

## **A Celebration of Our Volunteer Spirit and Diversity**

Every year at this time, our community shines its brightest thanks to the incredible Festival of Lights. Light-up caps off a month of intense, hard work by an army of volunteers and an entire year of planning and preparation. Light-up brings us together to celebrate the season and our community, and draws thousands of visitors.

Our Festival of Lights is a remarkable achievement. What is even more amazing is that it is just one of countless festivals and events our community puts on throughout the year. I'm not sure if there is another community of our size that hosts as many celebrations throughout the year as Ladysmith does. There are several remarkable things about this feat. We have so many things to showcase – our natural beauty, our history, the arts, music, our amazing friends and neighbours. And celebrate we do!

I look forward to our community events each and every year. We turn out in the hundreds and thousands for Kids' Pirate Day, the Ladysmith Maritime Festival, Aboriginal Day, Ladysmith Days, Show and Shine, Light up the Night, Arts on the Avenue – these celebrations define our summer. Then there are the events put on for the whole community in support of important causes – Concerts in the Park, Logger Sports, Outdoor Movie Night, Hip on the Hill, community dinners, dances and barbecues. These events, and so many more, define my social life!

In between the festivals, you look around and see playgrounds, parks, walkways, community services and all manner of amenities run, built and paid for by local organizations, groups and service clubs.

This volunteer spirit and generosity is, I believe, a large part of what makes Ladysmith so special, and helps to define who we are as a community. The time, energy and commitment of so many dedicated, community-minded volunteers is inspiring. From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank each and every person who gives so much to help build and celebrate our amazing community and make it an even better place to live.

This brings me to another great source of pride I have in our community... our diversity. As a community, Ladysmith has shown leadership in our embrace of diversity at all levels. We strive to be an inclusive and welcoming community, no matter our race, religion, lifestyle choices, place of origin or age. We have grown over the years to represent the best of what a caring and inclusive community should look like.

Although I have been somewhat disheartened recently to hear evidence that we still have work to do, I truly believe ours is a caring, generous, inclusive and tolerant community.

These values are especially important at this time of year. Through 2017 and beyond, I am committed to sharing and reinforcing the values of diversity and inclusion in all that I do. I do hope that as we go through the holiday season, into the new year, and the next... and the

next, that you will join me in sharing this view and this message that Ladysmith is truly a place that is welcoming and supportive to all. Let's move forward and show the world, now more than ever, that we truly shine brightest together.

While we are celebrating with family and loved ones, let us also not forget those who are in need and give what we can to extend cheer, warmth and generosity to those who need it most. All of the best of the season from my family to yours.

Mayor Aaron Stone

Your comments are always welcome. Let's connect!

[astone@ladysmith.ca](mailto:astone@ladysmith.ca)

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