



A fresh start for Gimli

Gimli Mayor Tammy Axelsson and her brand-new council hit the ground running

Mayor Axelsson flanked by her Council (L-R) Ross Bailey, Bill Barlow, Glen Brooks and Brian McKenzie. (Photo courtesy of Jim Mosher, *Interlake Spectator*)

Last October's election resulted in many changes to municipal councils across Manitoba. One would be hard pressed, however, to find a council table that changed as much as that of the RM of Gimli. Newcomer **Tammy Axelsson's** stunning victory over the incumbent mayor set the tone for what would be a complete overhaul of the previous council, with the three incumbents in the running all being defeated (the fourth member did not seek re-election).

In what was to become one of the most hotly contested campaigns in the province, Tammy Axelsson simply stood her ground with the belief, "People in the RM of Gimli deserve better." While she was rewarded with the Mayor's chair, she is by no means resting on her laurels. After running on a platform to promote openness and transparency amongst her council and the citizens of Gimli, it is easy to understand why Axelsson says, "People are excited about the potential in our community."

While the four councillors who join Mayor Axelsson are, with one exception, new to municipal politics, they bring a wide variety of experience to the table. They include former Mayor **Bill Barlow**; former Evergreen School Division Trustee **Ross Bailey**; retired school administrator **Glen Brooks**; and businessman **Brian McKenzie**. "I have absolute confidence in this council," says Axelsson.

Municipal Leader interviewed Mayor Axelsson for this issue's 'Municipal Profile.'

Q: With no political experience, what prompted you to run for Mayor?

A: I ran for mayor because I felt that I had something to offer. I love my community, I love learning, love working with people and I'm always up for a challenge. I have an established track record of service within the community among the organizations that I have been involved with over the years. I am hard working, accountable, diplomatic, a good listener, and I can work with just about anyone.

I am a firm believer in the saying that you shouldn't complain unless you are willing to step up and be a part of the solution. So I stepped up. The people of Gimli are its greatest asset and its greatest strength and I felt that the former council had lost touch with the people.

Q: Your campaign promised to use the Gimli website to post financial information; inform the public about what goes on in-camera; and appoint a youth representative to sit on council. Have you implemented any of these changes?

A: Yes, we've already taken some positive steps towards ensuring that we keep the

ratepayers informed about all aspects of the RM. Council has implemented a quarterly newsletter and reviewed the entire website. We will be making significant changes and improvements to the site over the next couple of months. Both are excellent tools for ongoing communication with the public. We have moved in-camera meetings to the beginning of council meetings and the first order of business of the regular meeting is then to give a general report on the in-camera session. And, I am pleased to say that we have now appointed **Jake Figler** as Gimli's first Youth Representative on council.

Q: What other improvements have you made to how council operates?

A: We have monthly Committee of the Whole Council meetings in addition to our two monthly council meetings. These, of course, are open to the public and we also receive delegations at these meeting. This is a very effective way to keep informed of each other's portfolios and to increase regular communication among council and the citizens. We have established a Policy Committee and are currently creating a number of written policies that are essential for council to have in order to make impartial decisions on issues. We adjusted the division of the internal boundaries of the municipality into four areas and each councillor will alternate

between the areas over the next four years as opposed to one councillor being responsible for one area for four years. We held a pre-budget public consultation meeting in order to give citizens the opportunity to give us their input for consideration when finalizing the budget.

Q: What is it like having a former mayor (Bill Barlow) as one of your councillors?

A: I would have to say that I find it very humbling. In my opinion, Bill was an excellent mayor and to have him on council with his vast knowledge and expertise in municipal politics is invaluable to me. Given the number of years Bill served the community of Gimli, and the fact that the rest of us are all new to council, it is a particularly beneficial in that he brings continuity to the table. And besides that, he is a good friend and mentor and I couldn't be happier to have him on council.

Q: Your council recently decided to hold a future meeting in Winnipeg, rather than Gimli. What's that about?

A: Again this is all about communication. As with many resort communities in Manitoba, Gimli has a large seasonal population. And they are significant and important part of our community. When I was going door-to-door during the election, I often heard from seasonal residents that they felt somewhat disconnected from council because they are seasonal. In my opinion, taking one meeting annually to Winnipeg will give council the opportunity to connect with this portion of our population prior to the summer season.

Q: How do you balance everything – work, council, and family?

A: My family always comes first. As for work and being mayor, establishing priorities at both jobs and delegating is the only way for me to maintain balance. It isn't always easy, but fortunately I am surrounded by a lot of supportive and capable people in all areas of my life.

Q: Can you highlight one or two of the main issues facing Gimli right now?

A: Balancing growth with infrastructure will be an ongoing challenge. We are fortunate to have steady residential and commercial growth in our community, but we must plan for growth so that we are in a position of being proactive rather



“I am a firm believer in the saying that you shouldn't complain unless you are willing to step up and be a part of the solution. So I stepped up.”

Gimli Mayor Tammy Axelson at the Municipal Office. (Photo courtesy of Jim Mosher, Interlake Spectator)



Mayor-elect Tammy Axelson being congratulated on election night. (Photo courtesy of Jim Mosher, Interlake Spectator)

than reactive. Consultation with the public and professionals will assist council in establishing a solid long-term plan for the future of Gimli. Lake Winnipeg is another high priority issue that needs to be dealt with now and on an ongoing basis. There is recognition and agreement that the lake is at risk. But we now also have lots of information available to us to guide us in the steps that are necessary to minimize that risk. Again, we need to establish a plan to protect this precious natural resource.

Q: As a woman, do you think you bring a different perspective to the council table?

A: We all bring different perspectives to the table, not so much because of our gender, but more importantly because of whom we are as individuals, our personal backgrounds and experience. However, I will say that I have noticed a real disparity in the number of women mayors and councilors at the municipal events I have attended to date. It seems that, although we have come a long way

As Executive Director of the New Iceland Heritage Museum, Tammy Axelsson has an abiding passion for her hometown. Though born in Winnipeg, she was raised in Gimli, and graduated from Gimli High School in 1978. She was away from Gimli for a decade, including seven years in BC and three years in Iceland, where she met her husband **Jon Gretar Axelsson**. The couple has two children – Fiona, 16, and Daniel, 17.

Courtesy of the Interlake Spectator

since women were granted voting privileges in Manitoba in 1916, we still have a long way to go. FCM's Forum magazine had a great article in the September/October issue. It points out the movement to elect more women to municipal councils. In the article it states, "The United Nations defines 30% as the minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women's concerns. Canada would need 2,120 more women in elected office to reach 30% ... that means increasing the number of women in municipal government by roughly 100 every year for 20

years." (Editor's note: *Municipal Leader's* series on 'Diversity in Municipal Politics' featured an article focusing on Women in Politics in our Summer 2005 issue.)

Q: How do you spend your 'down' time?

A: What down time? Actually, I most like to spend my down time doing things with my family and catching up with friends. I enjoy sleeping in, traveling, movies, a good book and anything else that doesn't require a lot of thought. ☺

See you at Rural Forum

in Brandon, April 26-27, 2007

Cochrane Engineering is proud to be a new member of GENIVAR, a leader in Canadian engineering.

Committed to serving Manitoba municipalities

- Engineering
- Environment
- Project management

T 204.477.6650 | bill.brant@genivar.com
www.genivar.com

COCHRANE ENGINEERING

Straight talk on pork

#4

The jobs we need

Manitoba hog farmers have created over 15,000 jobs in our province. That's more than Manitoba's aerospace and transportation manufacturing sectors combined.

The significant growth in Manitoba's hog industry over the last decade has given way to modest, more sustainable development. And that's providing communities around the province with a solid base to grow and prosper.

MANITOBA PORK COUNCIL
 204.237.PIGS (7447)
www.manitobapork.com

Hog farms are important contributors to local taxes that support public services.