

Limerick kicks off North Hastings Inspiration Place capital campaign



By Chris Drost

The capital campaign launch for North Hastings Inspiration Place, the new library and hub in Bancroft, got off to a promising start with a generous \$10,000 donation from the Township of Limerick.

An enthusiastic crowd of about 40 individuals as they gathered at the site of the future North Hastings Inspiration Place in downtown Bancroft on the afternoon of Sunday, May 1. The celebration was for the launch of the capital campaign for the project that includes the building of a new library and community hub with 30 affordable housing units on the upper floors.

Master of ceremonies and member of the North Hastings Public Library board of trustees, Dave Giles, introduced Library Board chair, Brian Hickey, who shared a greeting from the capital campaign chair, Cheryl Easton, who had a previous engagement. Cheryl said, "The public library is where place and possibility meet," said Stuart Dybeck. The dream of a place entirely imagined for the benefit of an entire community, is born in the mind of an individual, however it requires a community to make that individual dream a living, breathing reality for all to enjoy. Today we celebrate our community coming together in the spirit of friendship and collaboration, to make the first step towards making place and possibility meet, today we celebrate dreamers and doers. We are confident that with the generous support of our community, this space, and all who enter it will see their minds expanded and their maximum potential realised."

Giles noted that all three townships associated with the NHPL were at the launch. "I am delighted that is the case," he said.

“It is important to recognize that modern libraries are more than books. They are about community engagement and partnerships. One of those partnerships is to be celebrated here today. The new library is to be known as North Hastings Inspiration Place as it will inspire people beyond books and be a place for lifelong learning,” explained Giles.

“This project would not have come to fruition with Paul Jenkins and the council. They have helped make it a reality,” said NHPL board chair, Brian Hickey. He also gave generous accolades to Kim McMunn, CEO/head librarian and described her as “our own little dynamo.”

The building itself will be four storeys with the library and hub on the ground floor and 30 residential units on the three upper floors, with 12 being fully accessible. Hickey clarified that the builder is responsible for all the costs associated with the residential component of the building from construction costs to ongoing maintenance.

A total of \$1.4 million dollars has been secured from federal and provincial coffers for the project. The Town of Bancroft still hopes to raise between \$500,000 and \$600,000 for the project. “I am sure of the generosity of this community in raising the funds. Libraries are our greatest tool for strong mental health,” said Hickey.

NHIP will not only be a place for books but will have new technology infrastructures, a social gathering place, a learning and study area and outdoor space. It will be a safe place for everyone from children to seniors.

Giles explained that Canadian Mental Health Awareness Month has been going on for 70 years. “It is meaningful that we are sharing this event on May 1 with Baseball for Dad,” said Giles. He invited Louri Ann Snider and her young clan to come forward to share a few words. Snider, whose son was lost to suicide in 2019, inspired her to start an organization called Baseball for Dad. “I took pain and decide to create change. So far, 179 baseball gloves have been placed around the world, a Kindness Moose program has been developed in 15 schools where someone exhibiting kindness receives a stuffed moose each month, and 23 Buddy Benches have been placed in a number of communities. This month a Buddy Bench is being placed in the Baseball Hall of Fame. One will be donated to the new library,” explained Snider.

Snider expressed the importance of ending stigma, reducing wait times for mental health care and the need for people to be treated as quickly for mental health as other illnesses. The children who accompanied Snider shared their own special messages, promote positive mental health, create awareness, it's okay not to be okay and it's okay to ask for help.

Following Snider's presentation, Giles invited McMunn to share a few words. “They say that I am a go-getter but it has taken me 20 years to get a new library,” she share with a chuckle. “We are doing it as a community and we would love to have your help whether it is through a donation, as a volunteer or in other ways.

“It is nice to share time with community. We look forward to doing mental health activities and other things in the new hub. At this point, Leah, McMunn's granddaughter, stepped forward to present a Kindness Moose to local resident, Rhoda. McMunn shared that the new library will be fully accessible so individuals like Rhoda with mobility challenges will be able to visit the library on a more regular basis.

Giles explained that the NHPL serves the Town of Bancroft, Township of Limerick and Township of Faraday. “Limerick is a special place, indicative of community spirit and a huge supporter of the public library. Limerick is the smallest of the three but has gone way above their weight. Mayor Carl Stefanski stepped forward to address the audience. “In four short years as mayor, I am impressed to see efforts to bring this to reality. This will be a safe, quiet place to expand an individual's mind. Libraries will exist now and into the future. It may not be the Library of Congress but it is just as important to us,” said Stefanski. At this point, both he and, board trustee, Ingo Weise, stepped forward to present a cheque for \$10,000 towards the project to Hickey.

Giles addressed the crowd following the cheque presentation. “We wouldn't be here today with significant support from the provincial and federal governments. This would not have happened without input from Mayor Paul Jenkins who has been

instrumental in raising those funds and persuading the levels of government that we should have them. Jenkins also helped develop the partnership with the developer who is building the residential component of the build. Jenkins is a lifelong supporter of libraries and is a member of the NHPL board. He works hard every day," added Giles.

Mayor Jenkins began his remarks by thanking Snider and clan for their important messages, Mayor Carl Stefanski and Ingo Weise for the donation from the Township of Limerick, the library board and staff for their enthusiasm and for keeping him to procedures. Jenkins also thanked Malcolm Hunt, Bancroft's economic development advisor. "It took the whole of council to help make this happen," added Jenkins. The process started with an idea of having the new library in Millennium Park but public input showed they wanted it located downtown. "We were then approached by Phil Spry who added an affordable housing component. The fact that the library was combined with the affordable housing sealed the deal," said Jenkins. Because the housing part is under the federal Co-investment Fund, there is lots of red tape to work through and so the plan is currently to break ground in the fall of this year. He asked everyone to spread the word.

After the presentations, McMunn and Brittany Tomasini, project support coordinator, who has been working diligently on the project at the town office, unveiled new signage which will be installed on the existing library. One sign shares the news "We are moving," while the other two show a conceptual drawing of the new NHIP and the other, the layout of the different components within the complex.

Following the event, Jenkins said that he hopes that they can foster more partnerships with groups like Baseball for Dad. "I think this will be a great benefit to the whole region. The Town of Bancroft is totally invested in this. It is part of the overall revitalization of the downtown and will be an attractor for new residents looking to move here," he said.

Everyone attending was asked to share the event online and were invited back to the ground breaking event this fall.