

Maynooth's foundation rock solid



Associates of the Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association complete the finishing touches on the revitalization sign, found at the west end of Highway 28, in Maynooth. This project seeks to highlight connections to the Group of Seven for the region's cultural and tourism sector. Photo by Carla Van Balen Walter

By Sarah Vance

Maynooth has a new asset prominently displayed alongside the town's entry sign on the west side of Highway 28.

This stonework display combines granite boulders and river stones, that are indigenous to Hastings Highlands, and which date back to the last Ice Age, approximately 10,000 years ago.

There are several levels of stonework under the Maynooth welcome sign, which have been structured to present a slow moving stream that pools in certain areas and draws into small island formations.

This visual effect has been created by intermixing boulders, some of which are four tons in mass, alongside combinations of small river rocks and raised ledges that provide the appearance of a moving natural sculpture.

It has been a labour of love for the Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association, which developed this project over several months using community partnerships and a deep understanding of the region's mineral and artistic wealth.

“Carol Dromey and her husband Roger, new residents to our area, provided the idea, the sketches and they have also been involved with the finishing touches of the project,” said Carla Van Balen Walter, proprietor of the Maynooth General Store.

Dromey's work is intentional and has been designed to underscore the rugged topography of the Canadian Shield and the region's relevance within the Canadian arts scene. A cursory glance at the collections of the McMichael Gallery in Toronto, and the National Art Gallery of Canada, in Ottawa, bear testimony to the fact that Hastings Highlands was both a vital muse and a favourite stomping ground for Canadian legends David Milne and members of the Group of Seven.

“It was Carol Dromey's vision that pulled together the Maynooth geology, Group of Seven and the Maynooth entry signs into one package,” said Carol Russell, Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association chairperson.

Maynooth's connection to the arts is as indisputable as the geological and mineral wealth that made it a busy hub for mining exploration and aggregate distribution. These practices continue today, on a smaller scale, and local contractor Mark Hyland, of Maynooth Natural Granite, takes the credit for transforming Dromey's design sketches into reality.

Mark Hyland of Maynooth Natural Granite, was very supportive and instrumental in the landscape transformation around the sign with his equipment, manpower and supplies," said Carla Van Balen Walter.

Located on Moxam Road, with a display yard on Highway 62 North, this aggregate business markets the timeless beauty of local Canadian Shield granite, which is known to sparkle because of mica and quartz deposits.

From the uncontested Mineral Capital of Canada, Maynooth Natural Granite distributes products across Ontario and Quebec with a strong online presence at www.maynoothgranite.com, a website which boasts a online Landscape Material Calculator.

"All this rock is naturally worn and is full of colours and patterns that are unique to the region known as the Mineral Capital of Canada," said Hyland.

"For the revitalization project, the stream represents the timeless nature of our area as the rocks and bedrock that we find in such abundance here are among the very oldest in the world (over a billion years) and which form the foundation for the North American continent."

The Maynooth and Hastings Highlands Business Association revitalization projects are working to pull together the many cultural and creative infrastructures upon which their community has been built.

"The design has been created in the spirit of the Group of Seven, because they came to our area to paint," said Dromey. "Now craftspeople seem to continue to gravitate here. There is a creative pull in this community and the people in this community want the best for the place they live."

"This display represents the town in that it is simple, informal and rustic," said Hyland. "As static as it is, the display is constantly changing with weather, time of day or season."

The Municipality of Hastings Highlands has also taken significant steps towards refining their understanding of the region's mineral wealth with a Stage 1 archaeological assessment that consolidates research conducted by Northeastern Archeological Associates and which is aligned to outcomes in the tourism and cultural sector.

"The Maynooth Business Association has taken an active lead in their downtown revitalization project, leveraging existing assets to offer a unique experience to attract visitors to our area," said Nancy Matheson, councillor for Hastings Highlands.

"Their 'hands on' approach to community and partnering with key groups, help them develop innovative ways to revitalize both the people and the town."

These efforts contribute both to the enjoyment of the region and are also poised to attract new industries and entrepreneurs. Cassidy's Tea House and gift emporium, located on Maynooth's main street is one example of a business which existed successfully for 10 years, prior to relocating to Maynooth.

"We moved to Maynooth from Golden Lake in 2013," said Ann Bastin, proprietor. "We ran a similar store there, but chose to relocate to a family homestead in Hastings Highlands."

Maynooth's new revitalization work reflects a strong business association, in tune with the needs and interests of their region. Their work also underscores the values and priorities of their associates, which increased from 60 to 90 members over the past year.

"The future of Maynooth is in entrepreneurship and supporting the local economy," said Shaun Sellars, a young entrepreneur who opened her Maple Leaf Chocolate company in Hastings Highlands, in 2014. "We not only have the talent to create a rich local economy, but we also have a population who understands and values owner-run businesses."

It is worth a jaunt to Maynooth to see this new revitalization sculpture before it becomes veiled by winter snow. While the stonework is finished for this season, there are more plans that will come to fruition in the spring, when indigenous perennials and windswept trees will be planted alongside this living work of art.

"We can't wait to get the plants in place next spring," said Russell.