

# Gaelic legacy endures

by Maureen MacDonald,  
Minister of Gaelic Affairs.

Nova Scotians celebrate their Gaelic roots with activities throughout the province that honour the contributions Gaelic continues to make to our diverse history and culture and keeping Gaelic language and culture alive in 21st century Nova Scotia.

Historically, Gaelic has been important to Nova Scotia in many ways. In the 1901 Canadian census, 50,000 Nova Scotians selected Gaelic as their mother tongue. There were Gaelic-speaking families throughout Cumberland, Colchester, Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough Counties, and of course Cape Breton Island.

The 20th century was a challenging time for the survival of the Gaelic language in our province. Communities lost their young people in battle during both world wars, economic challenges led to out-migration to Boston and other parts of Canada, and there was a lack of serious institutional support for use of the language. All challenges to preserving and enhancing Gaelic culture.

And yet Gaelic endured in Nova Scotia. Its survival is a credit to the determination of Gaelic-speaking Nova Scotians to ensure their culture and language did not disappear. They visited and helped each other, worshipped together, made songs and music on traditional instruments and continued to tell their stories --

all in Gaelic.

In the early 1970s, the Gaelic Society of Sydney's activism resulted in the creation of a pilot program that brought Gaelic teachers from Scotland to Inverness County. One might see this initiative as the first of several hopeful signs that Gaelic language and culture would endure in Nova Scotia.

In 1996, the Nova Scotia Education Act was amended to specify that "school boards in Nova Scotia must offer core French classes from grades 4-9. Where they are offered, Mi'kmaq or Gaelic may fill the requirement". In that same year, May was officially designated as Gaelic Awareness Month.

Today, government is working with community partners to support the preservation of one of our province's founding cultures. The Office of Gaelic Affairs, created in 2007, has a primary mandate to increase the numbers of Gaelic speakers in the province. The office has spearheaded a program called Gàidhlig aig Baile, or Gaelic in the Home, where the emphasis is on using Gaelic as the language of instruction, ideally in a home environment. A pilot project entitled Bun is Bàrr, or Root and Branch, is bringing mentors together with an apprentice to engage in the language.

*Editor's Note: You're sure to hear Gaelic and even get a chance to speak it at the Gaelic College in St. Ann's and the Nova Scotia Highland Village in Iona.*

## Bras d'Or Lakes & Interpretive Centre

# Expects to welcome its 40,000th visitor this year



Mitchell Brewer and Dennis McNeil (L-R), both of Baddeck, are working as Interpretive Guides at the Bras d'Or Lakes and Watershed Interpretive Centre.

Baddeck

With 10 years under its belt, the Bras d'Or Lakes and Watershed Interpretive Centre in Baddeck has opened its doors for an 11th season. The current exhibit "Ecology of Bras d'Or" gives visitors an in-depth look into the history, culture, and ecology that has influenced the Bras d'Or Lakes watershed as we know it today.

Located in the historic, old, stone post office at 532 Chebucto Street in downtown Baddeck, the Interpretive Centre has been a popular stop-in for tourists over the last decade. "We're looking forward to welcoming our 40,000th visitor this season," says Anna McCrory, manager of the centre. "We're really glad to have reached so many people through the Interpretive Centre. Hopefully they walk away from here with a greater understanding and respect for the unique ecology found around and in the Bras d'Or Lakes."

This year, Dennis McNeil and Mitchell Brewer, both of Baddeck, are working as Interpretive Guides at the Centre. "I am looking forward to a great year. Feel free to come by and ask any questions you may have," invites Dennis McNeil. In addition to describing the ecol-

ogy of the Bras d'Or Lakes, the exhibit also presents some of the environmental challenges in the watershed and suggests ways in which they can be met by the local communities around the lakes and by individuals.

"We love that tourists come in and learn about the Lakes," says McCrory, "but we really invite people from around the watershed to come in as well. We would like to hear their stories and experiences as people who are part of the watershed and we welcome their ideas for how we can ensure that the watershed remains a healthy, vibrant place for all the creatures, plants and people that live here."

The Interpretive Centre is sponsored by the Bras d'Or Preservation Nature Trust, a charitable non-profit land trust that works with private landowners, communities, business, government and other organizations in the watershed to protect and preserve ecologically and culturally significant areas.

The centre will be open daily from 9am to 7pm, until the end of August and by chance until mid-October. Admission is by donation, which helps to keep the centre open.

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