

AGENTS OF Change 4.0



Better things can happen

By Jon Tattrie | Photos by Paul Darrow

For the past four years the December edition of *Business Voice* has focused on change. Every autumn we gather together our selected Agents of Change, and talk about how change that starts right outside your front door can morph into ideas that can radically change Nova Scotia's future for the better.

This year's Agents of Change meeting was apropos on many levels. The gathering at NSCC Waterfront campus took place mere hours after Canadians had voted overwhelmingly for change, sweeping Justin Trudeau's Liberal party into power. One of those elected was a previous Agent of Change, Andy Fillmore, MP for Halifax.

On that note, we'd like to introduce you to Agents of Change, 4.0:

When Diandra Phipps decided to open a vegan restaurant in Halifax, she went to the banks to borrow money. But the would-be lenders offered their own menu suggestion.

"Well, you should probably serve meat at your restaurant," she recalls them telling her.

Phipps was sure enVie would thrive as a vegan restaurant — even if she didn't grill up steaks — but she still had to prove it. The would-be lender asked her to get letters from potential customers, stating how often they would eat at her hypothetical vegan restaurant. The community responded, and today enVie is a thriving north-end restaurant (and you still can't order meat). In fact, only about one in five customers is vegan — the other four out of five just love the food.

It drove home for Phipps that our city sometimes requires a bit of convincing before embracing change. So when enVie decided to convert a yoga studio into a commercial kitchen to expand, Phipps didn't bother returning to traditional money lenders.

"It was actually a lot more than our initial opening. We realized we needed about \$20,000 extra," she says.

She asked her customers to help out. "The idea of being able to get a loan from our customers was really exciting for us, and to pay it back over time through VIP dinners, T-shirts and gift certificates."



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– Diandra Phipps,
Owner, enVie Restaurant

Phipps further broke with convention by adding a charitable fundraiser. The restaurant wound up raising \$3,000 on top of what they raised for the renovations. enVie gave the money to other local organizations, including the expanding Ecology Action Centre and Ark Outreach. And just like that, what could have been a run-of-the-mill loan changed into a community-building exercise.

"It was really amazing to see the change that happened and the people who got on board, just for our expansion," Phipps says.

That's why *Business Voice* named Phipps one of our Change Agents 4.0. The innovation drivers gathered at the Nova Scotia Community College's spectacular waterfront campus one sunny morning in late October, when change scented the fall air. The previous evening, Nova Scotia led the country in voting for change at the federal government level, giving all 11 seats to the Liberal Party.

In fact, one of the high-profile wins in the election came from one of the very first Change Agents. In 2012, *Business Voice* spoke to a rising star on the city planning scene. Today, Andy Fillmore is the Member of Parliament for Halifax. The Change Agents 4.0, while careful not to assume political loyalties, see the red tide as an example of how Nova Scotians can pull together — and how they can lead Canada.



Photo: Contributed

“They slow down and they immediately understand that there are people here who have value, who care about each other, who love each other.”

— Amy Schwartz, Co-facilitator of the Creighton Street painting project

Amy Schwartz knows that change starts at home — literally. A 10-year resident of Creighton Street, she grew increasingly frustrated with drivers blasting through the neighbourhood like race track drivers. Most local kids walk to school, and the danger and discomfort troubled her.

“I wrote to the city a number of times about how to get speed bumps and got turned away several times, and so have many residents in that neighbourhood,” she says. “And then I realized there was this place-making program where you could actually paint the street. I thought: that’s a positive way to address it.”

So the former city worker pulled the municipal levers, got an artist hired, and they created a painting on the street. It shows a woman’s braided hair turning into trees, each symbolic of the area. Most of the neighbourhood turned out as the street painting turned into a street party.

Not long after the face was added to the street, the faceless drivers changed their behaviour. “They slow down and they immediately understand that there are people here who have value, who care about each other, who love each other,” Schwartz says.

She still is trying to get physical speed bumps installed.



WHEN BUTCHERS AND VEGANS AGREE

Ted Grant, the Academic Chair of Culinary Arts and Tourism at NSCC, is bringing back pride in the traditional trades.

Grant — who is too modest to mention that he once appeared on *Live! With Regis and Kelly* — says entrepreneurs like Chris deWaal of Getaway Farms show Nova Scotians can and will support local tradespeople. “We’re seeing that artisanal butchery, artisanal baking, is strong again,” he says.

Awkwardly, Grant says this while sitting next to enVie’s vegan. He glances nervously in her direction as he talks about the joys of meat. “I feed my dogs raw meat,” Phipps assures him to laughter.

Grant dreams of the day more young Nova Scotians begin raising their own goats, milking them and turning that into pro-biotic yogurt and delicious cheese. That’s why under his leadership, NSCC works hard to support small and medium-size enterprises. “How we can raise the bar for hospitality excellence, tourism excellence, culinary excellence?” he asks.

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— Melody Pardoe,
Executive Director
of Volta

A SOLUTIONS ECONOMY

Melody Pardoe, Executive Director of Volta, also spends time thinking about the dreams of young east-coasters. To help turn them into reality, she helped start Hoist with teenager Alex Gillis. He told her how in high school, students are encouraged to get a trade or a job with an existing company, rather than risk starting a business.

Hoist gathers entrepreneurially-minded youth once a month to brainstorm ideas and lay the foundation for Nova Scotia’s prosperous future.

“What a lot of founders say to me is that there’s absolutely no resource like another entrepreneur. Building that place where people can come together and share their experiences and get somebody to introduce them to an expert in the field that they’re discovering — I think that’s a huge value,” Pardoe says.

She intends to expand Hoist to schools to give a path for future business starters.

In the dream factory that is Volta, she sees signs of Nova Scotians ditching the — dare we say it — culture of defeat. “We’re seeing, within entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship, a solutions economy. They’re more interested in and passionate about solving problems than they are about making a salary or having stability. They’re really leading the way,” Pardoe says.

Those tech-minded teenagers who do prefer to work for a company will find a good home at Norex, the award-



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— Jenelle Sobey, Managing Partner, Norex

winning digital design company. Norex makes a point of hiring new graduates and encouraging innovative thinking.

Jenelle Sobey, the new managing partner, says Norex loves curious kids tinkering in their basements, and wants them to come tinker at Norex one day.

“We bring these individuals on because they’re interested and engaged;

they’re passionate about problem solving and what they’re working on. Young people are just natural risk takers,” she says.

It’s not just talk. Norex directs employees to invest 20 per cent of their time on innovation. That appeals to young people, which improves Norex in a virtuous process of change.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

A common theme with our change agents this year was reinvesting success into the community. But while enVie quickly found neighbours it could help with its expansion, other communities struggle from a lack of connectivity.

That’s where LaMeia Reddick comes in. The North Preston woman started her business literally out of nothing — out of the spaces between Nova Scotia’s communities.

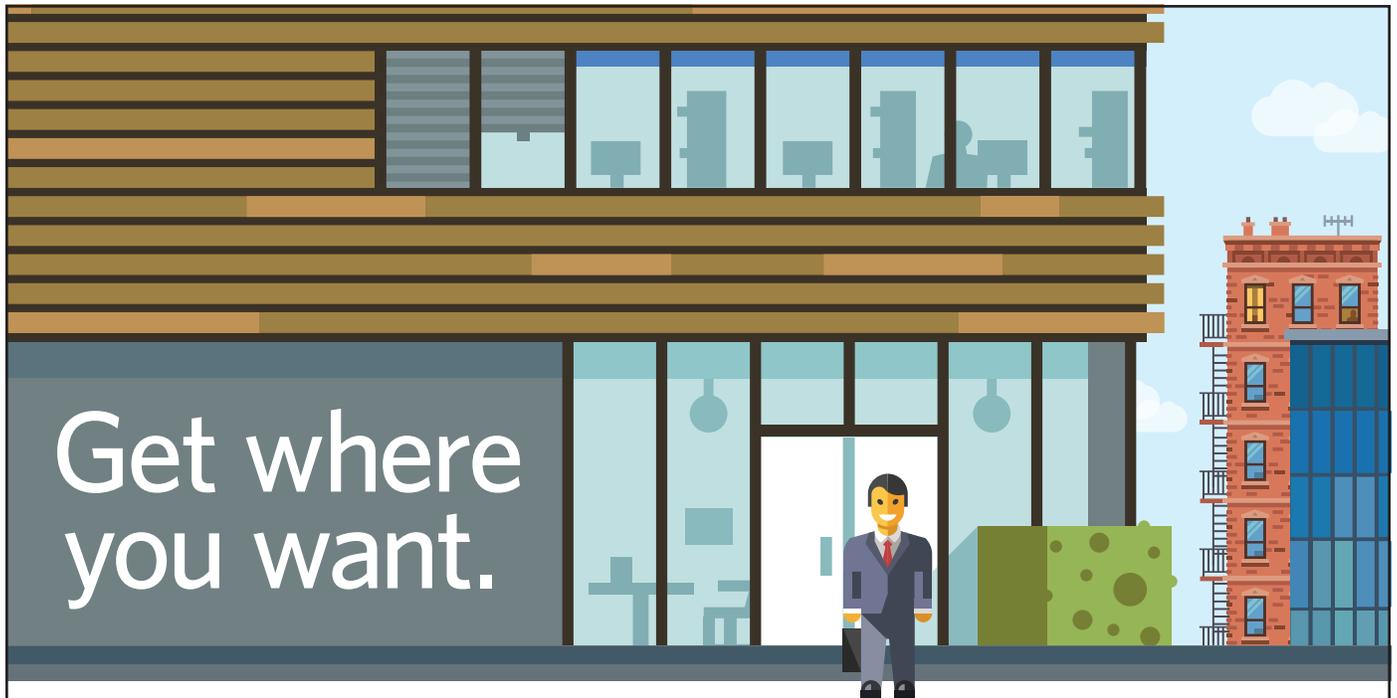
“I’ve been able to build this business of connecting people because of the gaps that exist in society,” she explains. “I call my business LaMeia Kinnects. I spell it k-i-n because it’s more about building familial relationship so that we can work together.”

She knows from her own community’s experience that social networks in the greater Halifax area don’t bring in all communities. That means even if a company or organization wants to reach a community, they may have no bridge. Reddick builds that bridge for them. For example, she plugged the Nova Scotia Barristers’ Society into North Preston for its #TalkJustice campaign.



“My work is about creating vibrant communities and all that stuff, but I really also have to draw attention to some of the problems that we have in society.”

— LaMeia Reddick, Owner, LaMeia Kinnects



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Agents of Change 4.0 *left to right:***LaMeia Reddick,***Owner,
LaMeia Kinnects***Jenelle Sobey,***Managing Partner,
Norex***Ted Grant,***Academic Chair of
Culinary Arts
and Tourism at NSCC***Diandra Phipps,***Owner, enVie
restaurant***Melody Pardoe,***Executive Director
of Volta***Amy Schwartz,***Co-facilitator of
the Creighton Street
painting project*

Thank you to Nova Scotia Community College for hosting the meeting and photo shoot for this edition of *Business Voice*.



“There are some people in Preston who’ve never left Preston to go to Halifax,” she says. And there are a many Halifax residents who have never visited Preston. Reddick doesn’t want that to remain a problem.

“Linked with my entrepreneurship is this social activism and promotion of history,” she says. “My work is about creating vibrant communities and all that stuff, but I really also have to draw attention to some of the problems that we have in society.”

She helped the barristers’ society to learn what Preston residents thought, connecting them online and off to help them improve their work.

Grant says that kind of collaboration will help everyone. It inspires him to see the entrepreneurial drive at NSCC.

“I want to do something different than anyone around here, but what I want to do that aligns with everyone is, make a difference,” he says. “I want to grow this economy. When I’m not with my kids or my wife, I’m working hard because I want to make a difference.”

Schwartz, the woman behind the Creighton Street painting, once worked for government. “In a lot of ways it was extremely frustrating, because people are not ready for collaboration on a lot of

levels,” she says. “I come from a place of a lot of frustration — of hitting barriers, and trying to work strategically around them, which is still very much how most people trying to make change in Nova Scotia have to work: figure out some strategic way around it.”

“*If everybody embraces everybody’s successes, then that positive energy can perpetuate throughout the province and better things can happen.”*

— **Melody Pardoe,**
Executive Director
of Volta

Some of the barriers are psychological, she says, as in the Nova Scotian tendency to let other regions lead. “We need to start doing stuff first. To start being — I hate to use the word — bold,” she says. “We need to be the first out there,

the starters, and not have to constantly wait until it’s been proven 10,000 times before.”

She imagines Nova Scotia tapping into its silver mine by becoming a world leader in creating a city senior citizens can easily navigate, and using an enhanced public transit network to attract car-shunning young people. “There’s no excuse for us being 20 years behind other cities in Canada. So I want us to stop making excuses and lead,” she says.

Nova Scotians must adopt “leap-frog” thinking to catch up, she says.

Phipps, who you’ll recall managed to start a thriving vegan restaurant without serving meat, still drives change in her restaurant. But the problem is no longer people demanding bacon.

“You put something on a plate that’s unique and innovative, and it’s so different that people are going, ‘Where is my lentil burger?’”

“We need to celebrate each other’s successes, instead of picking them apart or having that air of, ‘That should’ve been me,’” Pardoe adds. “If everybody embraces everybody’s successes, then that positive energy can perpetuate throughout the province and better things can happen.” ♦