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Bright horizons for Argentia Sunset

AMA and Fitzgerald's Pond park partner to establish RV park on former U.S. housing site

Kenn Oliver, The Charter



RVs such as these all the way from California set up shop at the College of the North Atlantic campus lot upon arriving Wednesday night. On their next visit, they'll have a fully serviced RV park to meet their every need.

Given the arrival and departure times of Marine Atlantic ferries to Argentia, early mornings and late evenings, most don't see the amount of recreational vehicle traffic that comes through on a given night. But ask anyone who works in Argentia about the volume of these rigs and they'll tell you that they constitute the bulk of traffic coming on or off the ferry.

Armed with that knowledge and the desire to round out the Southwest Avalon tourism package, the AMA in partnership with Dave and Susan Bartlett of Fitzgerald's Pond Park, officially announced the construction of a new RV park which will be aptly named Argentia Sunset Park.

AMA board member Hedley Burge says generally speaking the operation of such a service is traditionally not a great revenue generator. But he insists that the AMA is not concerned with profiteering in this venture, but rather a boost to the entire local area.

"This is what we were looking for with this, that it would not be good for a single person or group but for the community overall," says Mr. Burge.

The park, located on the site formerly known as the 1000 housing area on Argentia's Southside, will be able to accommodate 40 guests in 80 by 25 foot lots with 10 foot buffer zones between each. It will also boast all the necessary services – water, sewer and electrical – that most RVers have come to expect.

In addition, the building located at the park's entrance will be renovated for management and to house showers and washrooms.

"All people want is a few minor services and a place where they can feel secure," explains Mr. Bartlett who says while he'd like to be able to accommodate all visitors to his own private park, he simply does not have the space for the larger model of motor homes commonly used today.

Park Partners

Mr. Burge and Mr. Bartlett agree that the concept of an RV park is not a new one, but it took the right partnership to make it happen.

"The AMA does not have any experience in park operations," says Mr. Burge, "whereas Dave and Sue have a good marketing plan already in place and they'll take this and add it to their marketing scheme and promote it the same as Fitzgerald's and they already know the business."

"If there is success to be had this will be one of the main reasons for it."

Placentia St. Mary's MHA Felix Collins, on hand for the sod turning ceremony, says an RV park in Argentia is an ideal situation only made better by having the Bartlett's at the reigns.

"Fitzgerald's Pond is a great facility and from what I can see, Dave and Sue have done a great job there," says Mr. Collins, "but it isn't big enough to take all the flow from the traffic so this is just a perfect match."

Placentia Mayor Bill Hogan says it's encouraging to see the Bartlett's get involved with this project.

"They know what the demand is firsthand.

"They must see something there because all we could do before this was talk about it," says the Mayor who says the park will have tremendous value for the town's heritage, tourism and culture resume.

It's easy to tell Mr. Bartlett has been chomping at the bit to get this underway and he admits to being ready to play his part in developing the full tourism potential of the region.

"I think the message is across, we just haven't harnessed it yet," says Mr. Bartlett. "It's all here, we just need to harness it and put it together."

Disappearing business

You don't need to be an RVer to recognize the necessity of a park in the area to catch the ferry traffic. On late night arrivals, many of the disembarking passengers will pull in to the parking lot of the visitor information centre or the lot at the College of the North Atlantic campus.

"The reason they're utilizing the local area is because there is absolutely nowhere else for them to put them," says Mr. Bartlett who says most of those RVs are gone at the crack of dawn headed for other areas of the province.

"They're not in a rush, they're just following an itinerary that was given to them."

The park unfortunately will not be completed in time to capitalize on the remainder of the 2006 tourist season, but will be ready to operate at full capacity next spring. In the meantime, Mr. Bartlett has been given the permission of the AMA to utilize a parking area in Argentia in the interim.

"Introduce the people that are coming that Argentia is an RV park now and hopefully even from that little bit it'll give people a safe and secure parking area for this season," Mr. Bartlett states.

Edward Collins Contracting was awarded the construction of the PARK which is expected to be a key piece of the AMA's "Tourism Argentia" strategy by complementing the existing draws such as the Backland Trail, the 282 Coastal Defence Battery Guns and the Q-Driving Range.

"The AMA is very pleased to be able to do this and we think it will bode well for future developments whether it be museums or anything else that might develop in the area," says Mr. Burge.

Mayor Hogan, who suggests that this is long overdue, says he's been an outspoken critic of the AMA over the years, but is tremendously delighted to see this come to fruition.

"They do good things, and this is one of them!"

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