

Community of the Month

Dildo



Darrell Smith photo

Darrell Smith photo



Captain Ujico

Curiosity and adolescent titillation over the name will make you want to visit this community at least once, but the place and the people will leave you wanting more. That's the message of Gerald Smith about his hometown of Dildo.

He admits tourists frequently ask about the origin of the name, which isn't known for sure. "We always thought it was a place name in Spain or the name of a captain because the Spanish apparently sailed here in the 1500s," Gerald says. Another theory is that Dildo is derived from a Spanish or Portuguese description of the two islands at the entrance to the harbour. No matter the origin, to residents it simply means "home" and that's the main reason for not changing it whenever the question of a new name arises. (*Downhomer* recently conducted an online poll that asked "Should the name of Dildo be changed?" Overwhelmingly, Web site visitors voted "no." You can read their comments at www.downhomer.com)

The main industry here is fishing, though tourism is certainly on the rise. Gerald is Chair of Dildo and Area Economic Development Inc., formed in 1993. It opened a museum and interpretation centre, which "stimulated the economy to the point where there's four B&Bs here, a couple of restaurants and a boat tour," he says.



The centre interprets local fishing history as well as artifacts from a Maritime Archaic site at Anderson's Cove, and from a Dorset Palaeoeskimo and Recent Indian site on Dildo Island, about a mile offshore. Dildo Island Tours, founded by Gerald, travels to the archaeological site on the island, where there's also evidence of an 1890s codfish hatchery (the first in North America). Passengers are then treated to a boil-up on the beach. "People love it because...it's something people did years ago on Dildo Island," says Gerald, who captained the tour boat until this year. "I've had people from all over the world. Even (actress) Mary Walsh was out with me twice."

This August marks the 25th anniversary of Dildo Days, when the unveiling of a new Dildo flag is part of the week-long festivities. The design will be the winning entry in a school contest sponsored by the Society of United Fishermen.

The S.U.F. is one of several very active organizations in Dildo. As newcomers Daphne and Dick With found out, these groups are a great way to quickly fit in and meet people. The Withs moved from Ontario in 1997 to their new retirement property in Dildo. Daphne is a St. John's native whose family moved to Toronto when she was nine; Dick is a Mainlander. "We didn't know a soul (in Dildo)," Daphne says. "(But) we got down here and never regretted it."

She says there's always something to do: the Lion's Club holds regular dances, Dick fundraises and socializes with the S.U.F., and Daphne volunteers with the Salvation Army's reading program for elementary kids.

After eight years here, Daphne feels "like I'm properly placed." She adds that Dick, who loves sailing, is more of a Newfoundlander now than she is. In fact she asked him one day, if she were to die would he return to his home province of Ontario. "He looked at me like I had seven heads and said 'Of course I'd stay. What's wrong with you? This is my home.'" ☐