

# Community Schools Still Alive Elsewhere

By Carol Hyslop

On May 30, I attended the Small Schools Summit 2015 at River John Elementary School. There I learned an amazing fact: 'Community School' is alive and well and living in Chester Grant, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia!

For those of you old enough to remember, 'Community School' was an initiative introduced in Nova Scotia through the Department of Education in the very early 1980s. A representative for the initiative came to a Home & School (H&S) meeting in my community of Wentworth, Cumberland County, to encourage the formation of a 'Community School' group.

The H&S was told the 'Community School' movement evolved out of Flint, Michigan, USA, as an effort to stem vandalism against city schools and where it was found community use of school buildings fostered a feeling of ownership which in turn promoted a feeling of community responsibility and care for the building. The NS Department of Education believed such a method would be of use in our province and if Wentworth decided to form a 'Community School' group it would be supported and funded (!) by the Department.

This was not a new concept in Wentworth or other rural Nova Scotia communities where school buildings were viewed as community property and were historically used for community activities. However, in 1980 responsibility for and care of school buildings was gradually being removed from local Boards of Trustees and given to the then-new Cumberland District School Board.

The new school board knew little about the communities or the residents they were charged with serving and had many school buildings to manage resulting in a different take on community use of buildings. The proposed 'Community School' initiative gave the people of Wentworth an authorized method for the continued use of their school building and a group was quickly formed. Wentworth Community School was one of many formed in Cumberland County. The largely rural nature of the county meant it was not serviced by the social or recreational entities who supply a level of opportunities in urban areas. The support from the Department of Education in opening school buildings for community use free of charge and in funding coordinators allowed small rural communities to offer similar activities to their residents.

What did a 'Community School' do? In Wentworth CS efforts provided activities for both children and adults. The group supported the school by supplementing its curriculum with visiting artists, book fairs, recreational activities and school volunteers. It organized and staffed a community library in the building. It provided teachers and students with computers before they were made available through the school board and eventually helped create a C@Psite in the school.

For adults it hosted numerous craft classes, adult education classes, physical activities and supplied space for meetings. All these things were presented at a cost rural people could afford as the organizational work was done by volunteers and the space in the school building was provided free. It was a successful and valuable initiative that promoted a mutually beneficial relationship between government (Department of Education, school boards) and the community.

When the funding ran out and support from the Department of Education disappeared, the Cumberland District School Board offered

the 'Community Schools' in their jurisdiction continued free use of school buildings if they wished to continue as volunteer groups. Wentworth Community School accepted this offer and continued to operate. In the mid 1990s, the government of the day saw fit to dissolve smaller school boards and form new larger ones. Cumberland County saw itself lumped together with Pictou and Colchester-East Hants counties in the Chignecto Central Regional School Board.

Elected school board members from Cumberland soon found out Pictou and Colchester-East Hants boards had not been as generous to 'Community School' groups in their areas. Community use of buildings was not encouraged in these counties and, it was thought, should not be encouraged in Cumberland either.

A series of negotiations between Cumberland Community School groups and the new board ensued. The result of the negotiations was, for Wentworth, a signed "partnership" agreement between the board, the school and the community which permitted Community School operations to continue in the school

building free of charge and set out the responsibilities of each of the partners. And so 'Community School' continued in Wentworth.....until June 2014.

In June 2014, the locks were changed on Wentworth Consolidated Elementary School and the Wentworth Community School Council was informed by letter they would no longer be permitted to use the building free of charge. No warning, no prior consultation, no acceptable reason submitted to the group, no opportunity to discuss the decision.

After thirty years of successful operation, Wentworth Community School was judged to have been operating outside the policy and guidelines of the board and was locked out. A sad repayment for years of volunteer dedication and scrupulous following of responsibilities stipulated in the agreement signed with the board.

It was with great interest I found the 'Community School' initiative had survived and developed into something positive in another area of Nova Scotia. In fact, the school in Chester Grant is named "Forest Heights Community School" and operates as 'Community Schools' did in the beginning, with a co-ordinator acting as a liaison between the community and the school.

What is different is the Municipality of Chester supports the 'Community School' through its Recreation and Parks Department. It is to be supposed the South Shore Regional School Board has a more lenient view of community use of school buildings and are able to recognize the obvious... and not-so obvious... benefits of such a partnership.



MLA Karen Casey congratulates Carmen Davidson as the new President of the Colchester North Liberal Association. (Harrington Photo)



Councillor Doug MacInnes chats with Bill Casey, Liberal candidate for the riding of Cumberland-Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley, after the Colchester North Liberal Association AGM. (Harrington Photo)



Bruce Elliott, Kevin MacAleese and Gerald Elliott provided entertainment at the BBQ social following the Colchester North Liberal Association AGM. (Harrington Photo)



Amy Jennings presents Mrs. Margaret Davidson with a bouquet of flowers during her retirement party at the Chiganois Elementary School on June 18th. Mrs. D has taught for 33 years, with 15 years at Chiganois Elementary. (Harrington Photo)



Margaret Davidson listens to Hannah Burke, Emma Purdy and Lauren Sooksom as they read one of her favourite stories, The Gingerbread Man Loose in the School. Every year Mrs. D would read this to her class. She is sitting in a lovely chair, the students decorated with handprints for her as a retirement gift. (Harrington Photo)

## MacInnes wants Debert Airport Updated

By Maurice Rees

Councillor MacInnes, District 9, at Colchester Council's meeting on May 28th suggested applications for funding should be made to carry out infrastructure improvements to the Debert Airport. He suggested with Federal Programs recently announced, the timing might be right to pave the runway, tarmac repairs and even consider extending the runway.

Suggested projects included: \$300,000 for fencing; \$975,000 to repave the runway and major repairs to the Tarmac. Deputy Mayor Master interjected perhaps possible extension of the runway to

handle larger aircraft would be a good plan.

MacInnes sees the Debert airport as being the catalyst to a significant economic generator for the area and the province as a whole. In his final comment on the

matter he mentioned Debert's airport is basically "fog free", or at least has the least occurrence of fog of any airport in the province. The matter will be discussed in greater detail at an upcoming council meeting.

## Stolen Property Recovered

A John Deere lawn tractor and 20 bales on insulation were recovered by Colchester District RCMP following an investigation into thefts from businesses in Onslow and Debert. A 21-year-old male has been charged with two counts of possession of stolen property. He was released from custody and will appear in Truro Provincial Court

on September 2.

A 2015 John Deere lawn tractor, that had been stolen on June 9, 2015 from Green Diamond Equipment in Lower Onslow, was recovered. RCMP also recovered 20 bales of Weathershield insulation that had been stolen in October 2014 from Thermo-Cell Industries in Debert.

**SERVICE & PARTS**  
MOPAR PEOPLE. MOPAR PARTS.

THE ORIGINAL HOME OF  
**BUY 3 TIRES  
 GET 4TH TIRE  
 FREE**

AVAILABLE ON TIRES FROM:  
 BRIDGESTONE Firestone DUNLOP Continental GOODYEAR KELLY TIRES  
 GENERAL TIRE YOKOHAMA

**BLAIKIES**

**BLAIKIES DODGE CHRYSLER JEEP LTD.**

28 Waddell Street, Truro, NS B2N 5C5  
 902-893-4381 www.blaikies.com

HOURS: MON-WED: 7:30-5:30  
 THURS: 7:30-7:00 FRI: 7:30-5:30  
 SAT: 8:00-1:00