

## Maynooth poised to capture foodie travellers



This Mugwump stepped out of Interzone to attend the Arlington's annual Halloween Party. Commissioned by the Toronto Film Festival Hockley Studio's Mugwump attends parties with Canadian Director, David Cronenberg. SARAH VANCE Special to This Week

**By Sarah Vance**

The Maynooth Diner and Catering company celebrated its grand opening, at the Arlington Hotel as part of the annual Halloween Party, on Saturday, Oct. 31.

New entrepreneurs, Joany and Christine Kilgannon, have partnered to bring this restaurant venture to Maynooth's main street. The intimate restaurant, boasts 12 tables, in a rustic dining room, inside Maynooth's popular historic Arlington. Patrons arrived in costume for a night of networking and dancing to the beat of Toronto-based ska-reggae band, Random Order.

"I travelled from Killaloe to hear them and I'm a big fan of Lynx, the lead singer," said a Captain Jack Sparrow, who was amongst the more than 100 guests, who travelled to the heartbeat of Maynooth, to celebrate to the sounds of bongos and trombone.

"We are a family-run business," said the Kilgannons, as they prepared calzones and home-cut fries, which ushered in new aromas and new services, for patrons at the popular night club. "We look forward to working together with Bernie and the Arlington team for more theme nights."

"Breakfast is our most popular meal," said Joany describing how the "Mighty Maynooth" with its stacks of pancakes, eggs and bacon, is quickly becoming the local menu item of choice.

Maynooth's Diner and Catering Company is a helpful parallel business for the Arlington, which is a destination for hikers looking to access Algonquin Park; shoppers in search of artisan studios; and foodies looking to sample the flavours of Hastings Highlands.

"Every new business is one more reason for people to come, visit the many wonderful shops and businesses in Maynooth, spend time browsing and then enjoy our hospitality," said Hastings Highlands Mayor Vivian Bloom. "The Diner will enhance what we already have to offer, whether it be a full meal, smaller snack, or just coffee and tea ... we have it all."

While Maynooth continues to be known primarily for its arts scene, an up-cropping of new ventures in the food service industry are poised to make the area a destination for food travellers. Also known as "foodies," these tourists travel with the purpose of finding new experiences through ingredients and due to an ardent interest in local foods and beverages.

Maynooth's Diner and Catering Company is just one of many new businesses that are being built around the promotion of local Hastings Highlands ingredients.

Algonquin Gourmet Butter Tarts and the Sun Run Cafe offer a dining experience on Maynooth's main street. Maple Leaf Chocolate, run by chocolatier Shaun Sellers, provides speciality, fair-trade cocoa, organic truffles. Closer to Lake St. Peter, The Porterville Diner and the Madawaska Lodge and Restaurant, which boasts French Cuisine, remain vital stop-points for winter snowmobilers. Maynooth is also fostering niche estates, such as Hillview Farm and Studios, were a range of spiced and infused vinegars, spreads

and jellies are sold. They are enhanced by unique herbs and spices and are developed using natural pectin made from apples on the estate.

‘When we started out we didn’t think people would be as receptive to our products as they have been,’ said Carol Russell, who operates Hillview Farm and Studios. ‘We have been amazed by the response of the community and the interest in our locally farmed products.’

Maynooth appears to be growing, both in population and business development, as its council continues to market a destination for people looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. The Hastings Highlands website advertises, ‘if you are an entrepreneur looking to avoid the congestion of the big city and immerse yourself in the beautiful setting of Hastings Highlands, then we are the place for you.’

‘We have been working on a formal business expansion and retention plan,’ said Frank Mills, chief building official of Hastings Highlands. ‘Some real success has been achieved in the business and buildings of Hastings Highlands.’

Local businesses are supported by the Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association which strives, amongst other endeavours, to make the region more welcoming for visitors and entrepreneurs alike. And it appears to be working.

‘Our membership has jumped from 60 members to 90 members this year,’ said Carol Russell, Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association chair. ‘Our area is attracting a lot of young families and new entrepreneurs.’

A newly renovated visitor information board and customized street signs continue to be ongoing projects intended to help visitors connect with the region.

‘The empty or under-utilized commercial spaces, particularly in Maynooth are starting to come alive,’ said Frank Mills.

‘Every new business that has opened here almost annually for the past six years has brought Maynooth forward and has made it a destination,’ said Tracy Faragalli Hagar, a councillor for the Municipality of Hastings Highlands and proprietor of Foxfire Gallery Gifts and Antiques, on Maynooth’s main drag.

But at the Arlington, for the grand opening of Maynooth’s new Diner and Catering Company, it was dancing, not economic development, that was the key priority for patrons. And it was surreal. Cinematographers Harold Easton and Don Wilson, captured the unique ghoul and ghost sightings, as only the paparazzi could do.

Maynooth has a well established arts community, and Saturday night is just one more example of how Hastings Highlands is continuing to emerge as a food destination. It is a trend which is happening because people are leveraging what the region has to offer. It turns out these products are affordable. Commercial baker and caterer, Alanna Turner for example, has beat out larger distributors to provide desserts for South Algonquin Pub in Bancroft.

So with art galleries and great food, a logical next question might be, when do the wineries and breweries arrive?