

NSFM NEWS

Baddeck Centre Checks All The Boxes

Don't let the simple construction fool you: **Baddeck's ReUse Centre** is an environmental champion, a social enterprise, and an innovative cost-cutting program all rolled into one.

"It's a win-win-win and it has surpassed our expectations," says Victoria County CAO Leanne MacEachen.



The county trucks its garbage 150 kms away to a landfill in Guysborough, and the costs quickly drive up the county's \$2.6 million solid waste budget.

"Residents are always talking about the cost," she said, noting the sizeable chunk it eats from the municipality's almost \$12-million operating budget.

To save money, the county decided to investigate strategies to keep "gently used" items out of the landfill altogether.

"We wanted to create an opportunity for diversion, especially large items like stoves and washers in good condition, to save money on tipping and transportation fees," MacEachen says.

The municipality's recycling and waste diversion coordinator Jocelyn Bethune suggested a ReUse Centre where unwanted goods could be stored and then sold.

They chose a site at the Victoria County Landfill and Enviro Depot on the Old Margaree Road and put up a garage-style building for a low-five-figure pricetag. The venture has been a good motivator for bargain hunters in the county, where the median total income of families is \$56,794 (StatsCan), below both the provincial and federal average.

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NSFM NEWS

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- Story ideas? Contact the Communications Department at communications@nsfm.ca
- *Stories by Amy Pugsley Fraser, Communications Advisor*

Debbie Nielsen Celebrates Ten Years at NSFM

When she was growing up in Dartmouth and Lower Sackville, there were plenty of early indications that **Debbie Nielsen** was heading towards a career in sustainability and the environment.

“I was always an outdoor kid,” says Nielsen, *NSFM’s Infrastructure and Sustainability Officer*, who just celebrated 10 years on the job.

She remembers days spent catching frogs, wrangling snakes and chasing salamanders, and the new recruits often wound up in well-perforated shoeboxes under her bed.

Her family spent many summer vacations camping, and her parents encouraged her to spend time outside.

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- Debbie Nielsen receives a staff citation from NSFM President Pam Mood at the December board meeting.



- Warden Bruce Morrison accepts the Carbon Surcharge Fund Award from President Wayne Mason at the Halifax fall conference.
- In 2012, NSFM’s Board passed a motion for a \$5 carbon fee on conference registrations to mitigate the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from hosting events. The proceeds are disbursed annually to support small-scale initiatives that help municipalities reduce their energy consumption and emissions.

Baddeck ReUse Centre, *continued from front*

“It’s really a neat concept because we are hopefully helping out lower income residents who may not be able to buy something new.”

Residents drop unwanted items off in pallets outside the ReUse Centre, and municipal staffers bring them inside the building during their weekday shifts.

Enlisting local non-profit organizations to host weekly sales really sets the program apart, she says.

“There was no way we were going to profit from this, and (the non-profits) liked the idea” of pitching in to help.

On Saturday mornings, volunteers arrive on site, fix up the tables, set the prices and keep the proceeds.

So far, the efforts in 2018 and 2019 have put \$17,000 into the coffers of 10 local charities.

Councillors were very supportive from the start.

“It’s really great to see someone else have those things, for just the price of a donation,” says Baddeck Councillor Perla MacLeod.

“I’ve seen a lot of things go through there – dishes, toys, Christmas decorations, books and games, even a fridge, stove, bed, and a washer,” she says.

Sales are held Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and so far, organizations like Rescue Cats and 4-H have been weekend hosts.

There’s enough interest to continue with weekly sales all year, but the building isn’t equipped to operate past November.

“The weather is our enemy right now,” MacEachen says, noting they already have a list of charities signed up for 2020.

Last month, the municipality won **NSFM’s Carbon Surcharge Fund Award** and there are plans to put the \$1,200 winnings towards heat for the building.

In addition to helping people get rid of unwanted items, assisting local charities and driving down municipal costs, the ReUse Centre has also slowed the fill rate of the cells in the landfill.

“We are proving that it can be a good way to help the environment and local organizations. It’s one of the best things that we’ve done.”

Truro Wins Through Healthy Competition

A three-month fitness challenge in **Truro's** Public Works Department has created a fitter workforce through a little healthy competition.

Department Director **Andrew MacKinnon** came up with the **Public Works Challenge** after a few employees experienced major health issues.

"We really wanted to do something for heart health," he said.

MacKinnon experienced his own fitness epiphany almost two decades ago when he visited Denmark with a Federation of Canadian Municipalities energy mission.

"I just could not believe how fit Europeans were, especially in Copenhagen where everybody walks or bikes."

It was a different picture back home, where people will drive one block to go to the store.

"In the more rural towns, you do that. And here I am, the one in charge of making our sidewalks in good shape, but I'm not out walking on them."

After seeing the Danes in action, MacKinnon came home and took up running. His health commitment lasted more than a decade but had recently started to slip, he says.



• CAO Mike Dolter

A few Truro town departments, like Police and Fire, have health and fitness programs. Without a dedicated regime for Public Works, MacKinnon decided to create some in-house incentive for his team to get fit.

He started with the nuts and bolts of healthy living by bringing in a nutritionist to speak to staff.

Then he capitalized on the competitive nature of the department's employees by creating a contest that divided the 50 staff into operations teams, including Engineering, Transportation Services, Environmental Services, and the Water Treatment Plant.

A series of warmups were introduced in the public works building for crews to limber up before starting their shifts. And employees were encouraged to work out on their lunch hour or after work.

Throughout the three-month run, the teams kept track of weight and Body Mass Index (BMI) – and calculated the improvements for each team. Points were allocated for the total drop in team BMI, with bonuses given for quitting smoking.

At one point, Truro council chambers was doing double duty as a cross-fit studio for some of the town hall employees.

"We'd always find dumbbells against the wall in the back, which is kind of a funny thing to find in chambers," Truro CAO Mike Dolter said this week.

He saw the value of the contest from the outset and approved a team prize of a vacation day granted to each member of the winning team.

While Truro has yet to track the long-term effects, Dolter says the anecdotal evidence is stacking up.

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Innovator Award

- *AMANS/NSFM Wellness Program presented the Municipal Workplace Wellness Innovator Award to Truro for its Public Works Challenge during the Association of Municipal Administrators annual fall conference in Digby. It's the highest honour awarded through the program.*
- *Truro plans to build on its success by launching the **Public Works Challenge II** in 2020.*
- *The new program will include more town departments and offer more incentives for employees to quit smoking, stay fit and get healthy.*
- *The **Municipal Wellness Program** was established in 2014. It is a partnership between the Association of Municipal Administrators, NS and the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities.*

Truro, *continued from page 3*

“We haven’t seen a direct correlation with sick days yet, but everybody took something positive from the experience.”

While two staffers quit smoking, nine others had a significant drop in their weight and body mass index, with one employee losing 34 pounds and decreasing BMI by 4.8.

Researchers say that losing just five percent of your body weight can boost heart health.

“We’ve seen a difference in the level of lunchtime walking, and people doing fitness after work.”

And there’s room for more: The town has an annual \$300 grant for all employees to use toward physical fitness, and it can be used anywhere, he said.

They’re also looking at constructing shower facilities in the basement of town hall, so people can grab a shower after a mid-day work out.

The results are spurring a second health challenge for 2020 with a wider net of departments. It will focus more on fitness, with bonus points for joining a gym, upping weekly step counts, or giving up smoking.

“I applaud Public Works for leading it off, because we really do need to contribute to creating healthier employees,” Dolter said.

Debbie Nielsen, *continued from page 2*

“I was always fascinated by, and had an interest in, the environment.”

After graduating with a BSC from Dalhousie University, Nielsen did environmental planning as a second degree at NSCAD.

She joined the Ecology Action Centre as a volunteer and worked to establish the community garden project in Halifax’s North End.

In between her degrees, Nielsen worked at Clean Nova Scotia, helping with their compost education.

She also spent three years as the Executive Director of the Sunbury Shores Arts and Nature Centre in St. Andrews, NB, and six years as an environmental planning consultant in Iqaluit.

Her career with NSFAM began as the municipal sustainability coordinator in 2007, focusing on energy efficiency.

NSFAM was ahead of the curve when it advertised the new position, and Nielsen credits the vision of then-executive director Ken Simpson.

“It was unique, and it came at a time when climate change was starting to get some recognition.”

Despite the new awareness, there weren’t a lot of conversations happening.

“Municipalities were working in their silos on sustainability, so I was encouraged to find out their issues and celebrate the great work being done.”

Her focus has sharpened over the last few years. Nielsen is now the conduit between the province and municipalities on Gas Tax applications and projects.

Many of the projects financed through the Federal Gas Tax Fund, which stands at about \$58 million for Nova Scotia, are either sewer and water projects, or roads, paving and sidewalks.

“The shining stars for me are really the outdoor recreation projects,” she says.

Highlights from the last few years include a new park created from an old quarry in the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, and a dune revetment project in Lockeport that used old lobster traps to stabilize the sand beneath the waves.

“There’s a bit of a shift in the way our municipalities perceive the importance of sustainability issues and climate change, and that’s what I love and that’s where my training is,” she said.

Nielsen stresses the importance of asset management to address climate change because it’s an exercise in long term planning.

“I see the value in municipalities laying out long term plans with how they’re going to spend their capital money on infrastructure and putting a plan in place with how that will unfold over the next five, 10, 30 years plus.”

In her off hours, Nielsen still spends a lot of time outside. She runs before work each morning, and spends weekends cycling and hiking.

Even indoors, her focus doesn’t waver. She’s read a lot of climate change books and recently enjoyed *The Optimistic Environmentalist* by BC environmental lawyer David Richard Boyd.