



Goderich: Two Years After the Tornado

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Ontario's Prettiest Town Celebrates a Century of Storm Survival

It was an August Sunday afternoon that the people of Goderich won't soon forget. The most powerful tornado to hit Ontario in 15 years blasted through the quaint Lake Huron town, tearing off roofs and uprooting thousands of mature trees along a 20-kilometre path of destruction. Scores of heritage homes were leveled and as much as 75% of its downtown buildings were seriously damaged. One salt mine worker died, 37 were injured and the financial toll has been estimated in excess of \$130 million.

That was two years ago. And ironically, I had actually visited there during my birthday weekend that past May of 2011. I had reveled in the beauty of Goderich's flowering dogwood trees, long, leisurely boardwalk and stunning century-old architecture. I even made that steep climb up the rock steps from the harbour to view the little candy-striped lighthouse. And most poignantly, I recall sipping coffee in the historic main square across from the stately Georgian courthouse, taking in the scene with all its slow-paced, 19th century charm. Hard to believe it was all gone (or severely damaged) less than three months later.

Thankfully, the town is reporting tremendous progress in its reconstruction. Goderich had begun to triumphantly rise from the flames like a Phoenix, so to speak, and local papers reported a strong tourism season.



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As I discovered, the harbour town is no stranger to large-scale disasters. This summer, resilient Goderich is now turning its attention to the commemoration of another great storm it had long ago endured. Tornado 2011 didn't hold a candle to the Great Lakes Storm or 'White Hurricane' that blew through the region in 1913. For the centenary of this devastating event, Goderich Town Council is now busy preparing for elaborate celebrations to honour and salute the victims of this most infamous Great Lakes event. 250 sailors perished in it, and many ships, including three notable ones near Goderich harbour, were destroyed.

Memorial for the Great Lakes Storm of 1913

But here is where present meets past: In a wonderfully symbolic gesture, foundation stones from the recent tornado-ravaged Victoria Street United Church of 1878 are now being used to create a huge, cairn-type base for a mounted bronze plaque. The plaque will feature an artistic rendering of the ill-fated Wexford ship struggling in massive waves during the historic storm, and will serve as a grand memorial structure overlooking the harbour to mark the 1913 event. The unveiling is slated for November 10, 2013 following a month of commemorative events.

OLG Raised \$36,000 for Goderich

Interestingly Goderich's recovery from the 2011 storm hits resonates loudly here at PlayOLG. After the storm hit, OLG staff and management sprang into action to support the relief efforts. Through individual donations by OLG employees, fundraising drives like 'dress down days' at our various locations, corporate donations and other individual site charitable efforts, OLG raised more than \$36,000 for the Goderich Relief Fund. Of course we were not alone, and there were many other big givers including the Province of Ontario itself. The town was grateful at the exceptional show of support from so many organizations, businesses and caring individuals.

Goderich is just one of Ontario's many great towns. I find it so exhilarating to get out there and discover all the picturesque corners and communities of our province. Even more inspiring though to hear about how a pretty little town can bravely rebound when disaster repeatedly strikes.

Emily