

explore

RUNNIN' DOWN A DREAM

How an attraction is helping bring tourists to the Burin Peninsula, while keeping alive the memory of a man who so loved The Boot

BY LINDA BROWNE



DRIVING

along Church Street in scenic Burin, just beyond Bull's Cove, visitors come upon a curious sight. First, a big sign flanked by rum barrels catches your attention (a nod to the area's rum-running history). Then, as you turn and make your way down the winding asphalt drive, an incredible scene unfolds: an old-time mercantile store, cabaret, saddlery, blacksmith and more, with horse saddles and wagon wheels strewn throughout. These are just facades, but it makes you feel as though you've travelled through time and stepped out of rural Newfoundland and straight into the Wild West. (Indeed, you might expect a tumbleweed to blow by as you wander around.)

While Smugglers Cove could be mistaken for a spaghetti western film set, it's just one of the grand plans of a local visionary who wanted to entice others to spend time in a place he loved so dearly.





Tom Hollett's whimsical nature lives on around Burin, such as his windup VW Beetle and British phone box. Tom passed away in 2016.



SPIRIT OF THE WEST

Walking around Burin's beautiful heritage district, Tom Hollett's spirit lingers everywhere. There's the classic, British red phone box (placed there by Tom as an innovative way to tackle the area's lack of cell service while attracting visitors); the 1974 Volkswagen Beetle (painted bright blue and with a windup key fixed to the end) perched atop a rocky hill overlooking the town – the same one that used to be parked alongside the TCH just outside St. John's to promote Jiffy Cabs, the business that Tom owned and operated and his son

Chris runs today; and the colourful wooden chairs and benches on Poor's Poets Poetry Hill, where visitors can sit for a spell and soak in the breathtaking vistas.

"And Poor's – really, it was Power's. My father-in-law told me when they were young boys, that was the place they went to light the bonfire because it could be seen all throughout Burin... He said they'd take days and days bringing material up to the top of the hill to get ready for the big bonfire," says Mike Brennan, one of Tom's many good friends in the area.

These are just a few of the many projects Tom was involved with, but Smugglers Cove may be his most ambitious. Inspired by his motorcycle trips throughout the United States, Tom got the wheels turning to bring his dream of a western-style roadhouse bar and grill to his

Rather than let it fade away, Tom's friends pulled together to help bring his whimsical vision to life. Smugglers Cove officially flung open the doors in 2018, and while it's quiet on this particular day in mid-June, the place will soon come alive with music, motorcycles, good food, friends and fun – just how Tom would want it. Besides being home to the Heritage Riders Motorcycle Association and the Monkey's Fist bar and restaurant, Smugglers Cove also hosts concerts and events like Live at Heart, a global music business conference and showcase where talent from around the province and beyond can strut their stuff in front of music industry professionals from around the world. (Another part of Tom's dream was to promote the province's vibrant music scene.)

Sitting at a table at the Monkey's Fist with Mike Brennan and Alison Kavanaugh (who own and operate Smugglers Cove along with Alison's husband Paddy and chef Clint Brewer),

this isn't so much an interview as it is a time of remembrance. Laughs and smiles are shared, and a scattered tear is shed, as the two share stories about their dear friend – a dreamer with a generous spirit, a larger-than-life personality and an even bigger heart who loved his family, his friends and, of course, The Boot (as the Burin Peninsula is affectionately known). In return, he was loved beyond measure.

"When he walked in the room, you knew. Not by his size, but you just knew by his presence," Alison says. "Every single person he met he had



Participants of the 2019 Route 210 Run gather together at Smugglers Cove.

beloved Burin. Unfortunately, that dream was cut short in 2016 when Tom, 60, died in a motorcycle accident on his way to the Route 210 Run to help raise money for the local autism society.

"When Tom passed, we went about a year, basically, we were dumbstruck, numb from the loss of such a grand person. And me and Paddy [Kavanaugh], we were sat out here on the corner one day and we said, "What are we going to do?" recalls Mike.



Mike Brennan and Alison Kavanaugh stand inside the Monkey's Fist restaurant at Smugglers Cove with Tom Hollett's first Jiffy Cab sign.

an effect on.”

Stories of Tom's generosity are legendary. Alison recalls when she had tickets to see KISS in concert and was worried she wouldn't be able to go.

“Tom called my boss and said, ‘She needs the time off, we're going to the concert.’ And he rented a 50-foot RV and showed up at the house and picked us all up – me and Paddy and the two kids – and we all went on a holiday,” she says.

Tom's hometown pride shone in everything he did, and while he may not be here today, his spirit and memory are all around. For instance, there are the treasures that he picked up on his travels and other memorabilia, like the first Jiffy Cab sign that was on the roof of his car, holding a place of honour at the bar.

“We wanted to make sure that everybody knew whose dream it was,” Mike says. “We're basically the dream facilitators. We're just making sure that it carries on.”

FROM DREAM TO REALITY

A few years back, Tom had purchased a number of older properties in Burin that he began renovating for

vacation homes, a concept he called the “Hotel of Homes.” Taking inspiration from this idea, Mike and crew decided to build 10 glamping pods (small huts) around the pond at Smugglers Cove, giving visitors another option for a place to stay.

“At the time when Tom was dreaming his dream and building on it, glamping wasn't even on the radar. But we thought it'd be a really cool way to incorporate, still, his ideas, but on a smaller scale,” Mike says.

Smugglers Cove is just the beginning of great things planned for the area. Other items in the works include eco tours to the nearby resettled Great Burin Island (where Tom spent a lot of time). There visitors will be able to enjoy a hike and a boil-up of fish and potatoes, or a picnic lunch from Burin's Heritage Cafe.

“We weren't fully aware of his idea, but he used to keep telling us, ‘Well, it'd be nice if you could walk the whole road [of] Great Burin that was there 100 years ago.’ So he took on a gentleman, Mr. Darby, who was in his late 80s at the time or in his mid-80s, and he walked and showed them exactly where the road was. So Tom

had the road completely redone that went up the island, 4.2 kilometres. It's probably one of the most scenic and most stunning hiking trails in the province," Mike says.

They also hope to offer people the chance to catch and fillet their own cod during the food fishery, and have it cooked up for them. In addition, Mike says, they're working with private investors to bring other things to the area. While he's staying mum on

not only pirates and privateers, but also persistence and perseverance.

When all is said and done, this isn't just about promoting Burin, but the entire peninsula – something Mike and Alison say will be achieved by everyone working together.

"In Burin you got the hills and the rocks and the water, to Lamaline with its beautiful marshes and meadows and beaches, to Grand Bank's history. There's just so much to offer here," Mike says.

By all counts, Tom's dream of putting Burin on the map is well underway and in good hands. And what would he think if he could see Smugglers Cove today?

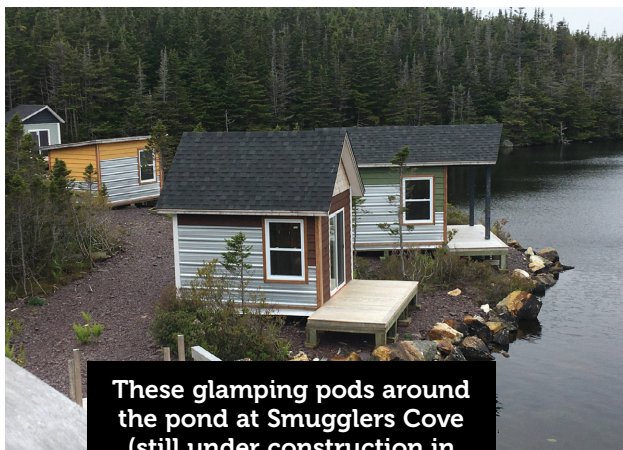
"Oh, he'd probably say, 'You got it all wrong,'" Mike says with a laugh.

But while some things may not look exactly like what Tom had in mind, his friends are working hard

to stay as close to his vision as possible. And when they're on the right track, they know.

"I miss him every day. I think we talk about him every day... whatever we're doing – and he's always showing up. We feel that his spirit's with us because certain things we go at, and we get into it and we're so frustrated, and then all of a sudden a bell goes off, or something happens, and it goes directly back to him," Mike says.

"He's not far from our shoulder... And other things we do, we'll replicate and remember Tom. We have no interest in trying to make this ours. We're trying to still keep that same dream alive that he had." 🗨️



These glamping pods around the pond at Smugglers Cove (still under construction in June) will give visitors another option for a place to stay.

details for now, he hints, "They will be exciting, and they will help fortify Burin as one of the No. 1 destination places in the province."

The idea is to add to the area's existing offerings, which includes spectacular scenery and hiking trails like the 6-km Cook's Lookout Trail (where British explorer Captain James Cook would look out for smugglers and privateers in the 18th century as he charted the coast). Working with researchers and the town, Mike and company also hope to bring more of Burin's intriguing history to light – a story that includes