

Chapter Activist Profile

Michaele Kustudic – Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia

Michaele Kustudic is a long-time member of the Council of Canadians and has been the contact person for the Annapolis Valley Chapter for the past nine years. She has put extensive effort into organizing her local chapter, working with the rest of the members of the chapter's Steering Committee to develop effective communication plans, host tours on issues such as trade, water and uranium mining, and encourage people to get involved in local issues. She recently stepped down from the position of unofficial chapter "chair," but will remain active in chapter activities. Michaele has made a huge contribution to the Council's success in the Atlantic region and is a shining example of how people can take action and make a difference in their community. We thank Michaele for all of her contributions.

Why do you think that the community was successful at starting the chapter?

We, here in Wolfville, are a unique community. Although the town is small, we have a university (Acadia), and we have a lot of people who are concerned about the changes that have been happening in Canada: the role of corporations in society and the water, trade and energy issues, which are the four campaign pillars of the Council of Canadians.

How did the chapter engage the local community?

We built a strong email list. At each public event we invite people to add their names to this list, and we send out information that is relevant – not too much information – but information that is harder to get via traditional methods. We have also built a solid core, a strong Steering Committee; this group has met regularly, usually at two- or three-week intervals. We talk about issues and decide what to do, and we network with other local groups who sometimes work with us. We also set up a phone tree – this works really well – calling people personally to invite them to upcoming events. This is a good way to contact people who don't have email.

How does the Steering Committee decide what to work on?

We meet and we usually start with what we have come to call "show and tell." We share news articles and items that we have seen or heard, that interest us. I share information that has arrived from the Council of Canadians. We then talk about whether we want to take some action, and decide on what that will be. What we are really good at is organizing events around specific issues or campaigns, and doing publicity for these.

When there is an author on a book tour, or something like this, we work hard to make these events successful.

How does the chapter work on local issues?

Several of us on the Steering Committee are also participants in other local groups. One of our members is interested in energy and transportation issues, and has been very active in promoting ideas related to these issues. We also have two members who are part of the Health Care Coalition, and several on the local anti-uranium-mining committee. Some of us are involved in local agricultural issues and in the "buy local" movement. Two of us are members of the local "gaggle" of the Raging Grannies; we keep the Grannies informed of current issues and upcoming events, and the Grannies often participate. It's amazing what a group of funny old women in silly hats can get away with! So we have opportunities to spread our information through these groups.

What has your chapter done really well?

We worked quite a bit on the energy campaign this year. Students on the Acadia campus wanted to ban bottled water and we were able to help them a lot with the materials from the Council of Canadians and the skills that we have developed. Being a small community we can also get meetings with local politicians. But what I consider to be our biggest success is getting information out to the public. We attend all of the All Candidates Meetings during elections and are able to ask good questions. I believe that the more people hear about an issue, the more it comes to the forefront of their minds. An example of this: when I came back from the visit to the



Michaele Kustudic takes part in a rally as part of the Council of Canadians Annual General Meeting in Edmonton last year. This year's AGM is headed to the Atlantic region and takes place October 23-25 in Saint John, New Brunswick.

tar sands, which took place in conjunction with the 2008 Council of Canadians AGM, I wrote an article about the issue for the local paper. Then, when Andrew Nikiforuk came to town on his book tour, we had people who knew about the issue, which helped us to organize a successful event. This kind of information helps to expand public awareness.

What would you like people to take away from an AGM in the Atlantic region?

I hope that people from other parts of the country will see what a lovely part of the world this is. Visiting a new place can really open your mind and broaden your thinking. It is great that the Council has AGMs across the country – it gives participants the chance to see all the parts of Canada for which they are "standing on guard."



For more information about how to join a chapter in your area, visit our website at www.canadians.org or call us at 1-800-387-7177.