

## Base 31

STORY AND PHOTO: RAMESH POORAN

### PEC Community Partners revitalization project

The Loch Sloy Business Park now has a new name and the potential for a bright future. The 700-acre site was purchased five months ago by PEC Community Partners Inc., a group of community builders including Tercot Communities, DECO Communities, PEC Placemaking and Rockport Group, with the intent of adaptive re-use of existing buildings on the site with an initial focus as a hub for arts and culture. Last Friday, the partners invited the public to visit the site for the unveiling of the new name and a glimpse of their future plans. The site will now be called Base 31, a nod to its Second World War name as the Royal Air Force No. 31 Bombing and Gunnery School. "We believe this place isn't just a relic. This place is rooted in the past, but I believe it's absolutely essential for the future. What

we are trying to establish here is an ethos of collaboration. A place where we can search for those win-win-win opportunities, and we are delighted to learn that that kind of ethos permeates the County already," said Tim Jones, CEO of Base 31. He noted the military heritage of the site, and also acknowledged the Indigenous legacy and history of this area, saying that the group has already established partnerships with the Mohawks of Tyendinaga. Jones also praised the work of the former site manager, Jacqui Burley, whose leadership helped to create the community at Loch Sloy and who worked tirelessly to save the buildings from further decay. She will remain as one of the collaborators with Base 31 and will continue to offer tours of the historic site. Jones said there are currently 31 collaborations and community investments, the number chosen deliberately to reflect the new name.

Assaf Weisz is one of the partners leading the revitalization project with Jones. He said there



(L-R): Assaf Weisz and Tim Jones of PEC Community Partners describe their plans for the revitalization of the former Loch Sloy site, now known as Base 31.

was a team of 14 people, almost all County residents, working on this initial stage. There are five buildings currently undergoing renovations, including one that will be converted into a visitors centre.

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There will be a new home for the Maison Depoivre Gallery as well as upgrades to Melt Gallery. This initial revitalization project will be limited to a 70-acre parcel of the site adjacent to Royal Road, which includes over 50 former barracks, mess halls, hangars and administration buildings. There are three areas of focus. The first is landscaping, with the intent to restore the ecological health of the site. The natural alvar landscape will be revived, and 1,000 plants and 150 native trees will be planted to aid in regeneration. The second aspect will be public art, with the collaboration of the County Arts Council. "We want to recruit artists who are going to re-imagine the role that these buildings can play as portals connecting the past and the future," said Weisz. Some of that work is already evident. The site entryway is now much more colourful, and there are archival photographs posted alongside the internal lanes. The third component is programming and events, with concerts, comedy and cabaret already scheduled or in the works. The first concert will be held on July 2, with an all-Indigenous lineup including David Maracle, Digging Roots and Iroquoian smoke dancers. Proceeds of this concert will be donated to the Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na language school in Tyendinaga. The site will be open on the following Saturday, July 9, for Community Day, with music, food and drink, and activities for the whole family. There will also be a craft beer festival, a music concert with Sarah Harmer, and a Queer comedy festival coming up over the summer months, and more programming in the fall.

County resident Sarah Doiron is the manager of programs and partnerships. She lives just down the hill from the site and has been fascinated with the location ever since she took one of Jacqui Burley's tours. She jumped at the chance to get in on the ground floor of the revitalization project. "I think our leadership are the most collaborative people I've ever worked with. They are really invested in getting participation from the community before coming up with any plans for the site, and we've had amazing stakeholder sessions from the heritage community, the naturalist community, the arts and events producers," she said. "It's been a fantastic opportunity to work with this network I've developed over the years and pursue some very exciting opportunities that I don't think existed before this." She said that getting municipal water to the site was the number one priority and they are working really closely with the County to get those services as soon as possible. She added that legacy events that took place at Loch Sloy, such as arm-drop drag racing, the Motosocial and Taste!, will continue. "We know how the community feels about it, and we want to keep that legacy going," she said. "The goal is to save as many buildings on the site as possible for adaptive re-use. We want to preserve the integrity of these structures and ultimately develop them into active spaces. We want there to be things for the residents as well as visitors, and we are absolutely committed to working with organizations throughout the community." For more information, please visit [base31.ca](http://base31.ca).

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