

Nova Scotia United Way Charity Swims

History

The idea of using swimming as a means of raising money for the United Way was the “brainchild” of Deputy Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (TIR), David Darrow. The first United Way charity swim in Nova Scotia took place on August 25, of 2010 and consisted of Darrow and fellow TIR employee, Kevin Doran, swimming across Halifax Harbour from the Woodside Ferry Terminal to Bishop’s Landing. The swim went off without a hitch thanks, in large measure, to the efforts of a hard-working team of TIR volunteers led the “can do” duo of Bruce Wood and Jennifer Presti. The two intrepid swimmers were accompanied on their swim across Halifax Harbour by boats piloted by Peter Giberson and Capt. Harvey Adams (Canada Sea). Peter and “Harv” have graciously donated their vessels and services to every Halifax Harbour United Way Swim. Proceeds from the first United Way Charity Swim totaled \$3,500. United Way Charity Swims have taken place every year since 2010, with the exception of 2013, and have generated more than \$70,000 in financial support for the United Way.

The first three annual swims consisted of Darrow and Doran traversing Halifax Harbour. In 2014, the pair convinced several other people to join them. Swimmers that year included, Darrow, Doran, Dan McDougall, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, Joachim Stroink, MLA, Halifax Chebucto and Sue Lapierre of the Halifax United Way. In 2015, Troy Bond, Department of Health and Wellness, Jana Peachy (12-year old daughter of TIR employee, Mark Peachy) and 13-year old friend, Anny Christian, joined in the swim.

In 2016, a decision was made to expand the charity swims beyond the geographic bounds of Halifax Harbour. On September 8th of that year, a small group of swimmers entered the chilly waters of Yarmouth Harbour for a swim at 7:00 a.m., drove to Halifax and swam across Halifax Harbour at noon and then on to Sydney where they swam across Sydney Harbour at 6:00 p.m. Three harbours in one day!!

In 2017, charity swims took place in Halifax, Sydney, Lunenburg and Yarmouth Harbours and across the Strait of Canso (from Mulgrave to Port Hawkesbury) on September 6th and 8th. In recognition of Canada’s 150th birthday, any swimmer who could raise a minimum of \$150 in support was invited to participate in the Halifax Harbour Swim. In total, 42 swimmers participated in that event.

In 2018, charity swims took place in Sydney Harbour, St. Peter’s Canal, Pictou Harbour, Halifax Harbour and Mahone Bay over a span of two days (Sept. 5 & Sept. 6). That year, more than 60 swimmers participated in the Halifax Harbour swim. Outreaches to the other two levels of government by Mary Lou Burke, Kevin Doran and David Darrow bore fruit for the first time, when more than a dozen municipal and federal employees joined in the Halifax Swim.

Organization

Since their inception in 2010, the United Way Charity Swims have been organized by employees of the Provincial Government. Up until 2015, the swims were planned and hosted by volunteers from the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. The swim was effectively “owned” by TIR during this time. Administrative support was provided by the Province’s United Way Campaign coordinator who, at the time was a TIR employee for six months of the year and an employee of the Provincial Government United Way Campaign’s lead Department for the other six months.

Since 2015, the charity swims have been planned and overseen by a “Core Group” of current and retired Provincial Government employees and are no longer “owned” by a single government department. Meetings of the Core Group are convened by Mary Lou Burke, in her capacity as Executive Chair of the Provincial Government’s United Way Campaign. Mary Lou also provides administrative support for the Core Group and oversees swim finances. Mary Lou’s very capable leadership and tireless work ethic have been critical to the success of this fund-raising effort since 2015.

Decisions regarding swim locations, swimmer eligibility, swim scheduling and other logistics are made by the Core Group. As of Jan. 1, 2019, the United Way Charity Swims Core Group is made up of the following individuals:

- Mary Lou Burke, PSC / Provincial United Way Campaign Lead Department
- David Darrow, swimmer, former Provincial Government Employee
- Kevin Doran, swimmer, Communications Nova Scotia
- Troy Bond, swimmer, Department of Lands and Forestry
- Nicholas Phillips, swimmer, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Paul LaFleche, swimmer, Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
- Tracy Crowell, swimmer, Department of Internal Services
- Heather Goodfellow, Department of Justice
- Sean Ward, Department of Justice
- Tom Seoul, Department of Lands and Forestry
- Bryan Darrell, swimmer, Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
- Mark Peachey, Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal
- Dan McDougall, swimmer, former Provincial Government Employee
- Bruce Wood, former Provincial Government Employee

Behind the scenes, many individuals from several provincial government departments and agencies volunteer annually to help ensure the success of the swims. In addition to arranging and providing logistical support for the swimmers, these dedicated individuals organize and host fundraising barbecues on the day of the swim, help with media outreach and undertake a variety of other swim related tasks.

Swim Locations

As noted above, swim locations are chosen annually by the United Way Charity Swims Core Group. Several factors are considered in the course of the Group's deliberations regarding swim locations, including swimmer safety, accessibility to provincial government employees and the general public, pedestrian traffic volumes, availability of local volunteers, etc. In this regard, the Halifax Harbour Swim serves as an excellent model for the other swims. Among other things, the Halifax Swim:

1. has enjoyed the approval and support of key organizations such as the Halifax Port Authority, Develop Nova Scotia (formerly the Waterfront Development Commission), the HRM Fire Department, the Department of National Defence, Nova Scotia Lifeguards, etc.;
2. is within walking distance of thousands of provincial government employees (in fact, the annual Provincial Government United Way Campaign Kick Off has been incorporated into the Halifax Harbour swim for the past two years, thus making it an economical event for the Campaign's host department);
3. is readily accessible to the general public and provides more than ample viewing space;
4. benefits from a large volume of pedestrian traffic, thanks in large measure to the cruise ships typically docked in the harbour in early September; and,
5. has been used by the United Way to rally and inspire leaders of all their Metro Area campaigns.

Following is a tentative schedule for the 2019 Charity Swims:

Tuesday, Sept 10 th	Wednesday, Sept 11 th	Thursday, Sept 12 th	Friday Sept 13 th
Leave at 4 p.m. and travel to St. Peter's	St. Peters swim at 8:30	Halifax Harbour swim – 11:30	Rain Date for either swim if needed
	Depart 10:15	Depart 1 p.m.	
	Arrive Sydney – 11:30	Arrive Chester – 2:00	
	Sydney – noon	Chester Swim 2:30	
	Depart 1:30	Depart 4 p.m.	
	Arrive Pictou – 4:30	Arrive Shelburne – 5:30	
	Pictou Swim – 5 p.m.	Shelburne swim – 6 p.m.	
	Depart Pictou at 6:30	Depart Shelburne at 7:30	
Arrive Halifax 8 pm – 9 pm (drop-offs)	Arrive Halifax 10 - 10:30 pm (drop offs)		

We are, once again, expecting and looking forward to substantial participation by municipal and federal employees in the 2019 meeting edition of the Halifax Harbour Swim.