

S.S. Keewatin 1907

Port McNicoll, Ontario



March 1, 2021.

The Editor: MidlandToday / OrilliaMatters / CollingwoodToday

Re: Sponsored Content "Honouring the incredible legacy of the SS Keewatin"

I wish to address errors of fact and omission appearing in this advertorial. The major points are these:

1. Both Gil Blutrach and Michael Sneyd, the President and CEO of Skyline Investments at the time, have made public statements about Skyline's commitment to donate the S.S. Keewatin to a charity in Port McNicoll, confirming Skyline's stated obligation in the purchase agreement between Skyline and Peterson dated November 30, 2011, as shown to the municipal government and others.
2. The charity was formed by Skyline on April 26, 2013. Its Board was under Skyline's control until October 18, 2018 and its management was under Skyline's control until September 1, 2020.
3. Eric Conroy, Consultant, was engaged by Skyline as Project Manager for the S.S. Keewatin project in 2011, and as President and CEO of the charity on its formation and continued until his resignation.

The original plan was that Skyline would promote its development in Port McNicoll utilizing Keewatin as the centrepiece, visitations would result, and admissions would fund the restoration of the ship. Instead, there was no promotion of the development and Conroy was left to his own devices to build awareness and visitations.

4. Skyline provided the charity with no up-front funds to restore and operate the ship, let alone promote it, but rather required the charity to pay for not only operational costs but also restoration materials and the management fees of both Skyline's Project Manager and General Manager out-of-revenues, merely zeroing the difference each year against a demand loan charged to the charity.
5. Regardless, Skyline reconfirmed its commitment in 2015 in supporting the charity's application for a grant under the Canada 150 Infrastructure Program to restore the historic Upper Lakes Service docks in Port McNicoll on which the Keewatin is tied. While Skyline covered a fraction of the cost, it benefited from funding provided by all levels of government used for environmental remediation of the land Skyline is required to donate to the municipality.
6. The charity's application to Canadian Heritage for Category B designation was made under Skyline's direction by lawyers appointed by Skyline. (Skyline ceased to be the sole member of the charity and to have control of its board of directors in 2018 in order to be eligible for a tax receipt for donating a cultural heritage property to the charity in the event of a successful application by the charity.)
7. The application was declined principally because the charity was unable to demonstrate sufficient financial resiliency. This was declared in an interim report by Canadian Heritage to Skyline's lawyers, and again after the application was declined, in a meeting by Conroy with the Deputy Minister in the office of a senator and presence of an MP. In both instances Skyline refused to provide a financial backstop necessary to conclude its obligations according to its own definition of those obligations.
8. Instead, on receipt of the original turn down Skyline directed Conroy to investigate alternate destinations for the ship. After the meeting with the Deputy Minister, and with the repeated refusal of Skyline to provide a financial backstop for the charity, Skyline directed Conroy to engage with the Maritime Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston, and Conroy capitulated.

Wayne Coombes
President