

# A Conversation with Matthew

by B. Heath —*The Townships Sun*

The value in a community is a reflection of the person you are. Local people paint a beautiful canvas with vibrant colours. Colours that move, bend, and change throughout the years. Matthew Farfan is an author, historian and leader, a visionary, preserving history and heritage. This three dimensional vision recognizes the value of knowing where we came from and understanding where the path leads us.

This is our local tapestry, rich in history. Matthew is driven by his interest in the local wellbeing and, after a brief conversation, it is clear Matthew accepts nothing less than 100% from himself. In speaking about his dedication to many organizations and projects, Matthew replies, “Do not do it unless you do it well.” Having had the privilege of knowing Matthew for many years, I know of this dedication. He served on Stanstead’s Town Council for 11 years; on the Haskell Free Library and Opera House board of directors for 9 years out of a maximum 9 year term (3 of the 9 years as President); and presently he serves as president of the Stanstead Historical Society (Colby Curtis Museum) and Director of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN).

Matthew was born in St. Lambert, Que. His parents purchased a cottage on Lake Memphremagog and this is where Matthew’s love of the Townships began. He has traveled much, and yet he tells me that there are, “...few places that compare to the Eastern Townships; the beautiful landscape, friendly people and bilingualism are very attractive. This is my favorite part of the world.”

Matthew’s position as Director of QAHN connects him with many community networking groups. *‘The Mission of (QAHN) Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network, founded in 2000, is to promote a greater understanding of the history of Quebec’s English-speaking communities by informing, inspiring and connecting people through its activities. Membership is open to anyone regardless of language or cultural affiliation with an interest in history, heritage and culture. QAHN’s concern is with the preservation of English speaking community’s heritage, not with language.’*



Matthew has written the following books, as well as articles that have appeared in numerous publications: **The Vermont-Quebec Border – Life on the Line; The Eastern Townships: On Lake and River; The Eastern Townships: In Town and Village.** *The Townships Sun* is privileged to have Matthew’s “Townships Trivia” column in each edition of our publication. This 10 photo, 10 question feature on Townships history is a favorite of many of our readers, and utilizes Matthew’s collection of between 15,000 and 20,000 old photographs.

It was 22 years ago when Matthew and his wife, Josiane Caillet, purchased the heritage house located on Dufferin St. in Stanstead, next door to the Colby Curtis Museum.

The couple opened and operated an art gallery for five years. Matthew describes it as fun, and full of life, especially during events. They held an Annual Eastern Townships Art Competition attracting as many as 250 people for some events. It was so big that the event would spill over from the house into the carriage house. There was a lot of work involved, and it certainly posed a challenge to have that many people in your home. Their weekends were not free to do as they might have wished. The gallery embraced the locals, and in turn they kept the gallery alive. Matthew and Josiane recognized the value to the community.

Matthew is an articulate, focused leader, dedicated to the Stanstead community as well as the Eastern Townships. We discussed his views on leadership and, to no surprise, his response was, “You have to do what is best, not what is popular. Keeping a town alive takes more than giving money. It is important to contribute to a town’s beautification and keep it vibrant.” In today’s society, true leadership is often missing. I was surprised to hear that Matthew spearheaded the “Architectural Protection Plan” to ensure that historic parts of Stanstead are not being destroyed. The Town of Stanstead was one of the first towns to adopt this policy, with other towns following. This surely reflects his belief in heritage and culture – and can be seen as well as in his publications and community initiatives – so it was no surprise to learn that his Master’s Degree thesis was on Townships History.

Matthew's scope is wide and encompassing, engaging people, preserving history and taking ownership of responsibility. Along with his serious no-nonsense working side there is a fun-loving side to Mr. Farfan. Actually, he described himself as "a bit of a clown." Matthew is definitely an outdoor enthusiast. You just might catch sight of him at Owl's Head, skiing down a trail, and if you are really lucky you will come across 'Big Ears.' Big Ears is Matthew's loveable little dog, always tagging along, and no article would be complete without mentioning this wonderful little guy. Just so you know, Big Ears is definitely in charge at QAHN. He can be seen at the QAHN office in Lennoxville as the official mascot, making tours of the building and visiting other organizations. He often stops to visit the ladies in the building, taking the odd nap, and occasionally receiving a treat from Cathy Turner.

There is so much more I can say about Matthew: he does not like the language of politics, negativity, or a community in disrepair. However, one of the best points I can make is that Matthew makes things happen, good things. I once heard you may discover more in one square mile than a thousand miles; I believe that looking at your own community builds who we are, where we have been and the things we need to embrace. It is never easy to encapsulate a person in one article. I sincerely hope that I have done justice to him with this tiny glimpse into the many aspects of Matthew Farfan.

Thank you, Matthew, for taking the time to have this conversation with me, as well as for your contributions to *The Townships Sun*. You are a great example of organizations and communities working together to promote and preserve all things Townships.





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