

You reap what you sow

By Stephen Kimber

"Now this is a really cool story."

We're barely inside The Barn Coffee and Social House in Mahone Bay, N.S., and Tina Hennigar is doing what she does best: promoting her community.

Hennigar tells me Michael Bishop and his wife Amelia soft-launched this cozy café a few weeks earlier. Originally from Nova Scotia, Mike had worked as a history teacher in Boston before he and his wife decided to move home in 2011. Now they've opened a collaborative-concept coffee house in a former storage barn on the town's Main Street. The Barn's coffee comes from provincially-based North Mountain Coffees, its pastries from the ovens of nearby Boulangerie La Vendéenne, and its soups, salads and sandwiches from local restaurants Rebecca's and Mateus Bistro.

"It's a win-win," Hennigar says, explaining her choice of lunch setting. "You get a taste of Lunenburg County and see the power of working together."

Hennigar, the recently appointed full-time population growth coordinator for NOW Lunenburg County, an organization promoting this region of close to 50,000 on the province's south coast, is all about working together. And, especially, about Lunenburg County.

Consider: this summer, Hennigar will drive a bright yellow, county-festooned "Create-a-life-you-love-in-Lunenburg-County" camper 8,000 km across Canada, stopping in towns, cities and mall parking lots to encourage people to relocate here.

The 41-year-old Hennigar was actually born in Wolfville in the province's Annapolis Valley. But when she was eight, her father, "a farm hand before it was sexy, packed up our mobile home and drove us to Bridgewater" seeking a better future for himself and his family. He found it, becoming a local contractor. Tina never left.

After graduating from sales and marketing at Bridgewater's community college campus, Tina decided she was ready for adventure. So she moved... 20 minutes up the highway to Mahone Bay. "I was 19, a single woman with no kids, moving to this small town. People joked I must be in the witness protection program."

She landed a job at the Mug and Anchor, a popular pub. "It's a great place to meet people." She met her husband, a member of the powerful Hennigar publishing clan, which owned the *Bridgewater Bulletin* (now *LighthouseNOW Progress Bulletin*), after he returned from university one summer. They have two teenaged children. Tina spent 15 years in sales with the newspaper before joining the local hospital as fundraiser in 2016.

Soon after, however, she saw a NOW Lunenburg County ad seeking "expressions of interest" for a full-time position. NOW had formed in the wake of the much-discussed-little-accomplished 2013 Ivany Report, which was a clarion call for citizens to help make the province economically sustainable again. Six Lunenburg business leaders "threw money in the pot" and staged community meetings seeking input about how to make on-the-ground change in their county. Hennigar attended several.

"When I saw the ad, I thought I could be part of something that could have an impact on the future of my community. How crazy incredible would that be?"

Crazy incredible indeed.

After visiting a recent Food Truck Festival in Bridgewater, Hennigar—who describes herself as a "creative problem solver"—re-thought the problem. "We can't expect everyone to come here to see what a wonderful community we have, so why not go to them?"

Over our delicious soup-and-salad lunch, Hennigar explains how the project was cobbled together with modest cash sponsorship, sweat equity and plenty of in-kind donations from local businesses. That thinking-outside-the-box adventure has not only attracted interest from people across the country, but also from locals and ex-pats who have already volunteered to help out at various stops.

While Hennigar is not expecting to lead a caravan of new settlers home, "we need to start somewhere, and we need to plant the seed, let people know this is a welcoming place to live, to work, to start a business."

Hennigar will.



Tina Hennigar

Population growth coordinator,
NOW Lunenburg County

Life's journey

When Tina Hennigar moved to Mahone Bay in 1995, she confesses, she'd never actually driven through the community in the daylight. "When I was in high school, we used to go to parties in Mahone Bay, but in the daytime? No."

Play along

Tina learned to play the guitar when her then six-year-old announced he wanted to learn. They took lessons together. But he soon discovered hockey, which "ended all hope for a musical prodigy." Tina continued her lessons and, 10 years later, they're playing together again after her son chose guitar as his Grade 10 art course. "It's rather humbling how quickly he surpassed my abilities."

Fear factor

Tina says she was afraid what people would think when she hit the Send key on the email announcing her cross-country camper trip. While response has been overwhelmingly positive, "I did have a few people who, let's just say, won't be encouraging their brothers in Belleville to lay out the welcome mat." Though the negativity "hurt a little," she says she's learned you have to "flex your fear muscle." Besides, she adds, perhaps that person "just didn't like their brother!"



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