

Whale Sanctuary Project breaks ground

Opening projected for summer 2027



RIGHT-SIZED SHOVEL: 15-month-old Austyn Simon had a shovel just her size and a little help from mom, Amy Simon, for the official groundbreaking of the Whale Sanctuary Project at picturesque Wine Harbour, Guysborough County, on June 19.

Helen Murphy

Joanne Jordan
Local Journalism
Initiative Reporter

WINE HARBOUR – Under bright blue skies along the scenic shoreline of Wine Harbour, the Whale Sanctuary Project (WSP) hosted a groundbreaking June 19, where ceremonial shovels turned the soil to mark the upcoming start of construction.

More than 60 people – including local residents, elected officials and Indigenous supporters – gathered at the Wine Harbour Wharf to

help celebrate the milestone following years of research, planning and development.

Inside the sanctuary’s gated perimeter, attendees toured the site, where the land-based portion of the project will be built, and listened to remarks from WSP leaders and supporters.

Outside the property, a small group of protesters opposed to the project, some holding signs, gathered at the entrance road and along the gated perimeter. Signs with messages in opposition

to the WSP were also posted along the road leading to the site.

Messages of gratitude

In welcoming guests, WSP CEO Charles Vinick thanked the many people involved in bringing the project to this point.

He offered special thanks to community liaison officer and co-ordinator Amy Simon, affectionately known locally as “the whale girl,” noting she was the

Continued on 38

Town council notes

Council crunches numbers on sewage treatment plant

Corey LeBlanc

ANTIGONISH – The Town of Antigonish continues to explore options for advancing its multi-million sewage treatment plant (STP) refurbishment project.

Three bids were submitted by the May 28 deadline for the pro-

posed work on the front-end of the facility, with each submission significantly over budget. The lowest one - \$6,282,365 – from Avondale Construction exceeded the issued quote in the tender package by \$2.23 million.

“Staff are working with the contractor and

with our consultant to see if there’s anything that we can tweak... Council said, loud and clear, that we must fix the sewer treatment plant, and reducing any scope of the work may jeopardize the smell and the effectiveness of this

Continued on 37

‘Building a safe, secure community for all’

Community members gather to discuss racist behaviour in Antigonish

Corey LeBlanc

ANTIGONISH – In response to what they say is an increase in racist behaviour directed at neighbours from diverse cultural groups – who now call this community home – a group of residents gathered at The People’s Place Library on

June 15 to discuss the goal of “building a safe, secure community for all.”

“They are becoming increasingly bold,” Olga Gladkikh – one of the organizers of the gathering – told *The Journal* of those harassing, intimidating, verbally abusing and discriminating

against others; experiences she noted that Black and Indigenous residents have been dealing with for years.

She added that the people who are being targeted are beginning to be made to feel that “they don’t belong in our community.”

“Our new residents

are feeling anxious, hesitant and unsupported about speaking up,” Gladkikh offered.

She noted that the June 15 meeting was the second one on the issue, coming after a more informal gathering of a “small group of friends” to discuss a recent incident involving a friend

and colleague who works at Coady Institute. During her usual morning walk to work on the StFX campus, as she passed the RCMP detachment, she was the target of verbal abuse from a passing vehicle, Gladkikh explained. The driver and passengers hurled obscenities and slurs towards her,

while telling her to ‘go home.’ The woman who

Continued on 37

\$2.25 + HST
PM: 40013898



9 903126 488886

Whale Sanctuary Project breaks ground

Continued from 1

.....

person who introduced project organizers to the Wine Harbour site.

“Amy has been our leader locally, and we are very grateful for all of her support,” Vinick said.

An emotional Vinick also thanked his wife, whom he described as “my rock,” for her understanding, patience and unending support throughout their years together as he has worked to find a better future for marine life.

Collaborative journey

Vinick thanked supporters and volunteers who dedicated countless hours and gave generously of their time and energy to help make the project a reality.

“We wouldn’t be here without all of you,” he said.

He also thanked Indigenous leaders for their support and guidance. “Throughout the years spent working on the project, engaging in informal consultation with the Mi’kmaw communities “was a tremendous experience,” Vinick told the crowd.

“What we’ve learned together is how much we have in common,” he said.

Special guests from the Mi’kmaw community included former senator Dan Christmas, who represented Nova Scotia in the senate from 2016 to 2023; Mi’kmaw artist Allan Siliboy; and Shau-na-Lee Maloney Wright of Sipekne’katik First

Nation, who performed a traditional welcome song.

Her daughter, Amanda Ruby Wright – whose Indigenous name coincidentally means “little whale,” – led a smudging ceremony before the ceremonial turning of the soil.

Bec Borchert, the marine protected areas co-ordinator at the Kwilmu’kw Maw-klusuaqn (KMK) Negotiation Office, spoke about the importance of consultation and discussions between development project organizers, including those involved with the WSP, regarding potential impacts – both good and bad – on Mi’kmaw Rights and Title.

She also emphasized the importance of incorporating Mi’kmaw values, laws, language and governance opportunities in the planning and development of the sanctuary.

Borchert said one of the important Mi’kmaw values is the principle of All My Relations, “which connects us to all living and non-living things in our environment – to the past, to the present and to the future.” She said this principle helps guide the steps needed to be taken to make projects like the WSP a reality.

As co-owners of the lands and waters of Nova Scotia, the Mi’kmaw community has a responsibility “to speak on behalf of our kin and to stand up for marine life in our territory,” Borchert said.

“The WSP is one



DRIVING LEGISLATION: Retired senator Wilfred Moore introduced and fought for legislation to protect whales and dolphins in Canada and prohibit keeping them in captivity for entertainment or breeding purposes. The Ending the Captivity of Whales and Dolphins Act passed in 2019. Helen Murphy

project that has made working together for mutual benefit absolutely easy.”

Championing the cause

Guest speaker Wilford Moore, a lawyer and former senator, introduced the legislation to protect whales and dolphins in Canada and prohibit keeping them in captivity for entertainment and for breeding purposes. Moore championed that legislation even after his retirement, until the Ending the Captivity of Whales and Dolphins Act passed in 2019.

Moore said that with “a great team” behind him and the support of his friend, the late lawyer, judge and senator Murray Sinclair, who chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commis-

sion and sponsored the bill, he worked hard to see it passed.

And now, Moore said, “This is an opportunity for our province to show leadership.”

He acknowledged that the road hasn’t been an easy one and there has been opposition.

Moore appealed to those who are opposed to the WSP project, suggesting it would be a positive step if people would work together.

“Just give us a chance,” he said.

To those who support the project and are eager to see it completed, “Hang in there with us and we’ll get the job done,” said Moore.

Preparing the site

Vinick said it is realistic to project a spring or



SHARING THE STORY: CEO Charles Vinick spoke of the early days in choosing the Wine Harbour site for the sanctuary and the many people who played a role in getting the project to groundbreaking. Helen Murphy



MUNICIPAL SUPPORT: District of St. Mary’s councillor Scott Beaver spoke on behalf of the municipality, as Warden James Fuller was unable to attend Friday’s groundbreaking. Helen Murphy

summer 2027 opening as the project continues to meet key construction and fundraising milestones, including site engineering and the fabrication and installation of nets, the bay pen and anchoring systems.

“We are proceeding with construction including installation of electrical power at the site, potable water, and refurbishment of the wharf,” Vinick told *The Journal*.

The land where the buildings will be constructed is privately owned and, he added, the terms and conditions between the WSP and the province for the Crown lease of the sanctuary site have been agreed upon for signature.

He noted the refurbishment of the wharf area that wraps around the land where the groundbreaking was held “is among our highest priorities, not only because that is the site for our land-side buildings, but even more important-

ly, because the wharf is the staging area for all in-water installation of the nets and the bay pen in the sanctuary waters.”

Vinick added, “We have always said that we will do everything possible to welcome whales when they need us. That remains our mantra today.”

Municipal support

Councillor Scott Beaver, speaking on behalf of the Municipality of the District of St. Mary’s, said “the WSP represents a unique vision, one that has attracted attention not only across Nova Scotia, but around the world.

“The project is an important investment in the region,” he added, noting the construction phase creating local employment opportunities, “and, in the years ahead, the sanctuary has the potential to bring visitors, research, education and economic activity to our

Opening projected for summer 2027



Hughie MacDonald (left) and WSP’s CEO Charles Vinick shared a light moment during the groundbreaking ceremony held June 19 at the project site in Wine Harbour. A co-founder of the Wine Harbour Wharf Authority, MacDonald operated his lobster boat from that location for more than 60 years. Joanne Jordan

Continued from 38

beautiful Eastern Shore.”

Beaver said the dedication that led to the reality of the WSP reflects many of the qualities of the District of St. Mary’s.

“Our strong communities, our connection to the ocean, and our commitment to preserving the natural beauty, that’s what makes this place so very, very special,” he said.

Correcting a wrong

WSP founder Lori Marino said the sanctuary “is an opportunity for us to make right, what is wrong.”

She added, “What was wrong was the idea that whales should be

taken out of the ocean and put into concrete tanks for our entertainment. Whales are wild creatures, and they have their own lives to live, just as we do, and no one, no one, should take that away from them.”

Marino said the groundbreaking ceremony marked a celebration of more than just the project.

“We are here to celebrate our efforts to give back to [the whales] what was taken from them, a life in the ocean,” she said. “This will mean so much for the individual whales who get to come here, but it will be a shining example of what humans are capable of: coming together not just for our own sake, but for



INDIGENOUS WELCOME: Shauna-Lee Maloney Wright of Sipekne’katik First Nation performed a traditional welcome song to help open the event. Helen Murphy

the sake of others, others who might look different than us but are persons in their own right.”

Marino added the project could be seen as an opportunity to reshape the relationship between humans and animals around the world.

Excited for the future

Speaking with *The Journal* after the event, Greg Morrow, MLA for Guysborough-Tracadie, said, “It’s exciting to get to this point...It’s been a long time coming.”

Morrow acknowledged that, although there have been a number of hurdles and “a bit of red tape” to overcome, “It’s here, it’s exciting, and it’s a great opportunity for the area.”

Helen MacDonald

attended the groundbreaking ceremony with her husband, Hughie, a founding member of the Wine Harbour Port Authority who fished for

more than 60 years from the very spot where the WSP is to be built.

“We’re so excited, it’s really wonderful,” MacDonald said.

The event concluded with refreshments and an opportunity for visitors to speak with presenters and ask questions about the sanctuary.