sung in these lands for generations, giving them new life and bringing them to new audiences around the world.

With well-known musicians like fiddler Kimberley Fraser and pianist Mac Morin on board, she's assembled a winning team.



“Kimberley and I have been friends for years,” she says. “We actually sang together in the Gaelic choir led by Catriona Parsons – who was good friends with my grandmother – at StFX. I’ve been very fortunate over the years, that when I come to people and say, ‘I have an idea...’ they are excited to help.”

The project vision is to keep as true to tradition as possible by highlighting local people and culture, not least in Inverness County where two tunes are slated to be filmed during Easter and released later this year.

### **A family affair**

A native of Avondale, between New Glasgow and Am Baile Mòr (Antigonish), Sheena has deep roots on Colin L Drive in Siudaig Bheag (Little Judique). Back on the mainland, Sheena grew up beside her paternal grandmother Catherine (MacGillivray) Anderson, a beloved native Gaelic-speaker, schoolteacher, and direct descendant of not only one, but two, Jacobite soldiers who fought in the Battle of Culloden and are now laid to rest beside the Culloden Cairn in Knoydart, Pictou County.

When Catherine was growing up, Gaelic was actively being suppressed in Nova Scotia, and although it was her first language, her own children, including Sheena’s father, Michael, did not grow up speaking Gaelic fluently.

Nevertheless, Sheena remembers how her nanny would use certain words and phrases in the old language with her children and grandchildren, and of course how she passed down the words and tunes of many old songs.

“Like her own father before her, she used to sing Gaelic songs to us from her rocking chair by the wood stove,” she recalls lovingly.

“It’s a precious gift to give to a child,” Sheena says. “It’s the gift of our culture and heritage. My dad has been instrumental in passing the culture down too, with his love of fiddle music and taking us to dances. Even now, Dad rarely misses a dance – he loves to waltz!”

“I sort of took the culture for granted as a kid,” she remembers. “It was only when I moved away that

I saw other people didn’t have access to it. I came to realize the importance of saving these old songs which are part of who we are as Gaels.”

### **Passing down a living culture**

During the pandemic, when daycare wasn’t available and Sheena’s young daughter, Brea, was at home with her, she found herself wondering what she could teach the youngster that couldn’t be learned elsewhere. Gaelic songs were the answer, and Sheena quickly set about adding as many as she could to her repertoire and sharing them with Brea, who soaked them up with that voracious appetite for learning that children have.

This is how Sheena’s multi-lingual, child-focused YouTube channel was born. Brea now sings multiple Gaelic songs, and her baby brother, Andrew, who is not yet two, likes to walk around humming the fiddle tune *Fàgail Lios Mòr* (*Leaving Lismore*), which Sheena hums to him every night.

“My kids, my nephews, and my dad all joined the musicians and I for the first music video of this Gaelic song preservation project. It’s a really special feeling – my nanny would love it!”

### **Share your own songs**

With a couple of additional tunes about to be recorded for the project, Sheena is on the hunt for more songs that are dear to the hearts of local people.

“I’m always looking for beautiful old (or original) Gaelic songs that people remember and want to share with the world. I’d love for people to get in touch and share their songs with us. And we’re also on the lookout for funding to make more of these recordings possible – ideas on that front are very welcome too!” ■

### **Follow the project or get in touch with Sheena at:**

 +  Sheena Anderson

 SheenaAndersonMusic

Email: [sheenaandersonmusic@gmail.com](mailto:sheenaandersonmusic@gmail.com)

# Food security in Inverness County – small is big

BY CAROLINE CAMERON

Lately, our springs are later and colder, our autumns later and warmer, and who knows when the dry and wet spells will come? What we do know is that, with a bit of attention, our perennials will pop up again in the spring, we'll enjoy moments of glorious summer weather, and the crops will bring us their bounty.

At least the climate changes we've seen in the last years give us a broader range of small talk at the store, but as we chat, our eyes fall on yet another shocking price. While one might not know what we can do about the "big picture," it is we who decide how the story unfolds within our local communities.

As one drop of rain has little impact on our life, it is nothing but raindrops, or lack thereof, that decide if we will have vegetables and meat to eat. And so it is with our energy and our dollars – whether we have lots or a little, we get to decide ourselves how to spend it.

So what has this to do with gardens? Our pandemic experiences have made us aware of 'supply chain insecurity'. If there ever comes a time that food supply is interrupted, we will be mighty grateful that local producers have invested a lot of effort and hours in maintaining local farming.

Yes, local market prices are often higher than you'll find in the chain stores, but you know the quality, and really, I'm not seeing any evidence of those market vendors living high off the hog – they are working hard for their money! Meanwhile, grocery stores chains report record profits. Whatever way you spend your money, try to keep it local, and think of the range of benefits you can bring in terms of





local employment, food quality, and securing local food supply.

Similarly, there are ways that we can use our time to promote a secure food supply. Have a garden, and support local garden clubs, and initiatives like 4-H. Grow your food security, don't shrink it!

### Garden snippets

- March is the time to watch for critters on your house plants. If any plants were outside last summer, they might be harbouring some insect eggs that will 'wake up' for the spring to feed on tender new plant growth, and then spread to other plants. No worries, just spray them with some soapy water.
- It's also a good time to start thinking about seedlings. Generally, tender plants like tomatoes and peppers are started about eight weeks before the last frost, so mid-April is good for them.
- While broccoli and cauliflower will grow better in cooler temperatures, they also benefit from being started indoors because their seeds won't germinate until the soil temperature is warmer, so the indoor start makes the difference.
- A few things to remember – lots of light, larger pots means happier roots, don't overwater, don't fertilize, and make it easier on yourself by not planting the whole seed package!
- As soon as the snow leaves, you can pile all sorts of material onto a patch of lawn to block the light, and kill off the grass – cardboard, leaves, compost – and boom, you've got a garden patch. If you don't take this approach to establish a garden plot, it is still important to kill off the grass, which traditionally was done by flipping over the sod with a plow or shovel before the new grass starts to grow. Most soils here are clayey

enough that the soil will later need to be tilled. But if your soil is workable and relatively weed-free, tilling is not necessary. I never find that the first year of cultivation yields good results, but then look out for your second year!

- After the garden's first year of full operation, Mill Road Grows has been awarded the support of Rural Cape Breton's 100 Women Who Care. In addition, support from the federal Enabling Accessibility Fund has been green-lighted to make this community garden and greenhouse fully accessible.
- Mill Road Grows has been established by Mill Road Social Enterprises to provide a great community work experience for Mill Road Social Enterprises' participants, to encourage healthy eating, promote gardening as a healthy active hobby, and to build community. It is also a place to share skills and information that make it possible for anyone interested in local food security to make a contribution.

Mill Road Grows is now able to expand its gardening space for more community gardening, enhance accessibility, and open up allotment gardens for those who would like to rent a small garden plot just for themselves.

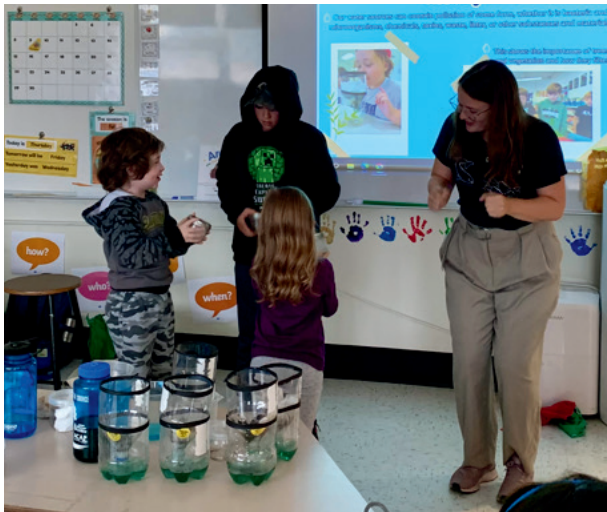
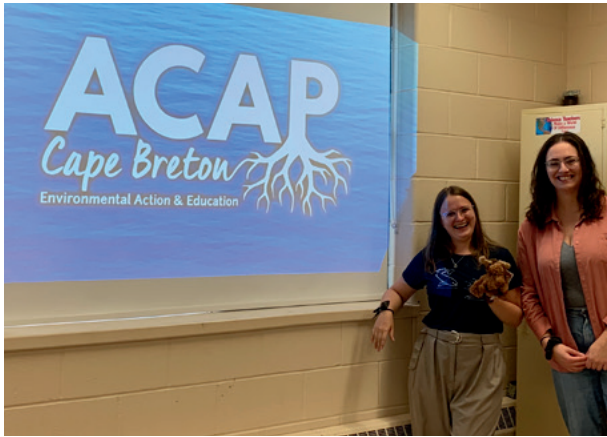
And it just won't be a community garden without the 'community.' Everyone, yes everyone, is welcome to drop by for a casual visit and harvest, or get involved.

So, do come by this season, and help yourself to some of the produce, or attend one of their many socials, workshops or work parties, or just bring a cup of tea to enjoy in the greenhouse. It's there for everyone. All levels of interest and involvement in this project are welcome, so please contact me at 902.258.5768, if you'd like more information.

*Happy gardening!*

Photo left: Kinsley MacLean, daughter of Breah Clarke and Leon MacLean, visiting the community garden in her neighbourhood at Mill Road Grows.

*Caroline Cameron lives in Strathlorne, and offers gardening and guiding services around Cape Breton Island. Please submit any gardening tips, questions, and news to [strathlorne@gmail.com](mailto:strathlorne@gmail.com) and visit Facebook at Nature/Nurture Gardening & Hiking.*



Clockwise from top, left: Meghan Tobin, left, education team lead with ACAP, was joined by Mairi Musgrave, the group's program coordinator. Inverness Academy students (L-R) Chloe Cormier, Mason Poirier, Caleb MacQuarrie and Sybil Forance build a filter. The grade five class at the Inverness school, along with Tobin, take part in the filter experiment which shows the importance of trees, plants and other vegetation and how they filter water. Students were encouraged to create their own water habitat. Tobin cheers on Pleasant Bay students (L-R) Autumn Tufford, Carter Pattingale and Bennett Bishop as they take part in the "no drainer" activity. Photos: contributed



# County students benefit from environmental partnership

BY DAVE MACNEIL

Local students are gaining an appreciation for water and where it comes from, thanks to a partnership between the Municipality of Inverness County and the Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP) Cape Breton.

ACAP Cape Breton visited five schools in October, including Inverness Education Centre/Academy, Cape Breton Highlands Education Centre/Academy in Terre Noire, Pleasant Bay School, Dalbrae Academy in Mabou and We’komaq Mikmaq School.

Monica Ragan, ACAP Cape Breton’s Program Manager for Western Cape Breton, says the municipality is providing support and input into activities. Presentations were done by Monica and her colleague Meaghan Tobin, the organization’s education lead.

“We have programming based on age,” explains Monica, who is originally from Whycocomagh but now lives in Port Hood. “For the younger ones, grade primary to two, we do a lot of reading and do some movement activities. It’s really designed to get the younger ones hearing words related to water and the water cycle, through movement and storytelling.”

She says older students in grades three to five learn about watersheds and source water, where their drinking water comes from and why it’s important to protect source water.

For students in grades six to eight, the focus is on wetlands and water quality.

“This is a specific lesson about wetlands, why they’re an important habitat for both living and non-living beings, but also how they help with water quality,” she adds.

With high school students, the presentations look mainly at climate change and citizen science, which is the role public volunteers can play in collecting and classifying scientific data. “Since this is a key time for students to be thinking about their careers, we talk about what traditional and non-traditional green careers look like,” Monica notes.

“It’s been very positive,” she says of the students’ response to the presentations. “They’re really engaged and interested.”

“Each presentation has a hands-on component,” Monica adds. “They’re really excited to get into groups and to do their teamwork and kind of problem-solve whatever situation we might ask them to tackle.”

She points to the ‘no-drainer’ activity they did with the younger students at Pleasant Bay School as an example of making science fun. She says three students are given mason jars, each holding a different item in water – toilet paper, paper towel and a so-called flushable wipe.

“Students have 15 to 30 seconds to shake it as hard as they can, like their toilet, and then we open up the jars to see what dissolved,” she explains. “We get everyone involved in cheering them on, and we get to see that the toilet paper dissolved but that the paper towel and flushable wipe are still intact, so it’s

**“They’re really excited to get into groups and to do their teamwork and kind of problem-solve whatever situation we might ask them to tackle.”**

cool to see the students’ reaction, and then you get conversation about what they flush down their toilet.”

“It’s kind of an eye-opener for them. This is a small demonstration, but it definitely makes an impact.”

ACAP Cape Breton is an environmental non-profit organization that offers the knowledge that Cape Bretoners need to make greener choices, and works directly on practical solutions that help protect and restore the natural environment. Established in 1992 to assist with tar pond remediation in the Sydney area, the organization has evolved into a dynamic group that integrates environmental, social, and economic factors into projects focusing on action, education, and ecosystem planning.

For the first three decades of its existence, the group focused its efforts within the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. The partnership with the Municipality of Inverness County doesn’t just include school visits, but also a series of watershed walks to educate people and share ideas about the importance of protecting watershed areas. The first walk was held last fall in the Margaree/Lake Ainslie watershed area, with a second along the Chéticamp river in January.

Monica says ACAP Cape Breton also held an event at L’Arche in Orangedale, with a presentation on micro-plastics.

“We talked about micro-plastics, what they are, how they form, how they end up in the environment, and then we lead a litter cleanup along the Orangedale Road with those in attendance,” she recalls “Unfortunately, there was quite a lot of litter to pick up! But it was a good thing to do.”

Monica says it’s exciting to have the opportunity to share her knowledge and love of the environment with people in her home county, and to learn from them at the same time.

“It’s really exciting to engage with all the residents, to share what I’ve learned and hear their concerns,” she notes. “You can learn so much. Even if people don’t have a background in environmental sciences, they have the intimate knowledge of what they’ve seen over time, and that’s just as valuable.”

“And having a career here in Inverness County is wonderful. I get to come home and be with my family and friends. It’s really great.”

Educated at Whycocomagh Education Centre and Dalbrae Academy in Mabou, Monica did her undergraduate work at StFX University.

“I went originally for Celtic Studies and during the process I realized how much I love the environment and water and things like that,” she explains. “I learned about the Aquatic Resources Program, so I did a fifth year, and I was able to graduate with an honours in anthropology and aquatic resources. From there I went to Dalhousie to do my master’s in environmental studies before graduating in the fall of 2021.”

Monica started with ACAP Cape Breton in January 2022 as an intern. When her internship ended, she was brought on full-time.

She says when they were booking the school visits last September, there was so much interest they were unable to get to every school, but she says the group plans to resume its school visits in the spring.

“We’re hoping to get back out in probably April and May,” she says. “We’re hoping to get back to those schools who didn’t get the chance to hear the presentation.” ■





# La Mi-Carême demeure une tradition bien vivante à Chéticamp

PAR DANIEL AUCOIN

*Michael Soucy Photography*





Read an english translation of this article online at [participaperonline.ca/courons-la\\_ensemble](https://participaperonline.ca/courons-la_ensemble)

Les Acadiens de la région de Chéticamp aiment partager leur patrimoine et leur culture. La Mi-Carême est l'une des plus vieilles traditions acadiennes encore célébrée dans cette communauté chaque hiver. Il s'agit bien de l'un des événements festifs les plus attendus de l'année.

De nos jours, la Mi-Carême est devenue une occasion de festoyer pendant une semaine avec musique et déguisements. La tradition permet de rompre avec les rigueurs de l'hiver dans la joie et les rires.

L'historien Georges Arsenault de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard est l'auteur du livre *La Mi-Carême en Acadie*. Selon lui :



*Aujourd'hui, si l'on veut courir la Mi-Carême aux provinces Maritimes, il n'y a d'autre choix que de se rendre dans la région de Chéticamp et Saint-Joseph-du-Moine en Nouvelle-Écosse. Dans ce coin bien connu du Cap-Breton, les mi-carêmes n'ont jamais manqué à leur rendez-vous annuel.*

*La semaine de la Mi-Carême est maintenant devenue une grande fête communautaire. Les éléments de base sont toujours les mêmes, à savoir la mascarade, le porte-à-porte, l'accueil, la musique, la danse, les friandises et même les boissons alcoolisées.*

Comme son nom l'indique, la Mi-Carême se célèbre au milieu de la période dite du carême, une période de 40 jours de privations qui précède la semaine sainte dans le calendrier chrétien. Anciennement, les costumes et les masques servaient à cacher l'identité des gens qui brisaient la période de pénitence du Carême.

De nos jours, à chaque mois de mars, les Acadiens d'ici sortent leurs déguisements, leurs masques et leurs instruments de musique. Plusieurs semaines avant la fête, les gens de la région vont aménager leur maison, leur sous-sol ou leur garage afin d'accueillir les mi-carêmes. À l'intérieur des maisons, le plancher est recouvert de carton et des chaises sont installées pour accueillir les mi-carêmes.

Les mordus de la Mi-Carême préparent leurs costumes des mois à l'avance. Les déguisements de la Mi-Carême sont de tous les genres. Les coureux revêtent leurs costumes et parquent de maison en maison en tentant de dissimuler leur identité. Les mi-carêmes vont changer leur démarche et contrefaire leur voix pour mystifier leurs hôtes.

L'objectif ultime pour les mi-carêmes est de ne pas être reconnu par parents et amis. Le jeu de devinette se poursuit jusqu'aux petites heures du matin. Lorsqu'elles se font démasquer, on offre aux mi-carêmes du sucre à la crème, des mets traditionnels acadiens et des breuvages.

Plusieurs véritables passionnés de la fête reviennent d'ailleurs à chaque année pour courir la Mi-Carême à Chéticamp. Jeunes et moins jeunes participent jour et nuit à cette belle tradition vivante. Cette grande période de réjouissances et de divertissements n'est pas près de s'éteindre dans cette région du Cap-Breton.

Au Havre de Grand-Étang, on retrouve le Centre de la Mi-Carême qui vise à préserver cette ancienne tradition qui perdure dans la communauté acadienne depuis plus de 200 ans. Ce centre d'interprétation propose une magnifique collection de masques artisanaux fabriqués localement, de même que des expositions interactives qui racontent l'évolution de la Mi-Carême.

De nos jours, la Mi-Carême est toujours célébrée dans la région de Chéticamp au Cap-Breton, à Fatima aux Îles de la Madeleine et à Natashquan et l'Île-aux-Grues au Québec ■



Michael Soucy Photography

# Participaper Listings

The Municipality of Inverness County

**Main Switchboard**  
902.787.2274

**Main Fax**  
902.787.3110

**Executive Office**  
**Chief Administrative Officer**  
902.787.3501

**Finance, Water and Tax Dept.**  
**Tax Collections**  
902.787.3510

**Water Utility**  
902.787.3505

**Tourism and Recreation**  
**Director of Tourism**  
902.787.3507

**Director of Recreation**  
902.787.3508

**Adult Education / Literacy**  
902.258.3110  
1.877.258.5550 (toll free)

**Public Works**  
**Dept. of Public Works**  
902.787.3503

**Water / Wastewater Operations**  
902.787.3503

**After Hours Emergency Number**  
902.258.5048

**Toll Free Number for Missed Solid Waste Pickup**  
GFL Missed Garbage Collection  
1.888.863.1744

**Other Municipal Waste Management Questions**  
1.866.258.0223

**Other Listings**  
**Eastern District Planning Commission**  
General Inquiries  
902.625.5361

**E-911 Civic Addressing**  
902.625.5366

**Building Inspector**  
902.625.5361

**Secondary Number**  
902.295.2900

1.888.625.5361 (toll free)

**Assistant Building Inspector / Fire Inspector**  
902.787.2900

**Secondary Number**  
902.631.2900

**Other Services**  
**Community Services**  
902.787.4000  
1.800.252.2275 (toll free)

**Inverness County Home Care**  
902.787.3449

**Cheticamp Home Care**  
902.224.1872

**Municipal Homes**  
**Foyer Pere Fiset**  
902.224.2087

**Inverary Manor**  
902.258.2842

**Coady Tompkins Library**  
902.248.2821

**Emergency Measures Contact**  
902.787.3500

## REGULAR COUNCIL MEETINGS

take place on the first Thursday of each month and start at 3:00 p.m. These meetings are open to the public.

The municipality's Facebook page also carries up-to-date information on Inverness County events and other items of interest to our residents.

**f @InvernessCounty**  
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