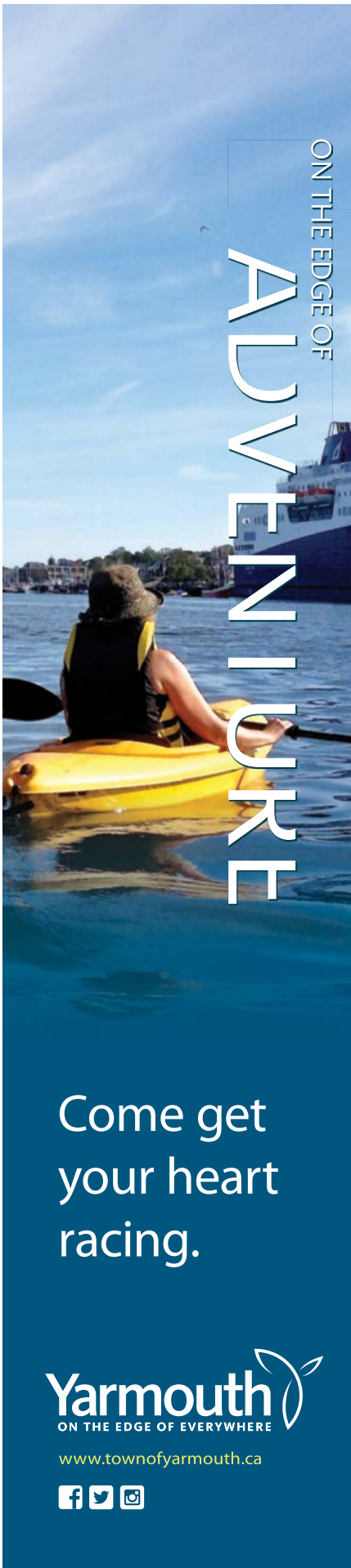


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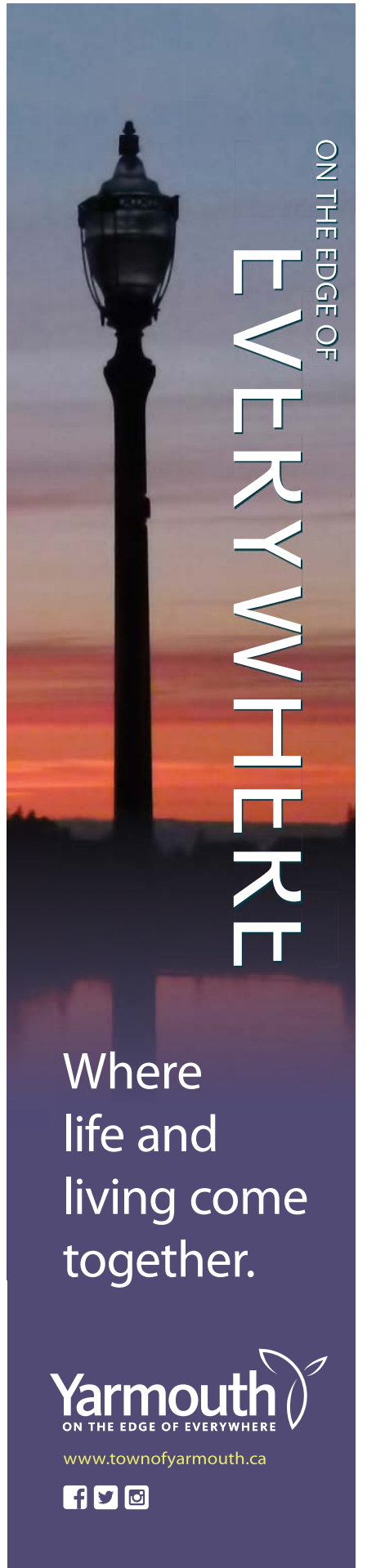
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# All Hands On Deck

Yarmouth's mayor has a powerful vision for her town

**PAM MOOD IS TAKING A FOND LOOK BACK** at her community's past at the same time as she's contemplating the future. When she does, the progressive mayor of Yarmouth sees an era when her town was one of the centres of economic activity in Atlantic Canada—when shipbuilding, manufacturing, and trade with New England elevated the community to city status. It was a period of stately homes, regal downtown buildings, and beautiful fountains and gardens. The trappings of wealth were everywhere. Mood believes that rich past is a model for the future.

"I see heritage, history, and people with an incredible spirit," says Mood. "We have everything in place to build that kind community again—a friendly close-knit community with the kind of urban flare that you can experience in places along the coast of New England. My job as a leader is to show people the possibilities of what can be achieved."

Mood hasn't wasted a lot of time getting around to that job since being elected in 2012. One of her first acts as mayor was to spearhead All

Hands On Deck, a community-driven initiative that would allow Yarmouth residents to come together and talk about what they could do to help the town bring back its pride and past glory. About 500 people showed up at the first meeting.

"To get 500 people in a town our size to show up and say, 'What can we do?' That says a lot about the spirit that exists here in Yarmouth," says Mood. "When something like that happens, people start to take notice of the change of attitude that's taking place in the community. Businesspeople and developers start paying attention. I've already had a number of developers knocking at my door looking to tap into the opportunities here. People are buying property. There's a real feeling that things are starting to happen."

Mood and her team also hired a new director of planning for the town: Caroline King, a young, smart urban planner full of fresh ideas. "She's finding new and innovative



**“I believe that in five years, Yarmouth will be a place where young people come to set up businesses and enjoy our lifestyle”**

**— Pam Mood**

ways to connect with business,” says Mood. Natalie Smith was recently hired as the town’s new economic development officer; she’s charged with promoting Yarmouth’s advantages to businesses across the region and beyond. One of the first orders of business was to give Yarmouth a tag line—“On the edge of everywhere”—to sum up the community’s history and its future possibilities. “Our tagline is perfect,” says Mood. “It describes who we are.”

Another new economic development happened soon after Mood’s election, although she doesn’t take credit for it. The ferry linking Yarmouth to Portland, Maine, was reinstated after a four-year absence. The mayor doesn’t believe the ferry is a make-or-break component of the town’s economic development plan, but it’s an important piece of the tourism industry, and it does reinforce one aspect of Yarmouth’s psyche: the connection with New England. A quick glance at a map of the Gulf of Maine shows just how close Yarmouth is to cities such as Portland and Boston—it’s a connection that is a strong part of Yarmouth’s potential business arsenal.

“I believe that in five years, Yarmouth will be a place where young people come to set up businesses and enjoy our lifestyle,” says Mood. “Those people who can work anywhere, people who can run businesses that are dependent on Internet connectivity or telecommuting, will find Yarmouth a very appealing place to live and work. Our downtown will be busy. We’ll have plenty of amenities. I see us being like a smaller version of Portland—a safe, vibrant, well-connected community.” —

**TOM MASON**

## LIFESTYLE



# Staking a claim

**For a wave of young families, Yarmouth offers a bright future**

For Dustin Duprat, moving to Yarmouth four years ago meant that he and his wife could afford the lifestyle they were looking for. The young Vermont native admits that probably wouldn’t be possible in most places in North America. “With the housing market and the cost of living the way they are in Yarmouth, we could get a leg up here,” he says. “We could afford the home we wanted.”

Other considerations came into play as well. Yarmouth puts the Duprats close to his wife’s family; she’s a Nova Scotia native whom he met at a Montreal design school. “It feels like the right place to be. It’s the right size town for me,” he says. “I love the proximity to Halifax and to quintessential Nova Scotian towns like Annapolis Royal, Shelburne, and Liverpool. There’s a lot of opportunity here in Yarmouth—the opportunity to start a small business or an industry.”

That’s exactly what Duprat is doing. As a designer and building-renovation specialist, he has set up a business in the barn of his 1857 home, one that will take advantage of the new round of renovation and rejuvenation that’s sweeping the town. He believes that Yarmouth’s current revival will take the same direction as many of the New England towns where he grew up. “The town is really pushing facade improvement, to revive the way it looked in the boom days of the past,” he says. “With the new siding technologies that are available today—technologies that look traditional but don’t require the maintenance they once did—that goal is definitely going to be possible to achieve.”

The Duprats are part of a wave of young families staking their claim in Yarmouth. Tom Baxter is also riding that wave, a family doctor who moved to the town with his wife and young children a year and a half ago. Yarmouth afforded the Halifax native the opportunity to engage in passions such as running, biking, and getting out in the woods. It also gave him the kind of hands-on career experience he would have had trouble finding in a larger centre. “I liked the idea of practicing in a rural setting,” he says. “It allowed me to get more involved with my patients and to do more hospital work. I’ve have a great working environment here, and my wife has already made some close friends in the community. It’s a beautiful place, and we’ve been very well received.”

Dustin Duprat agrees, and thinks the future is bright. “Yarmouth is going to develop and become one of Nova Scotia’s great towns again,” he says. “We’re going to get our pride back. I have great respect for our community leaders, and I know they’re on the right track.” — **T.M.**



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Jason and Matthew Doucette of Xona Games

JOHN SHERLOCK

# An easy commute

## A new generation of entrepreneurs are discovering the benefits of Yarmouth

Robert Mercier had to look up New Caledonia on a map the first time he landed a client from the Pacific island nation. “I thought it was in New Brunswick,” he says, laughing. Mercier’s geographic knowledge has improved a lot since then. Today his specialty travel company, Mouse Voyages Travel, serves clients from 17 countries who are looking for custom-designed vacations at Walt Disney World and other Orlando theme parks. “We guide them virtually through every step of their vacation, based on their interests and the ages of their children,” he says. “If they have a young girl who wants dinner reservations at Cinderella’s Royal Table, if they want to see fireworks, or parades, we make sure they don’t miss a moment of the magic.”

Mercier runs his international business from his Yarmouth home base, but it took him awhile to settle on the town. “We started the business in Quebec,” he says, “but that province was too regulated for us. Then we moved out West, but we couldn’t find the community spirit we were looking for. When we discovered Yarmouth, we realized the town was exactly what we were looking for as a place to live and to run a business. We’re really living the good life here now.”

For Alex Colgan, living in Yarmouth means working from home. It’s a good thing, because the daily commute would be a killer—5,800 kilometres and four time zones to his company’s head office in San Francisco. Colgan is the lead writer for Leap Motion, an IT firm that has developed a revolutionary new computer control system that allows gamers, designers, automobile drivers, and others to control computer interfaces simply by waving a hand in space. “The way we interact with computers hasn’t changed since the early 1980s,” says Colgan. “This is going to change that.”

Yarmouth native Matthew Doucette has been a game developer for nearly as long as he can remember. He started when he was seven years old, along with his twin brother, Jason, but it wasn’t until 2008 that the Doucettes realized they had the beginnings of a company. “Game development has always dominated our lives,” says Matthew. “But we didn’t really understand the business when we started. Nobody did.”

Today Matthew and Jason’s company, Xona Games, develops award-winning indie games that are simple, popular, and fun—a throwback to the games they enjoyed as children. The company is already an international success, and the Doucettes plan to keep operations in Yarmouth. “It’s home,” says Matthew. — T.M.

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# Punching above their weight

New ideas and new blood are changing the way Yarmouth approaches economic development

**IN ITS NINE YEARS OF EXISTENCE**, the World Junior A Challenge has always taken place in Canada, but Hockey Canada moves the location of the international tournament every year. That all changed in 2013, when tournament organizers decided to return to the community that had hosted the year before: Yarmouth. The sudden policy switch was no surprise to Yarmouth Mayor Pam Mood. “They came back because of the spread we put on the year before,” she says. “Because of our hospitality.”

A deep-rooted sense of hospitality is just one of the competitive advantages that Yarmouth has up its sleeve. There are many others—advantages that are hard to quantify and hard to duplicate, says Natalie Smith, the

town’s economic development officer. “There is a pride and a stubbornness here,” she says. “We’re an innovative community with a long list of great innovations. People here embrace community spirit, and they don’t compromise their lifestyle.”

Jeff Gushue is chief administrative officer for the town of Yarmouth. He says there has been a real push by the town in recent years to eliminate the regulations that have limited business growth. “For long periods, our regulations were restrictive to business,” he says. “With our shrinking population, we came to the realization that we needed to go in a different direction. We want to see this community grow.”

Gushue’s own epiphany happened one night recently

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## A low cost of living, an available workforce, inexpensive land, and excellent air, sea, and highway links all give Yarmouth a strong appeal for businesses looking for new locations to set up shop

when he was listening to Acadia University president Ray Ivany speak about the *One Nova Scotia* report that Ivany had headed. He realized that it was time to take action. Soon after that meeting, a land-use review was commissioned by the town. At the same time, the national consulting firm MMM Group was contracted to conduct an economic impact study while Yarmouth hired a new economic development officer and a director of planning to take things in a different direction.

Caroline King stepped into the latter role, a young urban-planning graduate student who immediately moved to Yarmouth, bought a house, and started making changes. “It was an opportunity to come to a town and do something different and new,” she says. “I jumped at the chance.”

King began with an inclusive approach, holding a round of public consultations to glean ideas and find out what options were available. She also began working closely with MMM Group. “They’ve been doing extensive community consultations. They are doing a lot around branding, helping the town change its image.”

Gushue says that while the Nova Star ferry to Portland, Maine, is the backbone of the tourism industry in Yarmouth, the

real economic driver is the fishing industry and its spinoffs. The town is also the retail and service centre for southwestern Nova Scotia. A stable of other advantages—a low cost of living, an available workforce, inexpensive land, and excellent air, sea and highway links—give Yarmouth a strong appeal for businesses looking for new locations to set up shop. “Our job is to make it easy for businesses that see those opportunities to locate here,” he says.

Yarmouth is also taking steps to rejuvenate its downtown, developing programs such as a facade incentive to provide economic perks to businesses that make building improvements. “We’re going to get our streets back to what they used to be,” says Smith. “We want to make it a more livable community and improve the quality of life.”

Smith says that there is already a noticeable difference. People are talking with renewed confidence and looking ahead to a bright future. “We’ve got an amazing mayor and a lot of good ideas,” she says. “Because we’re a service centre for southwestern Nova Scotia, we already have a lot of services that you wouldn’t expect in a town our size. We already punch above our weight. Now it’s time to let the rest of the world know about us.” — T.M.

# Training new doctors

## Innovative family medicine program a boon

Shelagh Leahey only planned to stay in Yarmouth for five years when she set up her family medical practice here shortly after graduating from medical school. That was in 1976.

Nearly 40 years later, Leahey has no plans of leaving her adoptive home anytime soon. In fact, she has just taken on a new job: training a new generation of family physicians. She is Yarmouth's postgraduate site director for the new Dalhousie University Family Medical Residency Program.

"The format for training family physicians has evolved," says Leahey. "The old way was to do a series of rotations in a hospital. The problem is, that's not how a family doctor practices medicine. About 95% of family physicians don't spend all day in a hospital, and 50% don't go to hospitals at all."

The new way of training at Dalhousie involves a daily office practice in a community with regular access to hospitals. South West Nova is one of eight sites across the Maritimes taking part in the program. The site is ideally suited for doctors interested in pursuing a career in rural Nova Scotia. Preceptor clinics are located in six communities in Digby, Yarmouth, and Shelburne counties, with Yarmouth and its multi-specialty, 100-bed hospital serving as the major academic site.

Leahey says that having a group of family medicine residents living and working in the Yarmouth area for 22 months has a major financial impact on the community; the payroll for the program is around \$750,000 annually. But there's another, less quantifiable benefit that may be more important. "Some of them will stay in rural Nova Scotia," she says. "Some of them might stay here in southwestern Nova Scotia. That's a big value for the province." — **T.M.**



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South End renos



Rennehan home



Old jailhouse

# Back to the nest

A successful business leader gives back to the community that raised her

**THE REVITALIZATION OF AN OLD** town jailhouse takes a heavy dose of out-of-the-box thinking, but for Mandy Rennehan, that's the easy part. She's used to seeing possibilities in things that other people might have missed. Rennehan left her Yarmouth home at the tender age of 20 to found the company Fresco Maintenance and Construction in Ontario. After 20 years of business success, she's giving back to the community that raised and nurtured her. The abandoned 150-year-old jail is part of her new development vision.

"It's an iconic building," says Rennehan. "It has been part of the community forever. My plan is to turn it into a focal point for the community—probably a retail space, maybe a five-star restaurant."

Rennehan expects the renovation project to cost around \$1 million, but that's only part of her plan to revitalize downtown Yarmouth. She also has her sights set on a number of buildings in the south end. "That was where Yarmouth started and prospered," she says. "It makes sense to look at that end of town as the place to start the revitalization process."

Rennehan says the jail will be LEED certified and modern when it's completed. She plans to restore the original brick and add an extension to the building, but she also wants to make sure the 19th-century facility conforms to 21st-century standards. "Things have to work as well on a practical level as they do on a design level," she says.

Yarmouth is like a sleeping giant, says Rennehan—a place bursting with potential that needs some help to get things started on the right track. She says that a number of developers are already taking a hard look at the opportunities available here, such as inexpensive properties ripe for development and a strong loyal workforce ready to take things to the next level. "You'd really struggle to find this architecture anywhere else," she says. "It's a unique place, and we can capitalize on that uniqueness. We can have great restaurants and shopping here, great tourism appeal, we can be a first-class destination like the great coastal towns in Maine. Yarmouth was an amazing place to grow up. I want to make it even better than that." — T.M.



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# A community full of opportunity

**EVEN IN A TOWN WITH MORE** than its share of historic architecture, the old Royal Bank building on Main Street in Yarmouth stands out: a two-storey, late-Victorian, Commercial-style structure with a granite-and-sandstone facade, Corinthian keystone trim, and pilaster columns. The building served as one of Yarmouth's main financial institutions from just before the beginning of the First World War through to 1979. After that it was home to a variety of small businesses for the next 25 years. In 2006 it assumed an important new role as The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia's western branch.

It's one of the most unique art galleries in the country, says gallery co-ordinator Angela Collier. "We are the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia's satellite gallery," she says. "That makes us the only satellite gallery of a major art gallery in Canada. All of the shows are curated by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, and we serve as additional exhibition space for its collection."

The affiliation allows the AGNS Western Branch to tap into a collection of more than 14,000 works of art—everything from painting and printmaking to sculpture and folk art. "We also get tremendous support from our local artist community," says Collier. "Our population of artists here in the Yarmouth area is amazing."

It may come as a surprise at first that a town the size of Yarmouth would have a major art gallery in its midst. But Yarmouth is full of amenities that much larger communities would envy, including a number of sports facilities, a local theatre, and a symphony orchestra chaired by a group of around 40 talented amateur musicians.

Mariner's Centre is one of the standouts. Opened in 2001, the 65,000-square-foot facility hosts concerts for up to 3,000 people, trade shows, conferences, catered events, and sports on its two ice surfaces. The centre was

the venue for the Canadian Junior Hockey league's Fred Page Cup in 2005 and hosted the New York Islanders training camps in 2005 and 2006. It was the site of the World Junior A Challenge in 2012 and 2013 and is home of the Yarmouth Junior A Mariners hockey team.

For those who like to take their sports outside, the popular Yarmouth Links Golf Course is one of Atlantic Canada's oldest and prettiest courses, dating back more than a century. Yarmouth County has dozens of hiking and biking trails, including the 87-kilometre Lower East Pubnico to Norwood Linear Park and a 132-kilometre trail built on an abandoned rail corridor from Yarmouth to Digby County, plus beaches, parks, sailing, and boating.

The place is brimming with talent too, according to Gordon Rothwell, the leader of the Yarmouth Citizen Band. The band is a collection of performing units that includes a wind ensemble, a swing band, and a symphony orchestra that all draw from a stable of local amateur musicians. "We've got a lot of incredibly talented musicians in Yarmouth," says Rothwell, "including a pretty decent complement of string players and some really strong players in the lead chairs."

The musicians, who range in age from 14 to 81, perform a wide-ranging repertoire that includes jazz standards, Christmas music, classics, and pops. Their latest showstopper is a Lady Gaga tune arranged as a traditional fugue.

The centre for volunteerism in Yarmouth arguably resides at Th'YARC Playhouse and Arts Centre, an intimate performing arts venue located on Parade Street. Along with performances by regional and international artists, the theatre is home to plays staged by the Yarmouth Drama Society, ballets by the Yarmouth Dance Academy, and workshops and displays by a variety of local art and craft organizations. Th'YARC has a set design shop, a costume society with around 1,000 costumes, and a lighting and sound studio. Everything is managed by a small army of volunteers.

Sandy Fevens is Th'YARC's executive director. She says the hundreds of volunteers who dedicate their time and energy to the community every year are doing it to please themselves as much as anyone else. "There are a lot of people in our community who love the arts," she says. "If they can get involved behind the scenes or onstage, they're getting a chance to do something they love. There are a lot of opportunities to do that here in Yarmouth." — T.M.

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