

Keeping Canada's Top Golf Course Public

Highlands Links is a golf course in Cape Breton which employs 33 people seasonally. It has been ranked as the best public golf course in the country two years running and best Canadian golf course in 2005 by Golf Magazine. Parks Canada had a mandate to privatize different functions and felt that they should not be in the business of subsidizing golf courses. With that came the plan to privatize Highlands Links. As soon as this became known, Dean LeFriend, President of the proactive local, contacted the PSAC and began setting up meetings and putting its members on committees regarding privatization. They began a campaign to educate the public on the benefits of having the golf course remain public. Such a golf course offers a competitively priced tourist draw, which brings money to the area and keeps the revenue within the public sector. Additionally, the loss of 33 jobs or lowered salaries would be devastating to the community of Ingonish, with a population of about 1,200. The Parks Canada argument that Highlands Links was a drain did hold some truth, however, the pro-shop and bar was privately run, with none of its revenues being filtered back into the golf course.

The mandate of the fightback was not just to fight for the security of the workers, but to show to the community how the security of the workers and their income was important to the public at-large. Ads were placed in golf magazines, leaflets were passed out, and signs were put up in the community. Members met with MPs, MLAs, and local councillors. A demonstration was held in front of local businesses, with hot dogs and a mascot to attract attention. A petition was circulated, which garnered 400 signatures in a single day. The members also did a drive to all the local business with the petition, and all but one business signed it. The majority of the community was quite supportive. They recognized the value of the public golf course economically and in the regard that the 33 employees were their neighbours, family, and friends. The media also played a very supportive role. The local had a good rapport with the media and were instrumental in bringing attention to the issue.

Another demonstration was held in September 2005. Off-duty members came in, and on-duty members booked several hours off to join in the rally. Over 50 people were there, along with PSAC representatives, and they marched in solidarity in front of the Parks Canada office. The golf course advisory board was holding a meeting inside, and the rally moved into that meeting, with two of the members employed by the golf course speaking to the board about what would happen to their families as a result of privatization.

After the office was vacated, another proposal was tabled for a similar status quo, only with a new parks manager and the parks were to try and develop a not for profit community group so all profit would be returned to the course. There was a \$937,000 infrastructure commitment, which has been filtering in ever since.

The local's effort was boosted when PSAC President, John Gordon, and Jeannie Baldwin, REVP Atlantic, travelled to Ingonish to golf the Highlands Links, bringing media attention to the struggle.

The union fights not just for its members, but for the community. The accomplishments of a union that shows solidarity is incredible, but the accomplishments of the community and the union acting in solidarity is astonishing, and is manifested in the victory of Highlands Links.