



FROM PROVINCE HOUSE TO HOME

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Kings West

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It would be easy to start the New Year looking back at how poorly the Canadian economy performed in the last six months of 2008. A 40% drop on the Toronto Stock Exchange; over 10% loss in house values, and 4 to 5 thousand jobs lost in Nova Scotia. However, there are many reasons besides my natural optimism to observe a number of positive signs.

My Christmas read was "The Geography of Hope" by Canadian Chris Turner. A fabulous work because of its practical solutions to current energy and environmental issues, and consequently the economic benefits of addressing the two. The central impact of Turner's work is that fear often causes paralysis, while hope creates action and charts a course for a new direction. Which leads me at the beginning of 2009 to look at a number of developments in the riding. These will be positive for Kings West, the Annapolis Valley and by extension, the province.

One in four to five jobs in the Valley are directly or indirectly created by agriculture. For that reason alone, and given the recent history in Kings County around farmland protection, this will be the year that the Province will need to take action to keep it available for future generations of Nova Scotians. Very simply, if this generation doesn't preserve the land base it won't be here for future farmers. I think Farmland Trust, like Nature Trust, will be a complimentary development that through public and private contributions will support farmland preservation. It will provide a farmer with retirement income, which is a small price to pay for his years of stewardship and food production.

The "Buy Local" movement will advance another step in 2009. It is critically important in its own right but also a support to "farmland preservation". The Buy Local movement is creating jobs and fostering sustainability while reducing the distance from field to fork. It is also advancing food safety and security which is an insurance policy that is priceless. This is all happening without the province having a comprehensive agricultural strategy. Don't get me wrong-some sectors are doing very well but an over-arching, integrated agricultural policy could halt farm loss, increase farm gate income and attract young farmers which is rare these days. Agriculture could be and should be hope for the next generation.

Three projects will get underway in 2009 and create a number of short-term construction jobs (currently needed) and will certainly have long term employment, health and quality of community benefits. Yes, the Kings Mutual Apple Dome will get started and serve the ice and recreational needs of Berwick and District for the next half century or more. I have always viewed an arena as an essential sport, recreation and healthy community complex in our Canadian climate. Berwick's new facility will certainly be that, and its multi-use, year round function will be a drawing card for new families and businesses. While the delay has made some people nervous, escalating costs forced the facility to be right sized and operationally affordable.

Good progress is being made by the Harbourville Restoration Society to finalize plans for the final phase of the community wharf. The east side construction phase has gone through a number of challenges but with a Valley company now involved in planning and overseeing construction, this project will be realized in 2009. The first phase of wharf work has brought about many benefits to Harbourville and has contributed to its viability. I often use this example to clearly demonstrate how infrastructure investment in rural communities provides hope and the possibility for their futures. Placing a weir in Harbourville, will certainly be another attraction this summer.

And then there is building Brigadoon, and I am sure many of you are asking "What is Brigadoon?" It is a not-for-profit organization that will build a camp facility on Aylesford Lake for children and youth with a chronic illness or condition. The facilities and programming for these young people are unique---often requiring medical teams, equipment and special protocols. Having met with David McKeage, Executive Director of Brigadoon, to discuss this \$5.75 million dollar facility, and all indications point to a 2009 construction start. There are already a number of businesses and individuals in the Valley involved in fund raising and creating awareness. This facility will be used year round and therefore provide a welcome addition to the Maritimes.

While 2009 will have its share of challenges for our province, I am confident we will seize opportunities and keep our county prosperous. It is one of five counties in Nova Scotia still increasing its population. Improving our quality of life is one of my goals for the New Year.

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