Built in 1899, the steel mill in Sydney, Nova Scotia was the largest in the world at the time, and was a dominant fixture in the lives of many Cape Bretoners and a symbol of Canadian industrial ingenuity. For over a century, the steel plant provided a livelihood for many residents of Sydney, and the economic spinoffs from it and the work at the coke ovens helped build a diverse community, rich in culture and history.

The ownership of the steel industry in Sydney changed hands many times over the century, and in order to prop up the works during hard times, both the provincial and federal governments were forced to step in to keep the steel plant and the coke ovens operational. Despite the numerous attempts to sell the steel plant and to find new markets for its products, due to increases in the cost of production, competition from overseas and a host of other factors, the steel plant closed in 2001.

With the closing of the plant, the community of Sydney and the surrounding area were faced with the environmental legacy of over 100 years of steel production – nearly one million tonnes of contaminated soils and sediments located in the heart of Sydney.

Understandably, the idea of cleaning up this environmental legacy became the focus of attention and concern by the local community for many years. Even before the cleanup project was initiated, a great deal of formal public discussion took place on how best to remediate the sites. At that time, nearly 1,000 public meetings were held debating the merits of various solutions with more than 1,700 residents taking part.

Governments listened, and on May 12, 2004, Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia signed a $400 million Cost Share Agreement to clean up the Sydney Tar Ponds and Coke Oven sites, over a ten year period.
Our project

Using the internationally proven technology of solidification and stabilization, the former tar ponds and coke ovens sites have been transformed into a safe and environmentally friendly park area and green space for residents and visitors to enjoy.

The solidification and stabilization process involved mixing cement and binding agents into the contaminated soils and sediments to immobilize hazardous contaminants within the treated material. For over 50 years, soil, sediment and sludge containing a variety of organic and inorganic contaminants have been treated successfully all across the globe using this versatile technology.

To ensure the effectiveness of the cleanup, the project followed the highest standards of environmental regulation and a comprehensive long-term monitoring and maintenance plan is being put in place.

In addition to the positive environmental impact the cleanup project has had on the community, it has also helped build a stronger economy for the future of Cape Breton. Over the last decade, the cleanup project has injected hundreds of millions of dollars into the Cape Breton economy, and employed hundreds of Cape Bretoners.

Beyond the number of dollars spent, the project has worked hand-in-hand with the community to make this cleanup a success and has provided meaningful training and employment opportunities for local residents, including Cape Breton’s First Nations, African Nova Scotians and women in the trades and technology fields.

Our Future

The tar ponds and coke ovens are no more. The successful remediation of these sites has propelled Cape Breton towards a brighter, greener, park-filled future.

This cleanup has set a new standard for large-scale projects, our local companies are now better positioned for success, and we as a community can stand a little taller as we celebrate this accomplishment as well as the past, present and future of our community.

Located in the heart of downtown Sydney, Open Hearth Park will be a beacon for residents and tourists. The park will include walking and biking trails, linking Prince Street to Battery Point. Visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy an unleashed dog park, outdoor skating area, playground, children’s splash pad and a bike park. Open Hearth Park will also be home to Cape Breton’s first football field.

The park will feature art installations crafted by some of Nova Scotia’s most talented artists. The artwork will pay homage to the days of steelmaking, and the many men and women whose strength and dedication made the community what it is today. Relics from the steel plant will also be located throughout the park. As visitors explore the trails, they’ll be taken on trip through time as they rediscover Sydney’s rich history.
What’s in a Name?

Students turned to Cape Breton’s proud steelmaking heritage as their name for the new park taking shape in the heart of downtown Sydney.

The new park’s name, “Open Hearth Park”, was chosen during a four-week national online vote after being submitted by Rob Sinclair’s Grade 6 class at MacDonald Elementary School in Dominion.

The Sydney Park Project campaign was launched in March and invited students from across Cape Breton to submit a name for the park and explain why they chose it in an original essay, song, photo, video or work of art. There were more than 200 names and submission and more than 8,000 votes cast online.

“When we found out about the opportunity to name the park, we jumped at the chance,” said Brian Doue, principal, MacDonald Elementary School. “Mr. Sinclair and his 14 students felt very strongly about the name Open Hearth Park and how it could keep our community’s legacy of steel making alive.”

Open hearth furnaces are a type of furnace where excess carbon and other impurities are burnt to produce steel.

With more than twice as many votes as any other finalist, Cape Bretoners and friends and family across Canada selected Open Hearth Park as the name of the new park - a fitting reflection of our community’s proud heritage and a warm and welcoming sentiment to residents and visitors to our beautiful home.

The Sydney Park Project team would like to extend our gratitude to all of the students and classes from across Cape Breton who took the time to submit a park name.

The submissions not only honoured the area’s proud past, but also provided a fresh perspective on how today’s youth and tomorrow’s leaders want Cape Breton to move forward with themes of rebirth, innovation and a greener and more prosperous future.

We also would like to thank the many Cape Bretoners and friends and family across Canada who participated in selecting the park’s new name by voting online.

From all of us to you – thank you!

The other finalists included:

- **New Beginning** – Piley Poqtamkiaq Park: Submitted by the grade 9 class from We’mona’q Mi’kmaq School
- **History Heroes Park**: Submitted by the 1-3 multi-grade class from Cape Breton Christian School
- **Phoenix Park**: Submitted by Katelyn McPherson, a grade 10 student from Riverview High School
- **S.P.A.R.C.K Park (Steel Plant Area Renewal for the Community and Kids)**: Submitted by the grade primary class at Harbourview Montessori School.

The Premier of Are You From the Pier Dear?

As part of the Stronger Than Steel celebration, Are You From the Pier Dear? will be premiered on the big screen for those wishing to see this great documentary on a larger-than-life scale.

Are You From the Pier, Dear? tells the story of the cleanup and it’s impact through the voice of Canada’s finest multicultural community. It is an inspiring story of how people’s courage and determination can triumph over the most overwhelming odds.

Don’t forget to bring your lawn chairs to watch both Heart of Steel and Are You From the Pier Dear? under the stars!
Public Works and Government Services Canada, Nova Scotia Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency would like to extend their sincere thanks to all of the contractors, consultants, not-for-profit groups, community associations, committees and the people of Sydney and Cape Breton. It is because of your hard work and dedication that this has become the largest and most successful cleanup project in our great country’s history. The new Open Hearth Park will remain as an enduring testament to your efforts and as a symbol of our community’s bright future.