

HORIZONS

Fundy Model Forest Newsletter



Project update

Premier mountain bike race fuels community development in Elgin

Elgin—(Oct. 20, 2011) *“Holy fun, mud, sand, pouring rain, great meal, fantastic homemade preserves/jams/jellies..... Great event !!!”*

That’s how one competitor summed up this year’s Tour of Elgin mountain bike marathon which took place on October 1.

After pushing themselves through 80 kilometres— a grueling 120 kilometres for the more adventurous— up and down the steep wooded hills of Elgin in the rain, exhausted riders in this year’s Tour of Elgin mountain bike race had to grab water hoses to sluice off the mud. Neither the rain nor a final 650 foot climb to the finish line dampened their exuberance.

The Tour of Elgin, hosted by the Elgin Eco-Association, has become an eagerly awaited challenge capping the season for mountain bikers in Atlantic Canada.



“This is hands-down the toughest race in Atlantic Canada and we can’t wait to do it up again next year,” said Shawn Hamilton who managed a second-place finish, covering the 120 kilometres in six hours and 40 minutes. A special belt buckle has been designed for riders who manage to finish the full distance. Hamilton was still wearing his 11 days later.

The Elgin event is like none other, he explained. The entire community takes part, preparing meals, handling registration, and even standing in the rain to hand out wet bananas along the course. Prizes can be a homemade bottle of chow from someone’s cupboard.

“The folks in Elgin are first class in my books and we really appreciate them giving us the opportunity to race a 120K event.”

Not only did the Elgin folks give them 120 kilometres, volunteers cleared and groomed an additional 40 kilometres so riders would have a new loop rather than to repeat any segment of the course.

“They even took lawn mowers up the sides of the trails,” said Moranda van Geest, president of the Elgin Eco-Association.

The dedication of the volunteers who willingly gave up part of their Sunday throughout the summer to extend the course is only one example of how this race has energized the community. It has been the engine pumping up community spirit and providing needed funds to revitalize Elgin. Seeing the results of their hard work gives young and old a sense of accomplishment and builds a strong sense of community, van Geest explained. “Everybody feels good.”

There are no barriers of age, religion, interests or skills to helping out. There is a spot for everyone. For example, the group’s newsletter is edited by a former Elgin resident, now a senior living in Ontario.

“We have people from eight to 80...everybody in the community can be involved no matter who you are or what you are.”

Shortly after the first bike race, the Elgin Eco-Association and the Elgin Women's Institute co-sponsored the Elgin Endowment Fund for community projects. The fund now stands at \$90,000, almost enough to build a ball field.



In only eight years, the Eco-Association has gathered and preserved the memories of local seniors, publishing the book *Elgin Revisited*. The book has been very popular with sales adding to the funds for community improvement projects. The Eco-Association has been able to create and maintain the Mapleton Acadian Forest Trail, an interpretive nature trail, and enhance a local swimming area. An ice rink and adjacent park are under construction. This fall, residents will plant the park with heritage flowers from their gardens.

In June, residents of Elgin Centre and Elgin Parish voted to increase their property taxes by a small amount to ensure there will be enough money to maintain the rink and park.

Elgin Eco-Association formed when the local school was closed. Van Geest and others in the community banded together to try to buy the building. They feared without a centre for community activities, Elgin's remaining life blood would soon drain away. The mountain bike marathon was to be the first fund-raiser. Ironically, they have never bought the school but in striving to do so they have invigorated a community and surrounding area of less than 500 people.

Elgin Eco-Association became a partner of the Fundy Model Forest when it started up in 2003. Fundy Model Forest was able to help the group start up the marathon by providing connections to expertise at the University of New Brunswick Saint John and a small amount of funding for activities.

Natural Resources Canada supports the work of Fundy Model Forest through the Canadian Forest Service's Forest Communities Program.