

Bayfield's Blue Community Story



Communities across Canada are turning “blue” as part of the Council of Canadians, CUPE and Eau Secours’s Blue Communities Project. This people-powered initiative encourages people to approach their municipal government to pass resolutions recognizing the human rights to water and sanitation, banning or phasing out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events, and promoting publicly financed, owned, and operated water and wastewater services. Bayfield, a small community in southwestern Ontario, was awarded its Blue Community designation in 2015 – but local residents haven’t stopped there. Ray Letheren, one of many local volunteers, shares the story about how they turned their community blue and kept going.

The southwestern Ontario Village of Bayfield has a population of 1,000 and is located on the shores of Lake Huron. Bayfield was awarded Blue Community status by the Council of Canadians in 2015. Inspired by Maude Barlow’s visits, the environmental voice of the village, Blue Bayfield, set out to honour its commitment to the Blue Community Project.

Blue Bayfield chose an alternative approach to gaining Blue Community status. Instead of seeking support from the municipal council, we sought support from the residents of the village, in a grassroots approach. Thirty-five organizations committed to the project

by agreeing to acknowledge access to water as a human right. In a landmark decision, local groups also ended the use of single-use bottled water at meetings and events. These groups ranged from Girl Guides, to service clubs, to book clubs, to gatherings with the local conservation authority.

Having received this community commitment, Blue Bayfield made over 2,000 refillable bottles available to anyone in the village. Blue Bayfield got sponsors and installed five refill stations throughout the village. The jewel of the refill stations is the mobile tricycle “Blue Betty.” Betty is made available to any group holding an event and comes filled with 20 litres of municipal water and compostable cups. She also makes weekly visits to the farmers’ market.

Over a two-year period, the refill stations have had over 25,000 users. This is a remarkable figure given that two of the stations are outdoors and out of service for seven months of the year.

The dangers of plastics

One of the missions of Blue Bayfield is to educate and raise awareness. Given our location on the shores of Lake Huron, we are constantly reminded of the effects of plastics in large bodies of water. Studies by 5 Gyre Institute, New York University and a Bayfield-based organization, Love Your Greats, have confirmed that the amount plastic in the Great Lakes per volume of water is double that of the

oceans. It is estimated that the oceans contain 220,000 pieces of plastic per square-kilometre compared to an estimated 440,000 pieces in the Lakes.

These are alarming figures when 45 million people in Canada, the U.S. and Indigenous nations depend on the Great Lakes for drinking water, recreation, and support for industries. Sadly, the Lakes are also reservoirs for sewage, plastic, and other debris from hundreds of communities of varying sizes. Much of the lake plastic is in the form of small beads. Fish and other species mistake these beads for food and municipal treatment plants are limited in their ability to remove microbeads from drinking water.

This concern gave rise to the Plastic Free Coastline Project. Bayfield, Ontario became part of this movement last spring by getting municipal council to pass a resolution to become plastic-free, organizing beach clean-ups, having local businesses commit to reduce the use of plastics, working with other groups, and holding plastic-free events.

With the support of the Blue Community Project and Plastic Free Coastlines, Blue Bayfield is doing its best to address environmental issues and be a model for other small coastline communities in Canada.

Ray Letheren is a member of the Blue Bayfield group.