

REES' Pieces

Transparency becomes blurred

2020 is becoming a year we will not forget and will have several entries in the history books, causing some to think, "How did they ever pull through" all those obstacles. The answer is simple, "We are Nova Scotians, and we are Strong".

To recap a few obstacles, first there was Covid-19 pandemic, which at first didn't seem to be much to worry about, but within six weeks, by mid-April, commenced to see how it was devastating the economy, and causing us to stay inside, scared to even open the front door; schools were closed and thousands had lost their jobs, temporarily with a large number to be lost forever.

Then on April 18-19, Canada's largest mass murder started in Portapique, ending 12 hours later in Enfield with the loss of 22 lives. Since then there has not been many positive events. Compared to the USA, Premier McNeil and Dr. Strang along with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gained popularity for the daily updates and how they delivered the "cold-hard facts" without sugar-coating.

Gnawing in the back of everyone's mind was the grief and sorry from the Portapique murders and a constant call for a public inquiry. Families, friends and fellow citizens from Nova Scotia and across Canada were calling for a "public inquiry" to reveal all the facts, but not expediently with a quick decision.

Upwards of 50 senators, many politicians, business leaders, chimed in requesting the federal and provincial governments call for a "public inquiry". It took federal minister, Bill Blair and provincial minister, Mark Furey almost three months to announce their decision, of an almost secret review, which did not fulfill the public outcry.

The three officials who will conduct the review come to the table with excellent credentials. No one, to my knowledge, has questioned their involvement. However, under a review, they will not call for witnesses to testify under oath, or call for many documents, others feel should be part of the inquiry.

Even though, a review has been called opposition to the decision and demanding a 'Public Inquiry' is just starting to gain traction. Some people suggest, just as Nova Scotians and fellow Canadians "stood" with the community and family members in grief and sorrow, there will be an ever growing outcry to change the status from a review to an inquiry.

Many media accounts, since the "review" announcement suggests the announcement raised more questions than it answered. The importance of "going forward" and answering many questions from family, neighbours, and fellow Canadians seems to be overshadowed, with many suggesting total transparency has been blurred as a result of underlying factors including:

Ministers Blair and Furey are former police officers, before entering politics, and some ask "Are they trying to protect former colleagues or institution? Should Blair and Furey recuse themselves to avoid public perception of "potential conflicts"?; Was their decision based on family, public, and fellow Canadians, or was their decision driven for political reasons?

In politics public opinion rises and falls like a yo-yo. The federal and provincial ruling parties saw a significant rise in their popularity for the way they handled Covid-19 activities, but it can be an even quicker slump downward, when the public is upset. Could the decision for a "review" cause popularity to head to the bottom, if public opinion continues to increase?

I suspect with the emotion of grief and caring others (not family members) have invested in the situation, the calls for "public inquiry" will only increase, and may cause political decisions to change.

In the long term, Colchester and Cumberland Counties will be in for tremendous growth with the UNESCO designation of Cliffs of Fundy as an approved GeoPark. It will take massive planning to ensure the two counties start out on the appropriate course to achieve the maximum economic benefits possible. Paramount to achieving these goals is to have high speed broadband delivered without delay. If the shoreline and remainder of the counties get connected, many types of businesses will evolve or relocate here.

It will take everyone's most sincere efforts to achieve a "public inquiry", and increase the economic base without destroying "quality of life", we enjoy.

Maurice

OP-ED

Closing the Digital Divide Key to Economic Recovery

By Tom Taggart

It's been four months since COVID-19 turned life upside down, and municipal leaders have been on the front lines of it all. Here in Nova Scotia, and right across Canada, we've worked flat-out to keep families and businesses protected. Local leaders have turned arenas into shelters, ensured public facilities are safe and clean for residents, and kept essential services running strong—all while facing plummeting revenues.

And throughout this pandemic, our rural communities have faced a critical disadvantage. Two million most-rural Canadians still can't access a decent, reliable Internet connection. That was true before COVID-19, but this pandemic has driven home the overwhelming urgency of closing that digital divide.

We have rural residents who can't work from home and students who can't participate in "virtual"

classrooms. We see doctors who can't access vital patient records when they need them. This is about small business owners who can't sell their products online and entire communities that can't reach their full economic potential. Every Canadian struggled to stay and feel connected throughout this pandemic, but that was so much harder in rural areas. This needs to change, once and for all.

Rural communities are doing what we can to innovate and invest. My county is part of a regional partnership of municipalities, a Canadian Internet service provider and Develop Nova Scotia—driving a project that will install almost 700 kms of optic fibre. When we're done, 21,700 currently-underserved Nova Scotia households and businesses will have better internet access. But all governments need to step up if we want to bring affordable, high-speed Internet to all Canadians—no matter where they live.

I have been working actively

within the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) as we engage the federal government to make that happen. After years of FCM's advocacy, Federal Budget 2019 committed significant funding to improve broadband and cellular connectivity—including \$1 billion for a Universal Broadband Fund. This was a boost for rural communities, but more than a year later, my residents are asking me when the money will flow and connections will improve.

FCM is bringing the message that broadband access needs to be a top priority for investment straight to federal decision-makers. We did that in a recent submission to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. FCM's Rural Forum did it again on a special teleconference with Rural Economic Development Minister Maryam Monsef. And while her response has been encouraging, my residents are impatient for action—and I'm right there with them.

That's a message we can all be taking to our members of Parliament. It's time to launch the Universal Broadband Fund, and to make sure it leads to real and swift results in our communities.

As Canada moves from pandemic response to recovery, investing in our communities will be vital. For a full recovery, every community needs the tools to thrive. In 2020, that has to include bringing high-speed Internet to every household and business. Rural communities need that. And with rural industries driving nearly a third of Canada's GDP—from tourism to forestry to agriculture—this entire, big, beautiful country needs it too.

Tom Taggart, Councillor, Municipality of Colchester and Vice-Chair FCM's Rural Forum

Review Not Sitting Well

Continued from page 1

They indicated plans will be formulated and they will ask for public support to pressure the decision be changed to a public format, so all evidence is readily available to the public.

From a scan of various media on Friday and Saturday, opposition to a review and drive for a public inquiry seems to be gaining traction. The review will address a variety of issues relating to the perpetrator, police and other law enforcement agencies, as well as victims and families. Topics to be reviewed include: contributing and contextual factors including the involvement of gender-based and intimate-partner violence; the perpetrator's access to firearms; police response

and police communications with the public, victims, their families, the Alert Ready Program and other law enforcement agencies

Ministers Furey and Blair committed all agencies and organizations under their respective jurisdiction and authority will participate fully in this review, ensuring the panel has what it needs to fulfill its mandate. These include, but are not limited to, the Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office, the Nova Scotia Medical Examiner's Office, all municipal police forces in Nova Scotia, the RCMP, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Canada Firearms Program, the Criminal Intelligence Service and the national Alert Ready Program.

One additional fact was both the interim and final report outlining findings and recommendations will be made public

Additional resources: Joint federal-provincial news release:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2020/07/governments-of-canada-and-nova-scotia-announce-joint-review-of-nova-scotia-tragedy.html>

Backgrounder: Independent Review Panel for April Tragedy: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2020/07/independent-review-panel-for-april-tragedy.html>

Independent Review Terms of Reference: <https://www.public-safety.gc.ca/cnt/cntnrg-crm/plcng/2020-nsir-tor-en.aspx>

Best In Show at Plein Air Festival

By Bruce Lantz

A painting by Debbie Mueller of Durham, New Hampshire, "Suspended Service", was named Best in Show at the 2020 Parrsboro International Plein Air festival on June 28. Mueller will receive a cash award of \$1,500 CAD plus a half-page ad in Plein Air Magazine valued at US\$2150.

Thirty artists from across North America participated in PIPAF in ISOLATION, which for the first time utilized an online-only format due to the COVID-19 pandemic instead of seeing the artists travel to Parrsboro, NS on the shores of the Bay of Fundy, home to the world's highest tides and some of the most stunning scenery to be found anywhere.

In addition to Mueller's win, judge Tom Forrestall named Diane Leifheit of Paul Smiths, NY as winner of the second-place award of \$1,000 CAD for "Bog River Falls", while the third-place prize of \$750 went to Thomas Bucci of Washington, DC for "Caffe Pomeridiano". The People's Choice award of \$500 went to Mueller for "Nubble Morning".

The \$300 prizes for Best Nocturne and Best Use of Light went to Wesley Lowe of Bridgewater, NS and Alison Menke of Clarksville, MD, respectively.

Honourable Mentions went to Oliver Hatton of Middle Lehave, NS, Sara Gray of Falmouth, ME, Douglas Williamson of Calgary, AB, Richard Sneary of Kansas City, MI and Henry Coe of Parkton, MD "The light is what made it (special). It stood

right out," judge Forrestall said of Muller's Best in Show piece.

"I'm beyond overwhelmed," said Mueller. "In this year and this time, when so many have quit it was very brave and creative to do this virtual event."

"En plein air" is a French expression that means "in the open air" and describes the art of outdoor painting, capturing landscapes and views in natural light. It has been a popular practice for centuries and requires specific skills and techniques requires adaptability to a changing environment and a speed in applying painting techniques.

Parrsboro Creative has been hosting the event, the largest in Canada, since 2017. It's part of the organization's vision of developing the area's cultural economy through the creation of a community of artists and artisans that will rejuvenate Parrsboro. With pandemic-inspired travel restrictions in place, organizers determined to forge ahead anyway and devised the PIPAF in ISOLATION concept, which allowed arts enthusiasts to watch the artists at work in their home communities through videos and livestreaming, and to view and even buy the completed works, all online at parrsborocreative.com/pleinair/pipaf-isolation. Artist profiles, examples of their work, the awards ceremony and more are hosted on the website.

Bruce Lantz can be contacted at 902-728-2007 or info@parrsborocreative.com

The Shoreline Journal

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PHONE: 902-647-2968; Fax: 902-647-2194 Toll Free 1-800-406-1426; Cell: 902-890-9850 • E-MAIL: maurice@theshorelinejournal.com

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