

St. Catharines Rowing Alumni Association

295 MAIN STREET
ST. CATHARINES, ONTARIO
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NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2021.



"FOR THE
BETTERMENT
OF ROWING"

It's February and that means "Groundhog Day," and in this *lockdown* world every day seems like Groundhog Day (remember the movie??). With a little more perseverance the province is getting close to flattening the second wave of the pandemic. It would be nice to enter the spring and be able to travel about, socialize and get back to some degree of normal. The current lockdown is making it very difficult for business and clubs to plan, and keep customers and members engaged. Without active participation, folks tend to drift away and every business and club will need to work very hard at rebuilding their base. Businesses and clubs of all stripes are a large number of the casualties of this past year.

Currently there is not any indication that our property or clubhouse will be able to reopen. The directors met on video this past Monday and have decided to issue refunds to 16 confirmed reservations already on the book for this summer season. This decision is a tough one; however our customers can now look at alternate plans for their event, understanding the current rules of the lockdown. The Alumni is not in a position to be able to safely and lawfully rent out our facilities, until more definitive direction is put forth by the many levels of government. We can only hope this will end soon and we can get back to business and share our wonderful facilities with the community.

The toughest part of a newsletter is announcing sad news. In January we lost two of our cherished senior members. On January 1st, John Dewar passed away at the age of 90. John was here this summer supporting our patio and thoroughly enjoyed many weekends down

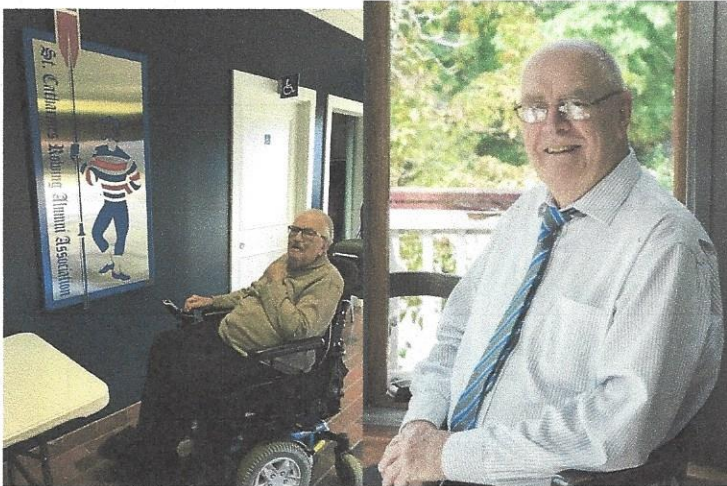
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on the island socializing and enjoying the camaraderie. The tall tales of the Alumni regattas on Three Mile Lake were reminisced on many a Friday night meeting. John was a dedicated active member of the Alumni and Athletics Old Boy Lacrosse, not to mention past president of the Rowing Club. Shortly after on January 10th, we lost Clint page at the age grand age of 96. Clint was a legend on Henley Island. With Clint it was; "always about the kids." A determined fundraiser, Clint and his team raised over \$1 million dollars in support of rowing, So much racing equipment in the shell house is a result of his tireless efforts. In his spare time Clint ruled the clerk of the course at every major regatta. Not a single shell or crew got on the water without passing the sage old eye of Clint. Clint wanted nothing but the best for every rower. Even this summer Clint made it down to the island and the Alumni club, to check out the patio action. Two wonderful men, our condolences go out to both the Dewar and page families. Rest in Peace boys.



An exciting announcement from Rowing Canada came out this week, to honour long time service recognition. Congratulations to all Canadians across the country who were recognized by Rowing Canada. In particular a huge shout out to our Alumni members who made the list this year.

- 55 years Harry Edmonstone
- 50 years Jim Marino
- 45 years Ken Campbell
- 25 years Carol Purcer

Your invaluable service over many years has enabled the sport to thrive and grow. Outstanding.

The current lockdown has also curtailed our ability to partner with OLG / Delta Bingo, We hope we are able to get up and running again soon with them as OLG/DELTA are a huge contributor to our entire community with their support of so many charities and non profit organizations.

A quick thank you to all our supporters and sponsors of the Alumni Newsletter, Continued success in your business. Also thanks for all our members who have renewed their membership dues recently. If it is still on your to do list please take a moment and forward to dues to the Alumni.

With time on our hands I thought I would include in this edition a copy of a terrific article featured in the community newspaper in Pt. Dalhousie. Chris Baker sat down with "Pops" Don Baker and Jim Minards to reminisce on the origins of Henley Island and the Clubhouse. It's a great story and maybe it will jog some memories to add to the story in the future

The days are getting longer, in 4 weeks we will be heading into March and things will be looking up. Meanwhile stay warm, and please stay healthy.

Cheers



It's early in the morning on July 4th, and I am standing on the patio of the St. Catharines Rowing Alumni Association, located atop Henley Island.

Around me, at a distance of (at least) six feet, are a handful of Alumni members, including my dad, current president, Don Baker Jr. We are here for the annual "Spring Clean-up". Except it's July. We're late this year because of the pandemic. To say these people are excited to finally be out of the house and back at their clubhouse is an understatement. This is obvious based on the turnout. I count at least a dozen members. And a dozen leaf blowers. I find the number of leaf blowers funny.

I look around this place and memories flood back. I've been coming here as long as I can remember. Regattas and Henley parties. Turkey raffles and boat christenings. The "Don Baker Sr." (My grandfather.) Somewhere there's a dorky picture of eight-year-old me standing next to that boat. I wonder where that is...

I am the Alumni's newest member, and my role this summer is to run the outdoor bar. With Ford's recent announcement that patios can open up, and every single one of the Alumni's rentals cancelled due to Covid-19, this is our best bet to keep the lights on.

For a place I've been coming my entire life, you'd think I'd know it's history. But a casual conversation over pizza and beer with my grandfather (I call him Pops) proves otherwise. I learn that Pops, and bunch of old rowers were responsible for starting the Alumni, and building the clubhouse back in the 1950s.

It started with a case of beer on a Sunday morning in 1954. A dilapidated tin shed beside the old rowing club on Lakeport Road. "Sunday Morning Class" they called it.

"It attracted a significant amount of people," says Jim Minards. Past and present rowers looking for a place to socialize. Pops and I are sitting on the veranda of Minards' ivy-covered home on Dalhousie Avenue not drinking beer. I wonder if Pops is disappointed.

That same year, the purchase of the land that would become Henley Island is brokered. Minards gets elected to the executive board of the Rowing Club, and eight new high schools in the region are commissioned. Rowing, for lack of a better term, takes off.

Minards recalls a memory where, one by one, the "old guys" who ran the rowing club during the war years disappeared. "Young guys" like himself and Pops that had rowed just a few years before were now "totally responsible" for everything when it came to rowing. And it's during this time that they form the Alumni. Their new name, curiously, is the St. Catharines Rowing Club Old Boys Association. They're in their 20s.

It takes years for rowing to actually move to the island. And even more before the clubhouse is built. There's no road. No bridge. No power. Pops and Jim remember the surveyor laying out the idea for the laneway off Main Street. But there's a log cabin in the way. So they move the cabin. 100 feet. After that an orchard of peach trees. Pops chuckles at the memory. "We did a lot of cutting of trees then."

It was all volunteers. They called them "work parties." A bunch of Old Boys coming out with their saws to cut the peach trees down. I think of the leaf blowers again.

Drinking beer at the Legion one night results in a scheme to alleviate the problem of disposing the peach trees. Pops recalls a fellow named Rich Simpson getting his dad's tow truck and dragging the trees out of the city's ravine via the neighbouring dairy farm. One problem solved.

But problems persisted. Two concrete silos are knocked down. The Old Boys haul the concrete to the water's edge to make a pad for Bill Smith's dump truck so it can turn around. Then there's the current. A couple of barges donated by the Muir Bros. Dry Docks are sunk full of dirt. Then an old bridge from Niagara on the Lake, and the "Handy Boy" tug that gets it there via Lake Ontario. The story of the Alumni and its clubhouse is intricately tied to the story of Henley Island itself. You can't tell one story without the other.

Then in May, 1959, Yale & Towne Lock Factory donate a good sized, little used wooden warehouse to the Old Boys with the stipulation that it must be moved off site within the year. This would eventually become the clubhouse. Piece by the piece, the warehouse is taken down and moved to Henley Island by the Old Boys. Everything including the hardwood floor which is still in the main hall today. An architect designs the clubhouse based on the materials provided, a "back asswards" approach says Minards, but the price was right. Free of charge. Bill Smith's dump truck gets another workout hauling timbers to the Port Dalhousie Dry Docks to be cut to size, and twelve, 30 ft. trusses are assembled. Smith's dump truck hauls them back. I understand now why Bill was named the Alumni's first president in 1957.

Pops' connection with Hamilton Plumbing Supply gets them a heating unit. After the building was already up however. So a hole had to be dug in the cellar. 7 ft deep. A few feet of sand and then mostly clay. Heavy, hard and wet. A borrowed farmer's till and an old beat-up truck dragged it out. "Back asswards," Minards says again.

"Anyone who could do anything was called upon to do it," says Minards. It took dozens of members hundreds of hours of volunteer time to complete the task of building the clubhouse. All while working full time jobs. Many with families. And that's still the way the club is run today.

For The Betterment of Rowing. That's the motto of the St. Catharines Rowing Alumni Association. Not just for old boys anymore. Not for a long time actually. Women and men for 60 years have given their time, freely, to the sport, and to this clubhouse, to ensure its continuance. People like Jim Minards, Bill Smith, Smoky Blair, Jack Arbuthnot, Ed Sullivan, Jack McAleese, Clint Page, and Pops. And the "young guys", Don Baker Jr., Wayne Dick, Brian Campbell, Ken Campbell, Tommy Lockhart, Barb Little, Mike Purcer, Joey Martin, and Bill Schenck. These are just a few of the many, many people who volunteer their time and energy year after year, for rowing's betterment.

When I open up the clubhouse bar every weekend this summer, and welcome Port Dalhousie residents familiar, and unfamiliar with the Alumni's lakeside patio, I try to remember what it took to build this place. I think about all the people past and present who blazed the trail, literally, to get here. I think about my afternoon with Pops and Jim Minards on the veranda, the last two remaining charter members of the Old Boys, relishing the past. I think of all of the events Port residents have attended here over the years. Weddings and Stag n Doe's. Rec Rowing BBQs and Much Music Video Dance parties after Henley. When I'm cracking another cold can of beer on a hot summer's eve, I think, we've come a long way from an old tin shed.

And I find myself starting to wonder if I should get myself a leaf blower.

Article by Chris Baker

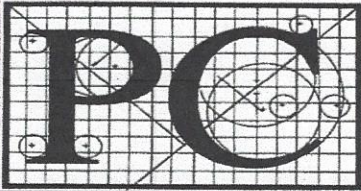
Special thanks to Jim Minards and Don Baker Sr. (Pops) for the interview. (Next time let's have a beer while we chat and make it official.)

Photo by Chris Baker

See attachment

Jim Minards on the left, Don Baker Sr. on the right

Thank you to The St. Catharines Rowing Alumni 2021 Newsletter Sponsors



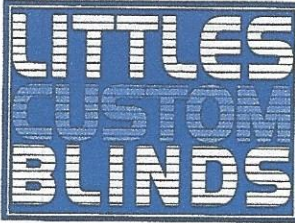
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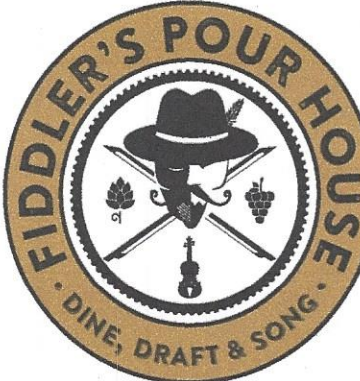
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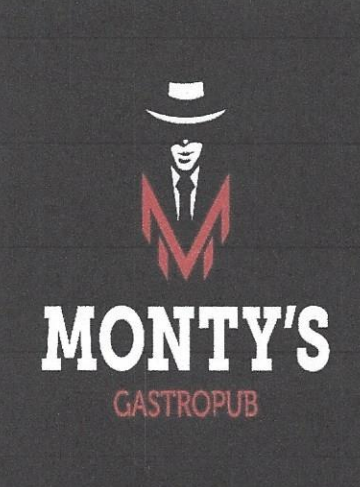


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