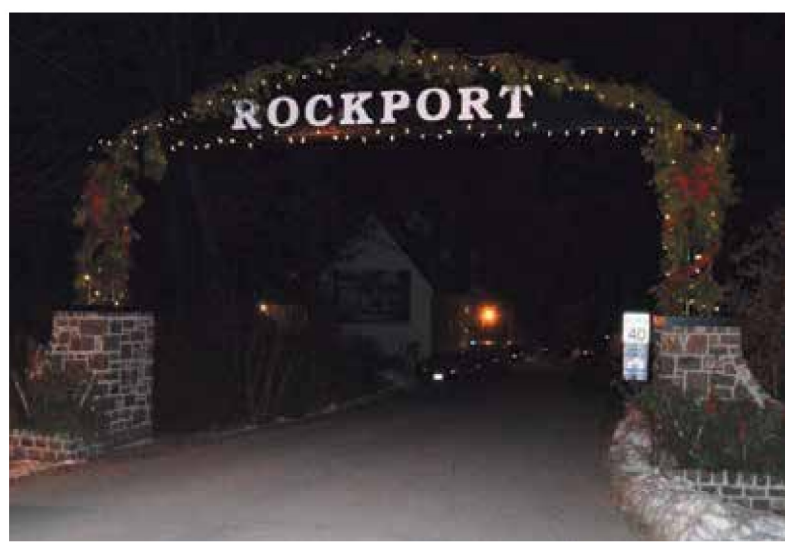




A Church of Redeemer fundraiser and donated part of the proceeds to the Rockport Customs Project. Pictured by the Customs Christmas Tree near the dock and waterfront.

Left to right are Linda Grant, Pat Jackson, Cheryl Pickens, organizers of the fundraiser presenting cheque to members of the Friends of Rockport Customs Board Wendy Merkley, Hunter Grant, and Dianne Phillips.



Rockport Light up the Gate at main entrance of Rockport off the Parkway.

ROCKPORT DOES NOT HIBERNATE

By Andi Christine Bednarzig

From Easter weekend to Thanksgiving, or for as long as foliage season lasts, Rockport, affectionately known to locals as “The sleepy little drinking village with a fishing problem”, is teeming with activity on the water, mainland and surrounding islands.

Fishing boats splutter along the shore as early morning mist lifts off the river. The calm gives way to strident megaphones on tour boats touting the natural beauty of the 1000 Islands and pointing out luxurious island mansions reminiscent of the golden age. Later in the season, the roar of speed boats on poker runs slices through the afternoon haze.

On land, rows and rows of double-decker busses discharge visitors armed with cameras and tripods, smiling and posing with selfie sticks.

But what happens in winter? Tucked in homes along the river, a scant 100 residents form the main core of Rockport.

After the last leaves have fallen, Rockport’s various committees, societies, groups, associations and volunteers keep this tiny community vibrating through the cold winter months as organizers plan festivities, fundraising dinners, and art shows.

The Christmas season opener will occur on Friday November 23rd as villagers gather at the west gate of entry into Rockport to celebrate “Light up the Gate”.

“We decorate the gate with white birch branches, fresh green pine and red bows” explained organizer, Dianne Phillips, Chair

of the Rockport Development Group. For seven years now, the gate has been lit up to the delight of an estimated 45 to 55 carollers. Enthusiastic singers are invited to meet at The Church of the Redeemer just to the left of the gate at 7:30 p.m.

After warming up with hot drinks and home-baked treats at the church, the fortified group will proceed to the customs dock at the waterfront to light a tree.

The lighting of the tree is of special interest to long-time resident, Wendy Merkley, Chair of the Friends of Rockport Customs Restoration Society.

During the busy summer season, Merkley can be found at her desk tucked in the back of RiverRock Shoppe, overlooking the customs property. She explained the prime objective of the society is to plan renovations with a focus on recreation and to provide greater public access.

Phillips, whose group is also involved in fundraising for the customs property, agreed, emphasizing the customs property is the only public access point, as all other access is privately owned.

“All people, visitors and residents alike, have a place to go and have a picnic, do some fishing and dock their boats.”

The 80-year-old Canada customs property and building, where the tree will be lit for the second year, has been in development since 2009. It was purchased by the Township of Leeds and Thousand Islands from Canada Border Services Agency. Donations for renovations have come from various

fundraising events, businesses, individuals and the township.

Once Christmas lights are stowed away, the Rockport Recreation Hall Association will go to work planning the 39th Rockport Winter Carnival. The carnival is traditionally held over the second weekend of February from Wednesday to Sunday. Meg Mallory, Chair of the Association, confirmed this year’s activities of traditional games and indoor activities. Outdoors, participants can join in a family skate, or horse shoes, curling, snow-golf (a version of golf played on snow), and frozen chicken bowling. Lumberjack skills can be tested at log sawing and nail driving, as well as the ever-popular redneck rodeo.

Mallory expects attendance of 60 to 75 people. The rodeo, held on Sunday, features a beer toss from a van seat strapped to a truck, as contestants aim empty cans at a mail box. They can also test their aim by attempting to toss a toilet seat over a pilon.

“We just like to have fun,” Mallory says.

The mission statement of the Rockport Development Group encapsulates the year-round goals of the community.

“To promote good quality sustainable tourism in our village that preserves and fosters a continued awareness of our long heritage and to make Rockport a premiere destination in the 1000 Islands.”

This sleepy village, with its energetic residents and volunteers, is certainly keeping its heritage alive and the neighbourhood flourishing. It certainly does not sleep.

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