

Highlander business



Haliburton Highlands
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

Happy New Year!

from the Chamber
Board & Staff

UPCOMING EVENTS

LAST CALL!

January Breakfast

Hosted by
Oakview Lodge & Marina
2029 Little Hawk Lake Rd
Algonquin Highlands, ON

Tuesday, January 12th, 2016

Guest Speaker:
Newly Elected MP
Jamie Schmale

RSVP TODAY!
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10TH ANNUAL AWARDS GALA

Have you nominated yet?

AWARD CRITERIA: HIGHLANDER OF THE YEAR

This prestigious award recognizes a citizen For outstanding contributions and community leadership demonstrated for the benefit of the Haliburton Highlands. The 'Highlander of the Year' is a community enthusiast - a true Ambassador who has contributed in the areas of art, culture, heritage, community services, economic development, the environment, etc.

**Nomination deadline is
Friday January 22, 2016**

Pick up a form online at
haliburtonchamber.com
or email
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Haliburton Highlands
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

Berman not giving up on innovation centre

By Mark Arike
Staff writer

Five years ago, Leora Berman decided to restore a local heritage building in Donald and turn it into a hub for contractors in the area.

It's been a challenging project to say the least, but she remains committed to seeing that vision through.

"It's the coolest frigging pain in the ass I've ever met," joked Berman in an interview.

The local resident committed to the project after meeting with Jim O'Connor, owner of the property which is home to one of the buildings belonging to a former chemical plant. She discovered the property and learned about its historical significance while researching different features throughout the Land Between, an area which stretches from the Canadian Shield to the St. Lawrence Lowlands.

"I knew what this building was about. A lot of historians know what this building was about. Haliburton didn't seem to know," said Berman.

She suggested O'Connor donate the property instead of letting it go for tax sale.

"I said what you own is not only significant for Haliburton, but North America."

The Donald Chemical Distribution Building was commissioned by Richard A. Donald and built by Westinghouse Engineering for \$1 million in 1908. The building, which features free-standing beams, would go to become "the largest iron coke plant in all of North America," explained Berman.

In 1914, Canada became a major exporter of iron and the market collapsed. According to the project's website, the plant was then sold for \$1 to Wood Chemical Inc., who then sold it to Standard Chemical Company. It was then used to produce wood acetate for

chemical applications and ammunitions until its closure in 1946.

O'Connor made the donation and Berman got to work. Since signing up as coordinator, she rezoned the property, gutted and cleaned the interior and obtained a \$50,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, among other things.

Engineers were paid for their initial study, but took an interest in the project and decided to donate their fees to design and overseeing the restoration process.

More than \$20,000 in cash and labour has been donated by local business owners.

The plan was to bring the uninhabited relic back to life as The Eco-Innovation Centre. Its purpose would be to "showcase and research the best in stewardship, green technologies and integrative building solutions." Berman likens it to "a living home show."

"We've got 500 families that are directly involved in construction and renovation," she pointed out. "So that's still the primary purpose."

Part of the reason the project has come to a standstill is the fact that the engineers would like to get their hands on the blueprints before providing their stamp of approval. Berman, however, has been unable to get her hands on them.

"The funny thing is the archives in Peterborough burnt down and the archives in Toronto burnt down," she said.

It is possible the engineers will be able to use the ruins across the street.

Until the engineering issues are resolved,

Berman will offer contractors a "virtual centre" online this summer. This will be known as The Building Between.

"Eventually, when the building is ready, members will be able to occupy it."

Berman is also looking at other ways the building could be utilized by other members of the community when it is not in use. For example, she would like to see youth use the space.

"Youth, in terms of a sector of our community, is not getting enough attention."

The Land Between (in this case the national charity which Berman founded) is now incubating the project. It was a move that made sense in order to leverage money for the project.

"The Land

Between has matching in-kind funding from our board participation and administration but some nondiscretionary funding from sales and sponsors," she said, adding that one of the organization's objectives is to "support and facilitate sustainable economic development in the region."

Berman admits the entire project has moved along slower than expected. The goal was to open the centre last year.

"As I've said from the beginning, it's worth a shot. I don't care if it's going to take 10 years, I'm still going to keep on truckin'," said Berman.

Berman thanked O'Connor for his generosity and stewardship of the building over the years.

To learn more about the building and recent developments visit buildingbetween.ca.

We've got about 500 families that are directly involved in construction and renovation.

Leora Berman



Photo by Walt Griffin

Christmas in January

Amber O'Rea, 20, was presented keys to a 2016 GMC Terrain SLE on Jan. 5 from Curry Chevrolet. O'Rea entered the nationwide GM Connect & Win contest when in for an oil change last year, when Jason Curry suggested she enter the no obligation contest. The contest took place between Dec. 4 and Jan. 4 and contestants could win one of 30 vehicles valued up to \$35,000. O'Rea was able to pick the vehicle of her choice.

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