

Taking her place in history

Diane Pearce is named CAO of Loyalist Township, the first employee hired

By Anne Craig
Staff Reporter

Anyone who has ever visited the Amherst Island Township municipal office will remember Diane Pearce.

With a cheery smile and efficient manner, Pearce has been a key cog in running the municipality for the past 23 years.

Now, with the impending creation of Loyalist Township, many people off the island will get to know Pearce as well.

Pearce is currently the chief administrative officer on Amherst Island and was recently named the new CAO of Loyalist Township, making her the first employee hired in this transition period.

It's a challenge she's excited about and she says she's looking forward to working with new people and helping get the freshly-minted township off the ground.

PERSONALITY OF THE WEEK

Pearce was originally trained as a X-ray technician and wasn't involved with politics at all. A year after she moved to the island, the job of CAO presented itself and the rest, as they say, is history.

"I had a strong interest in my community," Pearce says. "My interest has evolved from there."

According to Pearce, there has never been a dull moment during her work on Amherst Island.

She lists many accomplishments during her time there but doesn't take any of the credit, though admitting a great deal of satisfaction. She calls herself just "a piece in the puzzle" and realizes many other people help her every day.

"I work for council and council works for the community," Pearce adds.

The ferry is an issue that has been in the forefront since the provincial government cut funding for the island's only link to the mainland. Pearce works closely with the ferry issue, dealing with everything concerning that topic.

"The ferry is an on-going challenge," she explains. "We are keeping ahead of the changes. It's a major concern in this position. We need affordable transportation. I'm very proud of the ferry service."

Pearce explains negotiations are currently underway with the province and the hope is ferry service will remain at its current level. This is important to Pearce and council and important to the residents of the island.

"We wouldn't have the ferry service we have without the support of the federal government," she reminds everyone.



Council also just completed an official plan for the island which will aid in development of the island and give residents an idea where the community is headed over the next few years.

"The development is slow here (because of the ferry)," Pearce says. "It's not a big triumph, but it's important. It gives council and property owners a chance to define goals for the development of the township."

Another issue Pearce has worked tirelessly on, along with council, is the approval to expand the current waste management site. "We really saw the need to deal with our garbage problem." They considered for a time taking the garbage off the island, but Pearce explains that move simply wasn't practical.

"It's our responsibility to deal with it here," she says. "We have a great public works department superintendent who has worked hard on the landfill site."

Another project Pearce and council are proud of is the first response unit now set up on the island. The volunteers, which number 12, were trained by the Ontario Ministry of Health, and can respond to a variety of medical emergencies.

Pearce adds they started in 1990 and reports it's working very well.

As for the Loyalist Township, she just can't wait to get started. Her new job officially begins Monday at the Odessa office and she is excited.

"We are now a part of a larger group," she says. "I hope the mainland communities will welcome the inclusion of Amherst Island." But really, this is something Pearce isn't worried about based on how the meetings have gone so far.

For a long time, Pearce admits council didn't think the amalgamation would ever happen. "Once we realized the writing was on the wall and amalgamation was going to happen, we accepted it willingly."

She points to the challenge of developing a middle ground as one they are ready to accept and realizes they also must protect the interest of everyone in the new township.

"We want to take the best from the past and use it for the future," she says. "There is a wide diversity of characteristics in the township, urban, rural and islanders."

Pearce adds the most interesting aspect of the amalgamation is the change everyone will go through. "Now I can sit on the dock and look at our factories and they can sit on their dock and look at their island."

The biggest challenge they face in the amalgamation is, according to Pearce, working together. "There are so many aspects that want to be represented. Knitting all the parts will be a challenge. But I am prepared to jump in with both feet."

Along with her work with the municipality, Pearce has a family that keeps her busy and two children that "are my claims to fame." Jennifer and her husband Greg have just moved back to the island and Jeff is the bass player for the band Moist and lives in Montreal.

As for the future, Pearce isn't sure but says it will involve living on the island and enjoying her family. She still wants to remain active in municipal politics and wherever that might take her.