

Repurposing the Rockwood: A Heritage Hub for the Community

District of Sechelt

by **SIOBHAN SMITH**

Arts, Culture & Communications
Coordinator, District of Sechelt

Perched atop a hill and surrounded by a garden of rhododendrons, Rockwood Lodge is not only a piece of Sechelt's history, but also the home of its future. Rockwood Lodge is a landmark heritage building that was built between 1935 and 1936 in Sechelt, B.C.. Originally a guesthouse owned and operated by Scottish-born couple William and Jessie Ann Youngson, the Rockwood was for many years a popular destination for visitors from Vancouver who traveled to the Sunshine Coast via steamship. After being acquired by the District of Sechelt in 1987 and receiving heritage building status, Rockwood Lodge was repurposed into a hub for community organizations and the arts. After extreme flood damage in 2016 that threatened the survival of the building, the District of Sechelt received a well-timed B.C. | Canada 150 grant to rescue the building and preserve much-needed community space for years to come.

The history of Rockwood Lodge as an essential part of Sechelt's community infrastructure goes back decades. The Rockwood was originally the home of the SunCoast Rockwood Lodge Society. Programming included pottery and printmaking classes, a children's music program, writers' workshops, and a women's drop-in group. Now, a variety of organizations take advantage of the space. The longest running event held at the Rockwood is the annual Sunshine Coast Festival of the Written Arts. Over 36 years, the festival has utilized the Rockwood site to host authors from across Canada, including Michael Ondaatje, W.P. Kinsella, Dorothy Livesay, and Carol Shields.

In the fall of 2016, the Rockwood experienced severe drainage issues and basement flooding that threatened the structural soundness of the building. The funds from the B.C. | Canada 150 grant went directly to saving this precious community space. What started off as a project to repair the drainage system quickly revealed deeper issues that needed to be addressed to rescue the Rockwood from complete decay. The mould and mildew swiftly became a health hazard. Worse still, with no proper drainage in place two feet of ground water filled the space between the walls and the ground below. Over the course of nearly one year, the District repaired the Rockwood's drainage system, waterproofed the foundation, rebuilt all interior walls, installed a complete lighting and electrical panel upgrade, created new storage space, installed art rails, and built an accessible washroom and kitchen. The Rockwood was not only repaired, it was revitalized.

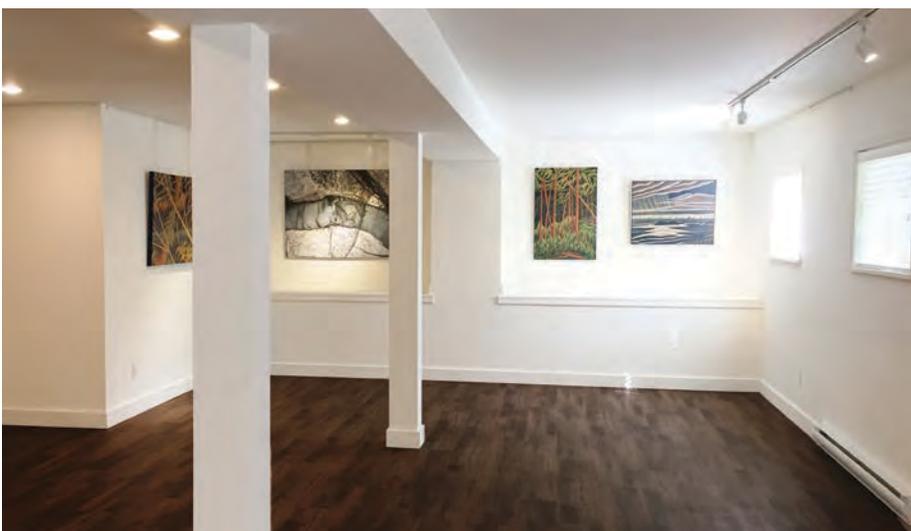
On May 17, 2018 the 750 sq. ft. multi-purpose basement space reopened. The newly renovated lower level has effectively doubled the space available to community groups. Recognizing the practical and relevant role the building provides to local arts and social service groups, the District of Sechelt kept

In the fall of 2016, the Rockwood experienced severe drainage issues and basement flooding that threatened the structural soundness of the building. The funds from the B.C. | Canada 150 grant went directly to saving this precious community space.



Top: The Rockwood Lodge, c. 1939/40.
Photo credit: Courtesy of Betty Ingram (née Youngson), Sechelt Community Archives 6.5.211

Bottom: View of the Rockwood Lodge.
Photo credit: Photos by Justin Samson.



the community use rental rates affordable after the upgrade. The building is the year-round home of the Sunshine Coast Restorative Justice program and the regular meeting spot for local cancer support groups, Victim Services, Indigenous healing circles, an LGBTQ pride youth group, and the Child and Youth Mental Health Team. The new space on the lower level will also be able to host exhibitions by local artists, displays from the Community Archives, meeting and workshop space for small and medium-sized groups, and can even accommodate music lessons on the community piano now housed in the space.

This renovation project has saved a truly beloved heritage building for generations to come. Investing in the restoration and improvement of the Rockwood has been critical in ensuring it can continue as the historic heart of our community. The Rockwood stands as both a link to our past, and a legacy that contributes to our future wellbeing. The District of Sechelt looks forward to continuing to expand the community-oriented uses of the Rockwood, providing the public with an opportunity to learn more about history and discover new ways to experience Sechelt's cultural heritage.

WEBSITES: writersfestival.ca/ & www.sechelt.ca/
FACEBOOK: @DistrictOfSechelt

Top Left: After the drainage system failed, approximately 2 feet of groundwater filled the space around perimeter of building.
Photo credit: Photo by S. Smith.

Top Right: Removing the baseboard trim and built-in cabinets revealed the full extent of the water damage. Black mould was found on drywall throughout the space.
Photo credit: Photo by S. Smith.

Bottom: Finished Rockwood Community Arts Space, featuring paintings by local artists Brian Romer and Bob Evermon.
Photo credit: Photo by S. Smith.