

## Lieutenant Governor Community Spirit Award Entry Form

Thank you for taking the time to tell your community's stories and what makes it so special.

- Please fill out the following information and then continue to complete your nomination by adding extra pages to this word document so that it will arrive in one single attachment.
- Please save your file by community name.
- All entries should be in Microsoft Word format and, if appropriate, in video format (avi or mpg only) as a second attachment.
- **All completed entry forms and submissions must be emailed to [submissions@communityspiritaward.ca](mailto:submissions@communityspiritaward.ca) by midnight, January 31, 2010.**

Community Name: St. Peter's

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

1. Village on the Canal Association (VOCA)
2. St. Peter's Economic Development Organization (SPEDO)
3. St. Peter's Village Commission
4. St. Peter's Lions Club
5. MacAskill House Museum Society
6. St. Peter's and District Volunteer Fire Department (SPDVFD)
7. St. Peter's Community Club
8. MacAskill Yacht Club
9. Bonnie Brae Senior Citizens Club
10. East Richmond Education Centre Home and School Association
11. Strait-Highlands Regional Development Agency

By submitting your nomination you are agreeing to allow the Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award to post your stories on the Award's website and to share these stories online with the Award's media partners.



## Introduction

The village of St. Peter's in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia has a fascinating history dating to 1650 when it was settled by adventurer Nicolas Denys. Today, the remains of forts which were the first line of defense and a source of supply for the Fortress Louisbourg are waiting to be explored in Battery Provincial Park, where a series of walking trails takes you through the park and around the village.



The famous St. Peter's Canal, a National Historic site which joins the Atlantic Ocean to the sparkling Bras D'Or Lake, winds its way through Battery Provincial Park, creating a popular spot for fishing, picnicking, swimming and site seeing. The Nicolas Denys Museum, adjacent to the canal, tells the story of this famous explorer and fur trader. A full service marina on the Bras D'Or Lake side of the canal can accommodate fishing and pleasure boats of all kinds.

St. Peter's, the birth place of world famous marine photographer, Wallace R. MacAskill is a must see. MacAskill's 115 year old home displays over 100 hand tinted photographs and artifacts dating back to the early days of photography. MacAskill's famous Bluenose photo is still reproduced on the Canadian dime.

## History

### 1630 – 1758

St. Peter's is one of North America's oldest European settlements, tracing its history to the 1630s when a small fortified settlement named "Saint Pierre" was built by merchants from La Rochelle, France on the isthmus. In 1650, La Rochelle merchant Nicolas Denys took possession of Saint Pierre and encouraged the fur trade with local members of the Mi'kmaq Nation who used the isthmus as a canoe portage route between the Atlantic Ocean and Bras d'Or Lake.



In addition to establishing a fur trading post, Denys later used the isthmus as a "haul over road" for portaging small sailing ships from Bras d'Or Lake to the Atlantic and vice versa.



France lost possession of present-day peninsular (main land) Nova Scotia to Britain in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. France began moving some Acadian colonists to Ile Royale (present-day Cape Breton Island) to populate this remaining outpost of Acadia. Port Toulouse was created near the 17th century location of the fortified community of Saint Pierre as a logistics base and supply centre for Fortress Louisbourg. To protect Port Toulouse, France built another fortification on the shore. The forts at Port Toulouse and Saint Pierre and settlements in the area were destroyed by the British in 1758 following the fall of Fortress Louisbourg and the rest of Acadia became a British colony.

### **1758 – Present**

Acadia in its entirety was given the name Nova Scotia, which was used since 1713 for Britain's portion of the territory. Britain sponsored settlers and displaced veterans from the Seven Years' War to move into the area of Saint Pierre/Port Toulouse. France declared war on Great Britain on February 1, 1793 during the French Revolutionary Wars. In response, Britain built Fort Dorchester on the summit of Mount Granville, a hill overlooking the isthmus.

The village of St. Peters was founded early in the 1800s. Local residents rehabilitated Denys's old "haul over road", laying wood skids for portaging small sailing ships across the isthmus. The route through the Bras d'Or Lake was considered a much shorter and safer voyage to Sydney than traveling around the exposed southern coast of Cape Breton Island. In 1825 a feasibility study into building a canal was undertaken. Construction of the St. Peters Canal began in 1854 and took 15 years of digging, blasting and drilling through a solid granite hill 20 m (65 ft) high to build a channel 800 m (2,600 ft) long with an average width of 30 m (100 ft). The canal opened in 1869 at the dawn of the industrial age on Cape Breton Island and quickly became a defining feature of the community and of the Island. There is tidal activity at both ends of the canal, and there can be a difference of up to 1.4 m (4.5 ft.) between the water level of the lake and ocean. For this reason, both entrances have double-lock gates (a unique structure in Nova Scotia).

The walls of the canal were lined with timber planking and locks were installed at each end. Modifications to the canal and lock continued until 1917 and the canal saw moderate to heavy use by small coastal steamships and barges, particularly during the First and Second World Wars when coal from the Sydney Coal Field was transported on this sheltered inland route to avoid U boats. A marble quarry on the western shore of Bras d'Or Lake at Marble Mountain also generated some shipping traffic.



# St. Peter's

*The Village on the Canal*

The canal was designated a National Historic Site in 1929 and the federal government took over its operation. Parks Canada is the government agency responsible for its maintenance and operation and undertook a major project to restore both entrances to the canal in 1985. During the postwar, commercial shipping has largely avoided traveling through Bras d'Or Lake and the canal is almost exclusively used by pleasure boats, particularly sail boats with the increased popularity of cruising Bras d'Or Lake in recent decades.

Parks Canada operates the canal from May to October each year. Vessels transiting the canal are limited by the size of the lock, which measures 91.44 m (301 ft) long, 14.45 m (47 ft) wide, and 4.88m (16 ft) draught. The ruins of Nicolas Denys' Fort Saint Pierre are located on the grounds of the lock master's house (ca. 1876) and the ruins of Fort Dorchester are located on Mount Granville which overlooks the Atlantic approach to the canal.



The Forts are located within the vicinity of Battery Provincial Park. The park is open from June 20 until September 15 and offers a 56 site wooded hillside campground, comfort station (showers and flush toilets), open picnic area, and unsupervised beach. A network of walking trails provide excellent views of the surroundings and much of the history of the site is described at interpretive sites along the way. The latest addition to this system is a new walkway which was opened this past September to create a stronger link between our celebrated park area and the community core of St. Peter's.

Jerome Point Light is located within the Park and celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008. At 51 feet above water, the Light serves as a landmark for the entrance to St. Peter's Canal. The latest highlight for this historic light is its appearance in a national Tim Horton's commercial where St. Peter's is featured prominently by name.





## St. Peter's Today

St. Peter's, a full-service community, bustles with activity all summer long, with the annual Nicolas Denys Days Festival which leads into the first long weekend in August. The community is located along Route 4 between Port Hawkesbury and Sydney and has an overall population of just over 1,400 people (visit Nova Scotia Community Counts, S. Peter's Community Profile for more information; [www.gov.ns.ca/communitycounts](http://www.gov.ns.ca/communitycounts) ). As the commercial center of Richmond County, it offers accommodations, camping, restaurants, coffee shops, grocery store, gift and craft shops, pharmacies, financial institutions, instant tellers, liquor store, service stations, several churches, a visitor information centre, museums and recreational facilities.

**St. Peter's is a community undertaking a major transformation.** In 2006, the Village of St. Peter's began a multi-year planning process that has resulted in a visionary conceptual plan for the Village looking out to 2025. We are excited about our new community – you should see us now!

Facilitated by the Strait-Highlands Regional Development Agency, the planning process was intensively consultative, with community groups, businesses and residents participating actively. The formation of a new economic development group that includes representatives from 13 existing community organizations was a key component of the process.



*Newly Renovated Business Storefront*

This group, the St. Peter's Economic Development Organization (SPEDO), is working in partnership with the Strait-Highlands Regional Development Agency, to implement a commercial storefront and streetscape program that is seeing the Village embrace its history and ready itself for the future with renovations and infrastructure upgrades all along the main street and some adjacent areas. Businesses and residents have taken ownership of this new vision; St. Peter's is already sporting a brand new look with extensive streetscape improvements and business façade improvements (8 completed, 10 underway or in design stage).



*New Community Kiosk*

To download the St. Peter's Main Street and Village Conceptual Plan, visit [www.strait-highlands.ns.ca/shrda/shrda\\_main.nsf/StPetersConceptualPlan.pdf](http://www.strait-highlands.ns.ca/shrda/shrda_main.nsf/StPetersConceptualPlan.pdf) .

In conjunction with this project, the largest municipal infrastructure project ever undertaken in the County of Richmond was implemented over the past year in St. Peter's.



A new water treatment and delivery system is joining the Village of St. Peter's with the adjacent community of Sampsonville, providing access to residents in both areas to water of excellent quality. This water infrastructure project is typical of the type of activity that occurs in St. Peter's. Although the Village limits are very specific, St. Peter's is a gathering place for social and commercial interests for the entire Eastern region of Richmond County. The communities of River Bourgeois, L'Ardoise, Grand River, Forchu, Framboise, Loch Lomond, Johnstown, Barra Head, Chapel Island, Sampsonville, St. George's Channel all have close ties to the Village of St. Peter's.

St. Peter's has also seen a major renovation completed at its local elementary school (which serves all of the smaller communities mentioned above, in addition to the Village). East Richmond Education Centre (EREC) students moved into their new and improved building in mid-January 2009. The renovation included an expanded gym, modernized classroom facilities, and improved administration, communication and security features.



The Village of St. Peter's has a longstanding history of supporting early education. Run by volunteers alone, the St. Peter's Playschool group educates and nurtures children from across eastern Richmond County. Students in this program flourish, developing individual strengths and team building as demonstrated through this year's Festival of Trees celebration where they won "Best Youth Group." St. Peter's Playschool has run for over 20 years on "volunteer power" – with little or no government funding!

Part of the planning process in St. Peter's was the identification of specific initiatives that promote the Village as a "choice life style destination" by developing year-round recreational activities and youth infrastructure / activities. A committee of dedicated individuals is advancing a project for an outdoor fitness and recreational development adjacent to the school property in the centre of the Village. The St. Peter's Lions Club has taken a lead role in assisting with the planning of a multi-use park area for use by the school and community at large – donating land and expertise to the development of this recreational space. For many years, organizations such as the Lions Club have taken an extremely active role in supporting the education of children in the community. This park will include wheelchair accessible fitness equipment – another example of St. Peter's residents working to make their community a better place and always thinking of those with varying abilities.



The Lions Club also operates a full service marina along the shores of the Bras d'Or Lakes. The St. Peter's Marina is a premier destination on the Lakes where some of the finest sailing in the world is done. Known for its gentle, fog-free waters, beautiful anchorages and hundreds of coves and islands, the Lakes are an international cruising destination that attract hundreds of boating enthusiasts every year.



The St. Peter's Marina has conducted several major expansion/upgrade projects over the last few years, and is an integral part of the community. Boating enthusiasts from around the globe flock to the Lakes each year, and are invariably impressed with the welcoming nature of the Village (often remarking on how even the local grocery store will deliver them back to the Marina with groceries in hand!)

Adjacent to the school is the newly built Richmond Villa (opened in 2006). This modernized complex serves clients from across Cape Breton Island, delivering care programs that support healthy living for seniors residing at the complex and in the surrounding communities. The Richmond Villa offers a great variety of volunteer programs that are made possible through the assistance of many volunteers. With staff support, volunteers help



provide activity and recreation to the residents for programs including, live music, pet therapy, monthly birthday parties, entertainment, word games, bowling, bingo, exercise programs, etc. With the East Richmond Education Centre and the Villa located so physically close to each other, students are connected to service learning opportunities with elderly people on a regular basis. Also, residents of the Villa enjoy watching the kids play at recess.

St. Peter's boasts an extremely active Volunteer Fire Department that includes first responder emergency medical training, and access to critical life saving equipment such as defibrillators, jaws of life, medical rescue unit, firetruck pumpers, a boat/water rescue vehicle, and equipment for ice and off-road rescue. SPDVFD has long promoted a strong sense of community – they provide access to their facility for a local PlaySchool group and they have developed a unique way of making St. Peter's a memorable location for visitors.



Each summer, a local group of students paints the more than 30 fire hydrants that run along Grenville and Pepperrell streets. The hydrants are painted as characters, usually related to the building they sit next to (for example, the hydrant outside the RCMP station is painted as a RCMP officer, and the hydrant next to the Glad Tidings Christmas Shoppe is painted as



Santa). Visitors from far and wide commonly refer to the Village as the “Land of Painted Fire Hydrants.” Although a small and simple touch, this activity which started over 10 years ago adds greatly to the charm that St. Peter’s offers to visitors.

St. Peter’s is also now a key stop-over for a new public transit system. Strait Area Transit begins in the community of L’Ardoise and travels westwardly through St. Peter’s and Louisdale before reaching Port Hawkesbury and Mulgrave. This unique, publicly funded transit system enables the movement of residents to and from the St. Peter’s region in a safe and reliable way, strengthening ties between St. Peter’s and other outlying communities in the area.

The Village on the Canal Association has developed a website ([www.visitstpeters.com](http://www.visitstpeters.com)) that supports the development of social and commercial interests in the community. Featuring our location as the *Gateway to the Bras d’Or*, this site has tracked hits from around the world and serves to inform newcomers, tourists, and existing residents on the many features and activities that St. Peter’s has to offer.

### **St. Peter’s activities...**

Several signature events occur in St. Peter’s each year that are reflective of the high level of participation in the community and volunteers in the Village. These events include:

**St. Peter’s Festival of Trees:** The 14<sup>th</sup> annual Festival of Trees held in November 2009 was a hallmark event for the Village on the Canal Association and for the Village as a whole. The Festival included a pancake breakfast with Santa and Mrs. Claus, local entertainment, a Santa’s workshop area with crafts and cookie decorating, an evening children’s concert, and of course many visits from Santa himself! The Festival of Trees this year saw over 45 trees entered in a contest to win one of several prizes (best overall, best youth, best community, etc).



Almost 300 people attended the event, over \$1,000 was raised through a voluntary silver collection, and approximately 45 children were able to have breakfast with Santa and discuss their Christmas wishes with him and Mrs. Claus!

More than a dozen volunteers spend months on planning and implementation to ensure that this event is a success for the community, and more importantly, for the children. In Santa’s Corner, children could create Christmas crafts, have milk & cookies with Santa and receive teddy bears, participate in a Christmas colouring contest, and read their letters to Santa. Special plans are underway for November 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010 as this will mark the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the St. Peter’s Festival of Trees.



**St. Peter's Celtic Colours:** Each year for the past six years the Village on the Canal Association has hosted a Celtic Colours evening concert that focuses on the talent that exists in our community (involving the youth fiddlers and other entertainers). It takes a dedicated and experienced group of volunteers to pull this event together to ensure that the event in St. Peter's is of the highest quality. All musical talent aside, St. Peter's has become renowned for its hospitality during the Celtic Colours International Festival – where the best meal and company are to be had following our event! Our community rallied this past October with the support of Destination Richmond Tourism Cooperative and local business to host a jam session every evening during Celtic Colours. These sessions, dubbed “Kitchen Rackets,” were a great success, drawing musicians and attendees each night.

**St. Peter's Trivia Night:** A recent addition to the lineup of yearly events in the Village is St. Peter's Trivia Night which has been a hit with Village and surrounding residents over the last three years. Trivia night is usually hosted in a local restaurant and brings together teams of four from across the Eastern end of Richmond County as part of a County-wide WinterFest. The Village on the Canal Association (VOCA) organizers have gone to special lengths to craft many trivia questions that reflect the history and culture of the Village and the region, ensuring great entertainment (and sometimes a learning experience!) This event has sold out in the past (20+ teams of 4) with the next one scheduled for February 20<sup>th</sup> – join us to test your trivia skills!

**Nicolas Denys Days Festival:** The week-long annual Nicolas Denys Days Festival leads into the long weekend in August and has been a signature event in the Village of St. Peter's for more than 30 years. This festival is a full week long – a remarkable feat for a festival run 100% by volunteers. The 2009 Festival included 44 separate events that were held in the Village including a Sheep Shearing demonstration, Family Movie Night, Youth Ball Hockey Tournament, Sailing Tours, Deep Fried Turkey, Slow Pitch Tournament, the annual MacDonnell Cup sailing race, and many more. A new signature event at the festival this year was Art Al Frescoe - an event in which artists set up their easels all over the village of St. Peter's for a day of outdoor painting. It was also a wonderful experience for the public to observe artists at work and to have the chance to buy work they've been watching the artist create.



Acadian Dancers at Battery Park



Lobsters R Us Float (local business)

Village on the Canal Association organizes this Festival every year and has adopted a philosophy of contribution to the community and activity-based volunteerism – in fact, with almost 1600 people attending, thousands of dollars were raised for local groups in





## Conclusion

Additional events and activities take place all year round in the Village hosted by organizations such as the Wallace MacAskill Museum Society, the MacAskill Yacht Club, the St. Peter's Community Club, the Bonnie Brae Senior Citizens Club and many others. The St. Peter's Village Commission is also a strong participant in community activities, with a focus on infrastructure maintenance. Open lines of communication between community groups and businesses are resulting in the development of stronger, more effective partnerships – and a stronger, more vibrant community.

Although St. Peter's has seen investment by government in the last few years, this investment has been the result of hard work by volunteers. When many communities will rely on government sponsored programs or salaried employees to get the job done, the majority of our programs are run by volunteers. In addition to the activities described above, examples of this tradition of volunteerism include our local community channel (with a public service announcement roll run completely on a volunteer basis), community events run by VOCA (a volunteer group with no salaried personnel), and even the local Village Commission was run for many years at its start-up by volunteers who were committed to ensuring St. Peter's had access to high quality water and sewage treatment systems. When we needed to attract medical professionals, a committee was formed to build a medical centre - land was donated and fundraising took place to ensure it happened. When people in our "community of communities" run into times of hardship, benefits are arranged to help them make it through – the last one held at the St. Peter's Lions Club raising over \$50,000 for a family in need.

Cradled by the Atlantic Ocean and the Bras d'Or Lake, St. Peter's is a community with a strong connection to its physical surroundings. A focus on trail development and outdoor recreation and fitness opportunities is the latest evidence of how the Village is capitalizing on its strengths. The infrastructure projects and events underway demonstrate the level of commitment through strong volunteerism and commercial participation, which has increased in the Village over the last few years. The "Gateway to the Bras d'Or" continues to grow in optimism, business activity, and volunteerism. In the face of an economic downturn and a declining population, this community is re-inventing itself in a socially and commercially sustainable way, focusing on its greatest asset – its people and places.

The Village on the Canal Association was incorporated in 1997 to generate a stronger community atmosphere – the "*je ne sais quoi?*" that makes a small town, a great one! For example, each year VOCA rallies the local business community to produce the centre ad for the Cape Breton Travel Guide. This requires an investment by up to 15 businesses and results in raising the profile of St. Peter's as a tourism destination. The 2009 ad design process resulted in a spirited copy that truly captures the spirit of the Village, including a feature of the Village's new official logo (see previous page).

# St. Peter's

*The Village on the Canal*

Each Spring, the annual St. Peter's Business Dinner is an opportunity for the community to celebrate entrepreneurship and innovation in our Village. Last year's Business Dinner, resulted in 12 "community spirit" awards for individuals, organizations, and businesses in the area that demonstrated an exceptional commitment to making our community a better place to live and do business. The recipients ranged from youth volunteers, to a playschool teacher, to a volunteer with the local seniors group. This new addition to the Business Dinner event arose due to the outstanding participation and community spirit demonstrated over the last few years to implement various projects and events in the Village, and so the natural next step for VOCA is to nominate the Village of St. Peter's for the Lieutenant Governors Community Spirit Award. We are proud of our community and our people!

***Let this be your invitation to St. Peter's – experience our spirit first-hand!***



*Festival of Trees*



*Fire Hydrant*



*Nicolas Denys Days War Canoe Races*