

## Breaking the mould

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### *Fundraising strategies for Black Loyalist Heritage Centre*



It all started at the Black Loyalist Historical Society's Friend Raising dinner at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in 2010 for Halifax philanthropist and businessman Allan Shaw.

"My wife and I were seated next to Lawrence Hill so I knew it was a fix of some sort," said Shaw with a chuckle. The event included a presentation of architectural plans for the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre, and readings by Hill from his award winning novel, the Book of Negroes.

"I left thinking that this was a wonderful cause," said Shaw. "By the time I got the call the next day asking if I would chair a fundraising campaign for the proposed centre I had already decided that I would do it," he said.

Work began assembling a team and planning a strategy. “Everybody we talked to loved the concept and loved the project but no corporation had it on their list of things to support,” said Shaw. “It was good they were interested but bad it didn’t fit their criteria.”

In order for the campaign to work, “we had to break the mould because everybody else had to break the mould too,” said Shaw, who made a sizeable personal donation enhanced by additional contributions from his partners and their company, the Shaw Group, to get the ball rolling. Other companies began to follow suite, as well as other philanthropists and patrons of the arts such as Halifax’s Marjorie Lindsay “who gave us our first real outside gift with a major contribution.”

Shaw and his team got Scotiabank “on board,” then were able to use that support to leverage the other banks. The campaign received a major boost when Emera contributed \$500,000 to the project.

“We are very proud to be involved with the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre presented by Emera,” said Chris Huskison, president and CEO. “We think the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre is important not just for Shelburne but for all of Nova Scotia.”

A “total team effort” and the “generosity” of many made the campaign a success, said Shaw. The end result- a \$7 million state of the art heritage centre “is outstanding,” he said. “It’s better than I had hoped for. It is and will be a gathering place for the community and for people of all races and configurations to come together.”

The Black Loyalist Heritage Society has had an ally in Lawrence Hill over the years, who has helped tell the story of the Black Loyalists to a much larger audience through his book and subsequent mini-series. “We have supported each other,” said Beverly Cox, site manager. “He spent a lot of time here doing research with Debra Hill and with Fin Bower from the Shelburne County Museum and when it came time where he could lend support to us he has always made himself available.”

There has also been some “divine intervention,” during the journey, said Society President Elizabeth Cromwell. “So many little things happened for it all to come together,” she said. “God has helped us along the way, sending us help when we needed it, inspiration and staying power.”

The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre is the newest member of the Nova Scotia Museum family and “tells a very significant story of one of our founding cultures,” said Stephanie Smith director of the Nova Scotia Museum.

The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre “makes a great addition to the family of museums,” said noted historian and author Ruth Whitehouse, who has written the book, *Black Loyalists: Southern Settlers of Nova Scotia's First Free Black Communities*. “It’s really important that we all get a chance to explore this history,” she said adding what has really struck her about the Black Loyalists’ story is the descendants. “I just really respect and love all the people who have been working on this,” she said. “They have worked so hard. It’s very touching.”

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