

Living Heritage at Work

Kristin Enns-Kavanagh, Public Engagement Specialist

P R O F I L E

Kristin is dedicated to community development, in whatever form it may take. Inspired by the early settlers of Cannington Manor, whom she studied as part of attaining a Master's degree in archaeology from the University of Saskatchewan, she came to appreciate the role of community as a sustaining system that ensured everyone would be taken care of throughout their life cycle, from birth to old age. In such early agrarian societies, neighbourliness and kinship are more important than pursuing individual goals. Kristin was also influenced by her maternal grandmother who was a wonderful storyteller. As a child she read a lot and found a role model in the stories of Laura Ingalls Wilder, kindling her interest in the past. Although Saskatoon is home, she has traveled throughout Saskatchewan exploring the hummocky native prairie in search of stone circles and homestead sites, as well as the forested area around Hudson Bay.

Kristin's father held high expectations for both his children. He instilled a strong work ethic and encouraged the pursuit of excellence. Those lessons have paid off in her work and in her life in general. Archaeology requires a methodical, systematic approach to collecting artifacts buried in the earth, a person could so easily miss something, so the process becomes very important in ensuring she has all the all the pieces before drawing any conclusions. She readily admits it is a control thing. This reliance on science can make you a bit of a snob when it comes to consulting the community, however Kristin soon came to recognize the value of community consultation and set aside any notion of being the expert.

Not surprising, it was a great professor that brought Kristin to pursue an anthropological approach to her work. Encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, she came to understand different ethnocentric perspectives and how people piece together their life to explain their choices. Kristin's course of study fed her interests, linking anthropology to social justice and women's issues. She learned the importance of questioning every and all assumptions.

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Community planning involves the whole community and understanding the language of living heritage is a first step in understanding what a community values. Planning grows out of the values identified and Kristin wants to ensure that heritage grows in tandem with other aspects of the community. Mapping heritage assets demonstrates the milestones in a communities' development and establishes the starting point for strategic planning. In her experience, communities intuitively understand the need to know how they came to be where they are before they can move forward.

In communities, traditions are woven into everyday life. Heritage lives in place and the meaning people give to a place. This shared history begins at the municipal level, but resonates at provincial and national levels as well. Kristin believes that if you have to prove the value of heritage you are asking the wrong questions. She wants Saskatchewan communities to feel good about the planning process and the results. She is keen to see communities succeed and grow into sustaining environments that meet the needs of residents.



Photograph courtesy of Kristin Enns-Kavanagh

Heritage Saskatchewan Alliance is the collective voice of all those who value heritage in Saskatchewan. Our vision is to see heritage as a valued and dynamic legacy that contributes to our sense of identity, creates an understanding of our past, is used to build communities in the present, and informs our choices for the future.