



Behind the lines

I'll never forget when I first heard about Zita Cobb and her plans to resuscitate Fogo Island. It was back in 2005 and I had recently finished a four-year stint as mayor of a small rural fishing community. I was fascinated by her story, perhaps because I felt like we had so much in common.

Both of us were volunteers with a shared passion for rural renewal. And the issues she was dealing with were identical to those which had consumed my attention in office: a dwindling tax base, aging municipal infrastructure, community rivalries, economic revitalization... Plus, we each had plans to boost employment, stabilize outmigration and create new industry in our respective communities.

But I thought I was dependent on government investment to make things happen. If I knew then what I know now (that it's businesses which build economies), I would have recruited private investors. I didn't. In that sense, I failed my community. Zita, on the other hand, appeared to be rapidly becoming a transformative force of nature.

As intrigued as I was, I didn't tell Zita's story at the time. Her philanthropy was already attracting ample press and I didn't want to repeat the same story everyone else was publishing. I also thought the timing was premature.

Time and again, governments across Atlantic Canada have tossed millions and millions of dollars at rural, isolated, traditional resource-based economies in the name of revitalization. Sadly, any positive effects of such expenditures were often transient.

Zita was different. Here was a private individual, with considerable business savvy and an ample personal war chest, recruiting her entire community to join her in a fight against unemployment and stagnation. Could she, would she, make a difference? Eight years and more than \$60 million later, the timing finally seemed right for me to check in on Fogo Island. My findings are detailed in our cover story: "Zita's missionary zeal."

Also in this issue, our Nova Scotia contributing editor Stephen Kimber dares to question whether or not organized labour is past its prime. Always a topical issue, it's more controversial than ever these days, particularly in Atlantic Canada where we've had a number of high profile, extended strikes. Why are these labour disruptions lasting so long (more than half a year in some cases)? What are unions doing for their fee-paying members if strike action doesn't offer the leverage it once did? Think about it: we have legislated minimum wages, work weeks, annual leave and workers' rights. Do workers even need unions anymore? Stephen's take on the matter is explained in both his

column (see page 18) and his feature story "State of the union." The latter includes an interview with Mike Hachey of Egg Films. It's an eye-opening account of an employer who seems to be doing everything right, including paying his freelancers higher than union salary. Yet his firm was still targeted by a national union. Explore the how, the why and the 'what the heck' in this must-read article.

We also turned our critical eye inward this issue, scrutinizing the weaknesses and strengths identified by you, our loyal readers. Though we always welcome constructive criticism, we actively campaign for it every fall with our readership survey. The results of that survey are used to improve the magazine for the coming year.

Minor adjustments, however, aren't enough for our planned relaunch in 2014. It's our 25th anniversary and we're celebrating our status as Atlantic Canada's longest-publishing regional business magazine with a complete redesign. You'll see elements that are both modern and vintage, new fonts and more graphics, a completely revamped Upfront section and even a revised Salvo. As requested, you'll essentially be embedded in our ongoing projects. Yes, from now on, this space won't be so much a column as it will be a behind-the-scenes explanation of feature development (the story behind the story).

What won't change, however, is our dedication to telling Atlantic Canada's business stories. Since our first edition back in 1989, every issue has been completely focused on the companies and people in the four Atlantic provinces. Your fascinating stories are the reason for our success and longevity. Thank you for sharing. | ABM

Feedback: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com

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A look ahead Some of the stories we're working on for next issue: Atlantic Canada's top employers; the Richard Oland murder investigation; and New Brunswick's thriving start-up culture.