

President of Holland College talks about the importance of learning from each other by Gloria Welton

Dr. Sandy MacDonald, President of Holland College, says sharing the story of our career paths is an opportunity to learn from one another. Many people guided and mentored him along his journey, and he was glad to listen.

After some reflection on his own career path, he says, "sometimes our decisions are good ones but sometimes there are failures. It is what you do with those not-so-good experiences that makes the difference."

It was a challenge for him when he first entered UPEI. "I got kicked out twice. It took me seven years to get a Bachelor of Arts."

"I worked for a year in Fort McMurray fixing sewer lines in the winter, and that experience gave me the nudge to go back to school. I was motivated to enter UPEI again and earned my Bachelor of Education."

The turning point in his career came when a professor of education at UPEI, Dr. Edgar MacDonald, helped steer him on the right path. "He understood me, pushed me, and mentored me. I went on to earn my Masters in Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, and it was a wonderful experience."

When he came back to PEI, and with some help from the province, he was granted a sabbatical to go to McGill University to earn a doctorate, and then came back to work for the Unit IV School Board.

He moved to a psychologist role with the Department of Justice, working at the two adult correctional centres, three youth centres, and the probation office. He did itinerant consulting and psychology work, and then was hired by Holland College.

He went on to become Vice President Academic of Applied Research at Holland College, and then became President in 2019.

"My career has been a winding path. Progress is rarely a straight line – it is usually a few steps forward, sideways, back, and forward again."

Holland College celebrates 50 years by learning from the community

"The college is set up to offer support to help students navigate their learning and to help students realize their dreams. Campuses and centres across the Island provide Islanders the opportunity to help shape their futures."

Dr. MacDonald credits the success of Holland College to the great work of many talented people. Holland College celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2019 with a strategic planning process led by Vice President Doug Currie.

The theme was #Next50 and included stakeholder facilitation sessions, online surveys, and other conversations to collect suggestions from industry, the general public, students, staff, and faculty.

"From all of the feedback, we will be able to measure our performance against this accountability framework by focusing on major themes."

Overarching direction for the college

"The single most important phenomenon for any educational institution is the relationship between instructors and students. Our attrition rates are extremely low, mainly because of the relationship between our instructors and our students."

"Parents, educators, and students are beginning to see college as a powerful alternative or add-on to university."

"Not every student will be successful at university or at college. It is becoming more common for students to graduate from college and go on to university."

The college recently started a unique pilot model working with welding and machining apprentices.

"The present method of block release means apprentices have to leave their place of work for 6-8 weeks to take classroom work at the college. Our Red Seal completion rates have suffered as a result, because people cannot afford to leave work."

"With this pilot, apprentices get laptops and are given time off weekly to do the work previously done in the classroom. It is the future of apprenticeship training."

"Experiential learning is our bread and butter at the college and we need to put more emphasis on this area. Some of the soft skills such as leadership and working with others are difficult to teach or assess but they may be best mastered through work-integrated learning. It is a lot easier to teach those skills on the job than in a classroom."

"That is why we need a strong relationship between industry and college and supports from the provincial and federal government."



Dr. Sandy MacDonald, President of Holland College, says his early life lessons kept him moving in his educational path. "My parents had 14 children, and my mother was a very strong proponent of education. Working hard was very important to our family, whether it was school work or a job. We were expected to be kind to people, and we also have a sense of humour, with an ability to laugh at one another and ourselves." *Submitted photo.*

"We are becoming more accessible and more flexible. For example, students may be able to take competencies from different programs and put together packages for short courses and micro credentials."

"We will be maximizing our relationships with junior high and high school students, and even elementary schools."

"The expansion of our Transitions program for high school students will continue."

"Unfortunately, we've seen a significant increase over the past several years in students suffering from mental health challenges, particularly anxiety."

"The world seems more complex with each passing day, and a number are finding it difficult to cope."

"Our students come to us to acquire the skills and competencies to find employment. That is the college's most important objective, and while we've been quite successful in the past, we're always trying to improve."

How to start your college education

"The first step is to call the registrar's office to ask for information. Recruiters are here to answer questions. We have tremendously committed staff. We help people make their career dreams come true."

To contact **Dr. Sandy MacDonald**, email gamacdonald@hollandcollege.com

For more information about entering **Holland College**, call **902-629-4217** or **1-800-446-5265**.

Visit www.hollandcollege.com and search **meet our recruiters**.

The Employment Journey Inc. is a monthly publication available to residents and businesses of PEI. The publication is produced by Gloria Welton. Funding for The Employment Journey is provided by the Canada/Prince Edward Island labour market agreements.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Canada, the Government of Prince Edward Island or the Publication Manager.

Publication Manager/Owner: Gloria Welton
Queens County Reporter/Copy Editor: Heidi Riley
Kings County Reporter: Stella Shepard
Reporter/Public Relations: Stacy Dunn
EJ Promoter/Presenter: Ethan Paquet
West Prince Reporter: Ruby Arsenault
Design/Pre-press: TechnoMedia Inc.
Webmaster: TechnoMedia Inc.

The Employment Journey Inc.
129 Harrod's Lane, Fairview, PE C0A 1H2
Telephone: **Charlottetown 902-894-4100**
Montague 902-838-4030 ext. 237
E-mail: employ@employmentjourney.com
Employment Journey © 1998