

New face at the helm of Headwaters Communities in Action



Written By MARNI WALSH

On April 1, Mono resident Jennifer Payne succeeded Shirley Boxem as the Executive Director of Headwaters Communities in Action.

Serving as director since 2013, Ms. Boxem is credited with strengthening the community improvement organization and its partnerships by creating and developing new projects throughout her tenure.

As the new leader of HCIA, Ms. Payne brings a wealth of knowledge to the role, with her business degree and years of dedication to the HCIA organization in which she supported the Headwaters Food and Farming Alliance and co-founded and coordinated the highly successful Farm to School Program.

In a press release, Diana Morris, Co-Chair of the HCIA Leadership Council thanked Shirley Boxem for her years of dedication and leadership, and asked the community to welcome Jennifer Payne as the new Executive Director.

Raised in Saint John, New Brunswick, Jennifer Payne says she developed her country ties "growing up at the end of a rural road, with a forest as my back yard, and trails connecting neighbourhoods where my friends lived." She moved to the Violet Hill area nearly 20 years ago to marry her husband Mark and raise their, now 13 year old, twin girls on a 10-acre property - part of which is Niagara Escarpment Commission protected land.

Ms. Payne says she first became aware of HCIA with the launch of the original Community Wellbeing Report and the Local Food Summit held in 2012.

‘It was so eye-opening for me, this whole world of local food specifically, and the connections to health, environment, culture, equity, economy and more. Then discovering all the linkages to the broader community-building movement, and having real local stats and research to refer to, just brought the bigger picture into focus,’ Ms. Payne said.

She added, ‘How we live together as communities and how neighbours work together intentionally to build a sense of place and belonging, to solve problems and take action, to make sure everyone is looked after while celebrating what is great about where we live - it's just a beautiful thing,’

It seemed to Ms. Payne, that HCIA provided ‘scaffolding and credibility by connecting local projects through national and global initiatives like the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.’

She says, ‘It felt like important work that I wanted to be part of in some way.’

Her various roles with Headwaters Food and Farming Alliance gave her ‘the opportunity to work with a team of passionate and creative people, to learn through trial and error, research and networking, and build something from the ground up that addresses a need in the community and has become well-loved (the Farm to School Programs),’ she told the Free Press.

‘I have attended conferences, countless webinars and done my own research into not-for-profit/charitable sector topics like governance, fundraising and finance, community engagement and campaigns. I am self taught in graphic design and website building and management, as well as various software and web tools that are useful in this work. You might say I'm a grassroots graduate, where my community work is concerned,’ she added.

Ms. Payne says she loves being a part of a team that takes action on important issues in the community.

‘I'm very excited to now be working more closely with the impressive team of community leaders on the HCIA Leadership Council, with our amazing project leads and committees, our funders and our extended family of community connections and partner networks,’ she said.

‘My mandate and goals in this role will be set based on the stated needs and priorities of our communities. These have certainly changed in the past couple of months, and will continue to evolve as we move out of the current response phase and into recovery and rebuilding. We are due to revisit our strategic plan at HCIA and will set goals and action plans then, including supports for our existing projects and consideration of new programming needs.’

In any case, she says, ‘strong communications and web presence will be key’ as she moved forward in her new role.