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Church Point, N.S.
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Sainte-Marie demolition plans are suspended, Local association wins national award

Church Point, Nova Scotia — The *Association Sainte-Marie héritage et développement (ASMHD)* announced that demolition plans for the historic **Église Sainte-Marie** have been suspended, following the provincial decision to maintain Sainte-Marie's heritage designation under the N.S. Heritage Property Act. The announcement was made during a keynote speech by the Association co-presidents, Stéphanie St. Pierre and Gabrielle Bardall at the National Trust for Canada's annual conference, *Heritage Now!* at the Halifax convention center on Friday, Oct 24. Properties protected under the Heritage Act cannot be legally demolished.

Later the same day, St. Pierre and Bardall accepted a **2025 Governors' Award** from the **National Trust for Canada** on behalf of the Association. The Governors' Award celebrates exemplary heritage initiatives that strengthen community identity, nurture a sense of place, and demonstrate the social and environmental value of heritage conservation.

Formed in 2024 to respond to the imminent demolition of the historic **Église Sainte-Marie**, North America's largest wooden church, ASMHD has since led a wave of renewal and innovation in heritage activism. The association combines deep local Acadian roots with professional expertise and national partnerships to reimagine Sainte-Marie's future as a centre of living Acadian culture and civic pride.

Key achievements recognized by the National Trust include:

- A **high-resolution digital scan of Sainte-Marie** ensuring the church is preserved in digital form for generations to come.
- The **John Bragg Award for Atlantic Canada** transforming digital data into immersive storytelling about master builder Léo Melanson and the Acadian volunteers who built Sainte-Marie.
- A **Heritage Alert** issued by **ICOMOS International** recognizing Sainte-Marie as a site of international significance under serious threat and calling for coordinated government action.
- **"Operation Pigeon"**, a volunteer-driven clean-up that transformed the church steeple from a biohazard site into a safe workspace for engineers, architects, and digital scanning teams.
- A forthcoming **provincial petition** with nearly **800 Nova Scotian signatures** to date demonstrating overwhelming public support for preserving Sainte-Marie.

The award was presented by Margo Sheppard, National Trust vice-chair. Sheppard stated: "The Board of Governors selected this project as a model of community-led heritage conservation lead that demonstrates how local leadership can protect cultural identities and reinvent the future of heritage sites." (Translated from French).

MaryAnn Gauvin, member of the Association's local advisory committee, participated in last weekend's activities. She shared the deep sense of relief felt by all members of the Association: "Now we can concentrate our energies on the future of Sainte-Marie." The group immediately launched a fundraising campaign to repair a leak in the roof this fall.

Looking ahead, ASMHD is developing plans to transform Sainte-Marie into a *Musée de la civilisation acadienne* — a dynamic cultural destination celebrating the Acadian experience upon return from exile, based in a living, French-speaking community. A preliminary professional economic assessment estimates that a revitalized Sainte-Marie could generate **\$4.4 million in regional economic activity**, create **38 full-time jobs**, and contribute **\$2.2 million to local GDP** — a major boost for a region facing significant demographic and economic challenges.

For more information on ASMHD and its ongoing work to safeguard and reimagine Sainte-Marie, visit www.saintemarieheritage.com or contact us at sos.sainte.marie2024@gmail.com. To make a contribution, visit <https://www.gofundme.com/f/sainte-marie-heritage>

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About the Governors' Award

The *Governors' Award* is presented annually by the Board of Governors of the **National Trust for Canada** to honour exceptional heritage projects that strengthen community identity, celebrate a sense of place, and highlight the broader social and environmental impacts of heritage conservation.

About ASMHD

The *Association Sainte-Marie Héritage et Développement (ASMHD)* is a community-led non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and revitalizing **Église Sainte-Marie** in Church Point, Nova Scotia. Rooted in Acadian history and driven by an inclusive, forward-looking vision, ASMHD seeks to transform Sainte-Marie into a living cultural landmark celebrating Acadian civilization, creativity, and resilience.

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