

Winds of change in Lunenburg

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Waterfront bustling with activity as renewal strategy takes hold in seafaring community



A mast is ready to be installed in one of two wooden schooners being built at The Dory Shop in Lunenburg. (BEVERLEY WARE / South Shore Bureau)

LUNENBURG — A metallic clang rings out from the belly of one of two wooden schooners under construction on Lunenburg's waterfront.

The orange of a newly built dory stands out against the blue water in which it bobs.

Red kayaks sit on the wharf. Behind them, an old fishing trawler, now painted clean and white, waits for locally made masts and rigging to be added so it can sail off to the Cook Islands.

Further along the waterfront, landscapers place sod beside a wooden walkway that leads to a new public wharf. Further down the waterfront, treated hemlock trees lie naked in the sun waiting to be put to use on another new wharf.

"It's amazing, the amount of economic activity," Colin MacLean, president and CEO of Halifax-based Waterfront Development Corp, said Thursday.

The corporation has been working with the Lunenburg Waterfront Association to help breathe new life into this seafaring town. It's an effort that has had a tremendous boost from such local businesses as Dawson Moreland and Associates, owners of The Dory Shop; scallopers Adams & Knickle Ltd. and Covey Island Boatworks.

From this UNESCO heritage site, where homes are recognized by their "Lunenburg bump," Clearwater Seafoods Inc. manages its worldwide fishing fleet.

It's here where people come from around the world to learn how to sail a tall ship and where young people learn the traditional craft of heritage carpentry as practised by their grandfathers.

"We're fortunate we still have a good base here and it's just trying to hang on to what we have and continue to add to it," said Alan Creaser, association chairman.

Hanging on to what they have has been a challenge for many years, even before the association took over eight wharves and their associated buildings from Clearwater several years ago.

Back when the fishery was changing, it was obvious to the community even then "that we'd have to try to hang on to at least the infrastructure," Crease said.

Because the community was able to hold onto its privately owned welding and fabricating shops, large fishing vessels and luxury yachts are refitted here, wooden schooners are built here and completed with stainless steel fittings and wooden masts that are also made here.

Not to mention, they're rebuilding the Bluenose II.

Creaser and MacLean toured Lunenburg's waterfront Thursday morning, showing off buildings that were once an eyesore and are now painted in welcoming colours, just waiting for someone to rent them.

They also toured the newly refurbished wharves that now offer plenty of opportunities for people to simply stand at the water's edge and absorb the gorgeous views.

Spirit of Canada skipper Derek Hatfield keeps his vessel at one of those new wharfs, where sailors can now tie up for the day.

So many people now meander along the wharf it can be difficult for Hatfield to get his work done, but he welcomes them aboard and is happy to talk about his three solo voyages around the world.

The wharf beside the Bluenose II reconstruction site is being turned in to a service dock for longer-term stays.

"Traditionally it's been very difficult to attract recreational vessels from away to Lunenburg because of a lack of service," said Jennifer Angel, director of operations and business development at the Waterfront Development Corp.

That's changing.

"Those amenities are coming," said Creaser, pointing to where a marine fuelling station will be.

The Lunenburg Board of Trade has also been working with the development corporation and other partners, including the town, museum and local businesses, to develop a new app that will enable people to use their smartphones, iPad or other hand-held device to take a walking tour along the wharf.

The system will be in place this summer if funding is received from the province and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

On Thursday, Shelah Allen of Lunenburg Town Walking Tours demonstrated the system at the Fishermen's Memorial, which pays tribute more than 600 men who lost their lives on 50 ships that sailed out of Lunenburg harbour.

MacLean said he is impressed by what's becoming available on Lunenburg's waterfront.

"You've got all the pieces and you tie it together with tourism and four-season marine activity," he said. "That's a package."

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