

The NB Museum, Destination for All Ages

by

Jane Barry, Greater Saint John Community Foundation

When the weather outside is less than appealing there is a place that's open seven days a week where you can shop, learn, have hands on experiences indoors and out, meet people, do research and some days, it's absolutely free. The New Brunswick Museum (NBM) is bound to catch the attention of visitors of all ages. Our community can also lay claim to having the nation's oldest continuously operating museum, with collections dating to the 1840's. It is the home of priceless artifacts and records which have been entrusted to New Brunswick citizens to record many elements of our history, long after we have gone.

Last fall an exhibit marked the conclusion of a unique, five year research project called CURA (Community University Research Alliance), which provided employment opportunities for 70 student researchers. "Saint John, an Industrial City in Transition" was one of the outcomes, involving exhibits and public presentations of research findings. Partners included the NBM, Saint John Human Development Council, UNB-Saint John, ACAP Saint John and Peninsula Heritage Inc.

A community outreach project, a "bio blitz", is currently underway in the Jacquet River Gorge, the Province's largest protected natural area. It recently welcomed a team of 18 experts in natural history, assisted by community members, to begin an inventory, as the basis for a management plan. Coordinated by the NBM's Head of Natural Sciences, Dr. Donald McAlpine and with funding from the Salamander Foundation, the local open house drew a large audience from the Northeast, giving new meaning to their provincial museum far from its headquarters

Late in June, the Museum of Civilization board met for the first time outside Ottawa and announced a valuable new NBM partnership which will result in jointly mounted exhibits, which may travel widely, a costly venture for one museum alone. This week, NBM visitors will be treated to a new, dual exhibit of photography and painting. Jamie Wilson has captured images of NB painters whose works will also be included in the summer show. It's the ultimate example of a "Staycation" where the budget-conscious can tour without leaving home.

R. Gary Faloon, Q.C., heads the fifteen member board, which includes six new volunteers reflecting the diversity of the province. He dedicates a lot of his time to the NBM and other community groups. "The NBM Board is currently focused on two key priorities: achieving significant improvements to the NBM's facilities and strengthening opportunities for funding for the NBM in the future" he states.

Jane Fullerton has been with the NBM for over twenty years and is their Director and CEO. She leads an incredibly skilled and well-trained team of specialists in a wide variety of fields in the fine and decorative arts, natural sciences and human history. The permanent staff of about fifty is assisted by term, part-time and summer student employees at the Market Square Exhibition Centre and the Douglas Avenue Collections Centre (including extensive archives, research library and collection storage).

Staff and Research Associates of the New Brunswick Museum are involved in a wide variety of research programs relating to their extensive collections. They are managed through computer based databases: InMagic for the Natural Sciences (including botany, zoology or geology) and the Archives and Research Library, (including the photograph collection) and The Museum System (TMS) for the Humanities. A group from within and outside the NBM is actively exploring the possibility of becoming a UNESCO Geopark, capitalizing on some of Saint John's best kept geological secrets.

If you have treasures you may wish to entrust forever to the people of our Province, there is a re-assuring process which protects the donor and Museum. If the items seem to be of local or regional interest and not replicated in the NBM's collections, they will be examined by experts for significance and authenticity and presented to a committee for consideration. If accepted, valuations would be done and a charitable receipt issued. Occasionally, a purchase might be made but funding for these is scarce. The donor need not worry about the items being "sold" because the NBM will not accept them unless the artifacts are of long-term value and complementary to their collections. To de-accession an item is rare and a very lengthy process.

The Museum offers opportunities to visit galleries, attend openings, curator talks, and workshops. Admission is free on July 1, NB Day, Acadian Day, Aug. 15 and Santa Claus Parade day. NBM's Children's and Youth activities, even birthday parties, sound like fun: Museum Idoll, Night at the Museum, Birds, Bugs and Belugas, Giants of the Deep, Anchors Aweigh and Fossil Finds. For a modest cost, staff can travel to classrooms or host an event at Market Square. A variety of summer camps offer young people New Brunswick history, science, and art through indoor and outdoor excursions, eco-art production or hands-on discovery activities. For info: 1.888.268.9595 www.nbm-mnb.ca



Photo: Jane Fullerton, is Director & CEO of the New Brunswick Museum and President R. Gary Faloon, Q.C., heads the board of the provincial institution, Canada's oldest continuously operating Museum.

Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, Executive Director of the Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 672-8880. To view other Community Profiles, visit www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca