

St. Paul's United Church now even more welcoming



By Jim Eadie

"Our sign says that all are welcome," said Rev. Lynn Watson, minister at St. Paul's United Church in Bancroft. "That is what our sign says ? and now we really are!?"

Watson was referring to the brand new elevator just completed at the church. A large group of church members and community supporters as well as political representatives including Todd Smith MPP and Mayor Bernice Jenkins attended the official opening and ribbon cutting at the church on Oct. 4.

The historic church sits at the high point of Hastings St. in Bancroft overlooking the main street of the town, and is sometimes noted for the long climb up over 20 steps from street level to the front door. As this posed a barrier for many people gaining access to the church, a chair lift was installed a number of years ago, but several problems left this solution as only a temporary one. The chair lift would not service all of the stairs to be navigated; it could not carry a casket for funerals; and 2 years ago the church learned that it no longer met the requirements of the building code. On June 8th, 2014 the church congregation made the decision to install the elevator.

"We knew it was a big job," said Watson. "Some people thought we could never do it. But, we decided that we were going to do this job, and it will make a definite difference in peoples lives. I couldn't believe it ? even someone on the street stopped me and gave me \$20."

A member of the church organized Baptiste Lake boat cruises to raise money. Last summer, Watson herself raised \$10,000 in donations from the community by swimming across Baptiste Lake and back.

"Am I ever glad the grants came through," she said. "Now I don't have to do the polar plunge that I promised!?"

Grants were received supporting the project from Ontario and Canadian governments, and the Royal Canadian Legion in Bancroft.

Watson was quick to note the donations from the community, as well as all of the folks who "put their shoulder to the load." She noted in a recurring theme, that it is one thing to say everyone is welcome, but another big step to make sure that they are. Following the short service, an elderly man in the audience observed: "Well, now I won't be half an hour late for church because of the steps!" "We come from a place of blessing," Watson concluded. "Everyone is welcome here. Regular folks, the educated and uneducated, whatever race or culture, the young and the old, gay and lesbian, and the woman in her niqab. They are all welcome here."