

St. Andrews a Community Classroom

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The deep-rooted relationship between the Coady International Institute and one Antigonish County community can be described as easily as ABCD. Over the past two decades, St. Andrews has used ABCD, asset based community development, to help make several additions, including a community centre and a curling rink. ABCD is a model that identifies the best ways in which to improve without impeding long-term development.

“St. Andrews presents a wonderful opportunity for Coady participants to experience a local example of community-driven development,” Coady assistant director Gord Cunningham said. “There is much we can learn from St. Andrews about what communities should be doing for themselves versus what they should be expecting governments to provide.”

As part of their Coady education, participants visit St. Andrews. They receive an up-close look at the possibilities and successes in community development. Workshops and other sessions are part of the curriculum. “St. Andrews also holds lessons for us all on how community leaders can motivate and mobilize citizens to participate in community activities and about how to sustain community initiatives over the long haul,” Cunningham said. The successes of St. Andrews have been threads in a couple of Coady-led projects that showcase the community’s link to the world.

St. Andrews volunteers Mary van den Heuvel and Joe van de Wiel are profiled in the documentary *By Their Own Hands*, a film that showcases how asset-based community-led development has benefited their community. Community-led innovations also led to St. Andrews inclusion in *From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development*, a book edited by Cunningham and his Coady colleague Alison Mathie. “The whole relationship has been a tremendously positive one for us,” St. Andrews Community Partnership president and longtime volunteer Leroy MacEachern said. He added “the association has been a learning experience for members of the community.” “It has been a wonderful educational tool for the Coady students as well,” he added.

The Coady reflected the high level of respect for its relationship with St. Andrews when it recently nominated the community for a 2009 Celebrating Communities Award, which honours innovative collaboration and success across Nova Scotia. “It is nice to see them start getting the recognition they deserve,” Cunningham, who attended the awards’ presentation, said. Cunningham added congratulations for that honour, along with the 2009 Lieutenant Governor’s Community Spirit Award St. Andrews received in early September, on behalf of the Coady. “St. Andrews and its citizens continue to inspire us,” he concluded. When talking about the Coady and its people, it is safe to say St. Andrews would consider the feeling to be mutual. *With files from Connor MacEachern.*