

Claresholm & District Museum
Annual report to Town Council
November 12, 2024
By: Bill Kells, Museum Executive Director

On Nov. 14, 2023, we presented the museum's first Annual report to Council and indicated at that time we would return each year to give an update. Well, here we are again almost to the day on Nov. 12th. Thank you, Mayor, Council, and Administration, for giving us this opportunity tonight to present our 2024 report.

2024 has been a very busy year and in fact has outpaced 2023 in almost every measured performance statistic. It was also a very successful year for important growth and improvements within the museum. It was, however, also one of our more challenging years as you well know, behind the scenes, with artifact storage.

In addition to the Day-to-Day responsibilities associated with managing the museum, we continually focus our attention on many key areas.

Grants, income and financial donations.

- We have been successful in obtaining Young Canada Works, Federal grants, to hire two summer students annually, which are crucial to the museum summer operations This year our YCW contribution was **\$11,692.80** (50% of cost) to hire two students for a total of 16 weeks each, May – Sept.
- We have increased the variety and quality of products in the gift shop and in 2023 saw an increase in sales of 220% to \$1,547. For 2024 total sales reached **\$3,471**, again slightly over 220% increase. We will continue to add products and further build on that through 2025. Most products we now stock consistently generate between 30% & 40% mark up.
- Gate donations for 2023 were \$ 5,090.00 and for 2024 were **\$7,051.00**, an increase of almost \$2,000.00 or approx.130%. We are also seeing many more \$10 & \$20 bills in the donation box.
- Bus tours were also up, from 19 in 2023 to **23 in 2024**. The Jasper wildfire caused the cancellation of at least 4 bus tours scheduled for us, or that number would have been much better
- Total number of visitors also increased
 - o 2023 visitors to the VIC = 1,756
 - o 2024 visitors to the VIC = **2,541**

***** Visitor numbers for both years include bus tours
- We also received a generous donation from the Lions Club of **\$800.00**

Community Engagement

- Special Events
 - o Father's Day Classic Car show, (2nd year), attracted slightly less numbers this year because of weather, but important to note, it involves other community groups such as the Lions providing breakfast and the Social Center with lunch and the Friends of the museum Society with afternoon coffee and cookies.
 - o Fair Days Friday night (3rd year) was a great success and attracted one of the largest crowds to date and increased local visitors through the museum.
 - o Tea on the Lawn, a popular annual event, to which we added many fun children's games in 2023, was down in numbers because of competing events in other parts of town. We will work on better coordination with other town dept's on attracting a larger crowd next year.
 - o Participated in the Friends of the Museum 1st annual Heritage buildings walking tour in Sept. The 1912 CPR Station was the last building on the tour and where the Friends hosted an afternoon tea for all who participated.
 - o Old Fashioned Christmas is on Dec 6th. this year, hosted by the Friends of the Museum Society. Planning is well under way and is always a great event.
- School programs and Seniors tours. - For 2024 we again hosted classes from West Meadow Elementary School. A class of ESL students, and we also, for the first time, hosted a tour group of seniors from the Heartland retirement home in Okotoks who also reserved lunch at a restaurant here in Claresholm.
- Social media engagement - (297 followers from June of 2020 grew to 1229 in 2023 and were happy to report has grown by another 123, **(approx. 10/mth) to 1352** with lots of engagement through interactions and comments on the posts)
- We enter a Fair Days Parade floats every year, tied to the parade theme but also Claresholm history. This year was no exception with the carnival tent and mini link trainer amusement ride., The float won first place in our category and grand aggregate for best overall in parade. A really fun annual project for the Board, Friends and museum staff and great way to engage with the community in a fun and positive way.
- Offsite Community events - Canada Day in the Park and Winterfest at the Community Hall, with a Booth promoting the museum and engaging the public.
- Farmers Market on the grounds – Although not a museum event, hosting the Farmers Market attracts a new audience to the grounds and local visitors through the museum.
- We Hosted the staff from the High River Museum in mid-August, for a ½ day of information sharing and a facility tour. They reciprocated early Sept. hosting our Staff for a great exchange of ideas and tour of their new storage facility.
- We also had the opportunity to tour the collections storage and Archives facility of the UFA in Calgary.

Collections Management

- Hired a Collections and Visitor Experience supervisor early October who is already doing great work in terms of addressing a backlog of research requests, artifact donations and dealing with the fallout from the recent flood. This is a split position which will switch to overseeing visitor experience & staff in the summer months.
- We are a professionally accredited museum under the Recognized Museum Program of the Alberta Museum Association. Accreditation is up for renewal every four years, and we are going through that process this year.
- We are also a registered member of the Archives Society of Alberta.
- The highest priority for collections management in 2024, was formally addressing the storage needs of the museum with Town Council. We thank Mayor and Council once again for giving us that opportunity.

Artifact Donations

We continue to receive Donations of Artifacts and Archival documents which are of excellent quality and significant in telling the rich history of Claresholm & District. The following are just a few from 2024.

- Although Harold Seymour's 1928 Ford Model A, "Claresholm" fire truck, jackets, radios and walkie talkies etc. have been on display in the Exhibit Hall since 2008, they were only on loan. This year Harold formally donated all of those incredibly significant items to be part of the museum's permanent collection.
- We were contacted by Ms. Alison Cooper from Cambridge UK about a photo album of her uncle, Antony Wright who trained in Claresholm in 1951. It contains photos of life at the base but also several photos of downtown Claresholm.
- We received an amazing collection from Adrian Cooke from Kelowna BC. A collection of Mr. Cooke's father's Air Force belongings, some from his time training at the Claresholm Air base in the 1950's. logbooks, photographs, navigation equip. deployment plates, gloves etc.
- Sobeys family and store collection from Debbie Lozeman, contains large, framed portraits of her great grandparents John and Anna Soby, some of the first settlers in Claresholm. Also, an advertising calendar from J M Soby store from 1938.
- Donation from Susan (Lewis) Schwindt Calgary Ab. Original 1917 blueprints from the TD Lewis house at 209 – 49th Ave. Claresholm, a 1950s CHS sweater, blouse and skirt as well as prom dress of Leona (Lewis) Larson and more.
- The Masons service Club of Claresholm disbanded this year and we received a number of significant pieces from their meeting room.
- Sons of Norway also disbanded and we received a number of pieces from their collections as well.

*** There were many more great donations in 2024, too many to list here.

Exhibits

- The Claresholm WWII pilot flight training simulator, "Link Trainer" was finally completed and set out on display. This project was accomplished in large part thanks to the hard work and countless volunteer hours by Don Glimsdale, Al Engle & Bob Mackin of the Friends of the Museum Society. To finally get the project completed, Dave Washylshen also took the wings, fuselage canopy, and tail fins to his shop and painted them, putting the final touches on the trainer. This project was funded by the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Area and Bonnie Downey of the Friends of the Museum invited Charlene Davidson and Carmela Steel from the Foundation to the museum to thank them and to see the finished project.
- Added a CPR Dining Car display case in the Station mid-summer.
- Enhanced an exhibit on the Claresholm Agricultural college
- Purchased and installed red velvet rope & chrome stanchions in the church exhibit in the Exhibit Hall and black velvet rope in the 1930 farmhouse exhibit. This replaced the last of the older wooden, handmade, stanchions and cord dividers.
- Purchased a large 54-inch TV for the station to scroll photos of exhibits in the Exhibit Hall interior during summer and for programming and meetings during the off season.
- Purchased a large format heat press for mounting and laminating photos and interpretive labels which are now created in house.
- Continued to enhance the Fire Fighting and Farming exhibit, which provides better exhibit lighting but also allows us to turn off the last bank of overhead fluorescents. We now have only LED aisle and exhibit lighting throughout the entire Exhibit Hall.

Marketing

- Claresholm Local Press continues to be our best source of local marketing. With advertisements, poster production, announcements and through wonderful stories written by Rob Vogt, supporting our activities and events!!
- As mentioned, we had a booth at the Pincher Creek Trade Show again this year. That show attracts approx. 2,500 visitors over the weekend. We always hand out free passes and it is encouraging to see a few get turned in over the summer.
- We participated with a booth at Winterfest again this year. Always a great opportunity to engage with local folks and promote the museum. Handed out swag and free passes.
- As mentioned earlier, continually promoting on Social Media. (posting on Facebook and Instagram)

- We continue to pull together photos and promotional information to include in both a new brochure. We are constantly reminded by visitors that the museum in Claresholm is now of a quality and professional standard worthy of promotion as an attraction.
- Working with the Town's Engagement Coordinator, we will promote to:
 - o Travel Alberta
 - o Alberta Southwest Regional Alliance
 - o Tourism Lethbridge
 - o Municipal Visitor Information Centers in Southern Alberta
 - o Through Economic Development Claresholm
 - o Tour Bus companies
 - o Seniors care Centers and housing complexes etc. regionally.

Volunteer contribution (so vitally important)

Friends of the Museum Society and Museum Board members:

- Attending regular meetings for both Boards and Sub Committees.
- Helping plan, set up & host special events.
- Work Bee's for larger museum projects.
- Serving coffee and cookies for bus tours
- Keeping the gardens looking beautiful all summer
- Preparing the museum for opening in May.
- Supporting the museum as a nonprofit Society with grant applications.
- Baking hundreds of "homemade" cookies for bus tours and events.
- Building parade floats & participating in the parades.
- Helping where needed in the museum.

**** The list goes on and on and we so appreciate everyone's contribution.