

FRIENDS OF THE RIDEAU

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS FOR 2024, NOVEMBER 30, 2024

Friends of the Rideau can report a successful year in 2024. While the number of visitors to the interpretation centre in Merrickville was slightly lower than in 2023, at 13,500, board members attended several community events along the Rideau Waterway and took our messages about the history and heritage of the Rideau to ever-larger audiences.

As our members and supporters know, operating The Depot, our visitor and interpretation centre in Merrickville, is an essential part of our work. With the much-appreciated support of the Village Council, and other partners, Friends is able to introduce visitors to the rich heritage of the Rideau Canal, not only as found in Merrickville but all along the waterway. Our hard-working staff of Joshua Terpstra and Kyra Davis assist both first-time and repeat visitors to appreciate the architecture and engineering of the Rideau, and the way in which the construction and operation of the Canal since 1832 has shaped the social and environmental character of the waterway region.

It is important for us to emphasize how vital to our work the contributions of our partners are. That said, we have to admit disappointment in the significantly lower level of support available from the Canada Summer Jobs program of the federal government, though the size of the target beneficiary group increased. In order to ensure that Friends provided the level of support visitors to the Rideau needed and deserved, we dipped into our modest financial reserves and were able to operate for the same period of time, at the same level of service. We must acknowledge the generosity of our supporters, through their membership fees and their donations, in contributing to Friends' financial health. The Village of Merrickville continued to provide a most welcome grant to help defray The Depot operating expenses, as well as other forms of support including off-season storage of materials when The Depot, an unheated space, is closed. In addition, Friends receives a heritage organization grant from the Ontario government which helps us publish our semi-annual newsletter. This publication, with its historic content and its advocacy messages, goes to our members/supporters, municipalities and community-based groups along the Rideau Waterway that share our interests and objectives.

Friends' relationship with Parks Canada, the custodian and operator of the Rideau Canal National Historic Site and UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a critical part of the success of our organization. Parks provide us with the use of The Depot building, situated in Blockhouse Park in the heart of Merrickville. As well, we distribute Parks' Canada's maps and guides to the Rideau, material which is invaluable in assisting visitors to explore the twenty-six lockstations and related dams and blockhouses. In the past Friends has assisted Parks with the design and printing of the pamphlet *How a Lock Works*, distributed at all lockstations, and we have offered

to renew that part of our partnership. Friends has offered also to assist Parks to reissue the Rideau Canal visitor passport, which proved very popular in 2017. Discussions continue. We continue to enjoy a good relationship with senior managers of the Rideau Canal, notably David Britton, Director of the Ontario Waterways, and Mark Brus, the Manager of Operations.

Last year (2023) we mentioned that the process of undertaking cultural landscape studies on key sections of the Rideau, as mentioned in the Rideau Canal management plan had begun. Notwithstanding considerable work by consultants and a lot of public consultation, the report and recommendations on the first of these studies, on the Ottawa Reach of the Canal, has not been published, six months after the scheduled date. Consequently, the other four studies, covering Smiths Falls, Jones Falls, Newboro and Merrickville, are stalled. Friends, and other heritage organisations, contributed to the Ottawa study and we look forward to working with Parks Canada on the re-starting of this important work necessary to document and protect the heritage of the Rideau.

Finally, Friends is pleased to have been invited to be a member of the Rideau Canal Stakeholder Advisory Committee, convened by Parks Canada and chaired by the Director of Ontario Waterways David Britton. We have for some time been encouraging Parks to reinstitute this group, which last existed approximately 15 years ago. Comprising representatives of community-based organizations, it is hoped the Committee will serve as a useful platform for discussion of the management of the Rideau Canal.

The Board of Friends of the Rideau; Doug Arrand, Chris Biber, Cheryl Gulseth, Bruce Kemp, Hunter McGill, Gillian Organ, Joshua Terpstra, Sue Warren and Ken Watson, remain dedicated to enhancing, conserving and promoting the heritage and charm of the Rideau Canal.

Hunter McGill

Chair, Friends of the Rideau