



SIDNEY MUSEUM

*Non-profit organization preserving the Town of Sidney's
and District of North Saanich's archives and collections.*

Location: Sidney, Capital Regional District



Becoming a leader in a changing town

The Sidney Museum and Archives was founded in 1971, only five years after the Town of Sidney itself incorporated, with a mandate to collect, preserve and display significant historical artifacts and archival materials from the area. But, the town of Sidney has changed a lot since then. Originally a farm site, then a mill town, then industrial town with a cannery and roofing factory, then a vacation spot at the end of the railway, Sidney had been through many iterations before it even incorporated. As a link from Victoria to Vancouver and to the San Juan Islands, it remains a transportation hub, but is changing from the quaint retirement community of two decades ago into a vibrant and diverse town that is a centre for artists, businesses, and families. The Sidney Museum and Archives has worked hard to remain relevant as its community has grown and changed, and, in doing so, has transitioned from being a community space to being a community leader.



The journey: Decades of work & a Lego exhibit

After moving to its current location in the 1990s with one full-time staff member, the Museum began opening space for rotating temporary exhibits ranging from quilting displays to banknote collections, providing the community with space to share its own story. Partly due to the success of the temporary exhibits, the museum was able to expand and nearly double its space, and in 2015 brought on a second full-time staff member. In 2020, with the support of the District of North Saanich and the Town of Sidney, the Museum secured funding to add a third full time staff member.

While the temporary and travelling exhibits have allowed the community to share its own stories, it was the annual Lego Exhibit that began to draw people from all over the world to the Saanich Peninsula. Having started as a way to provide some fun and joy during the bleak winter months, the Lego Exhibit is now a regional attraction. Despite its underground location, the museum started to draw in tens-of-thousands of visitors during the exhibits, and soon the exhibition became a town-wide festival with dozens of participating businesses and a town-wide scavenger hunt. For this and other contributions to the community, the museum was recognized in 2019 with an award for Not-for-Profit Organization of the Year by the local Chamber of Commerce. Planning a town-wide event isn't the kind of thing you'd expect from a small museum with only two staff, but when the opportunity arose, the staff made it happen.

"You don't expect to be planning a town-wide festival when you start working at a museum - it's just something you adapt to!"

Alongside this success, the Museum has worked hard to bring its collections, storage, and archives to the highest standards possible. As the steward of the collection on behalf of local government, keeping the collection well-protected and organized isn't just good museology - it's an essential part of the good-will relationship the Museum has with the Town of Sidney and District of North Saanich. Throughout all its changes and growth in the past two-decades, the Museum continues to keep an admission-by-donation model; as a public space intended to showcase the community, this is foundational to their relationship to the people of Sidney and is a key part of their sustained funding from the town and municipality.

Exploring economic impact

By attracting crowds of families and tourists into town during the winter months with the LEGO Exhibit, and especially during the Family Day Weekend LEGO Festival, the Sidney Museum's impact extends beyond just increasing foot traffic along Sidney's main drive. Participating businesses see enough increased revenue on the Family Day weekend that they extend or change their hours to accommodate everyone.

"They tell us it's the best weekend of the year."

But, with all the change and development going on in the community, the Museum is also an essential grounding place where the community can pause and reflect on economic development and the way the town has changed. The Sidney Museum and Archives tells the story of its town's many iterations and, in doing so, it helps ensure that the community retains its sense of identity and place, even as the physical landscape changes.

"Economic development in our downtown core comes with new building and development, and the change can be emotional for people. The museum provides a place where we can preserve our memories of the town we knew, and it shows us that the town has changed many times already."

Sharing insights



Scale Up:

- Staff were quick to take on tasks outside the museum's walls, including the planning of the town-wide, as well as pursuing community sponsorships and grants to fund new projects.



Increase Diversity:

- Rotating temporary exhibits allow the museum to showcase the diversity of the town of Sidney, both intellectually and culturally. Recent exhibits include partnerships with local First Nations.



Focus:

- Staff are constantly working to ensure that the collection is in order. Having a well-organized collection is not only essential to their function as steward of the Town of Sidney's artifacts, but is also what makes them an essential service. During the COVID-19 shutdown, the museum's archives were still an essential source of information for planners, real estate agents, and developers.



Train:

- Recently started connecting with other cultural organizations in the area to support professionalization across the sector. By developing a community of professionals, they're helping ensure that other small institutions are not isolated and vice-versa.