

Quinte Personalities

The germ hunter

By Jennifer Bell

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Glen Hudgin might be likened to a crusader against germs.

He doesn't wear a cape or a mask, but nevertheless he's on the hunt for salmonella, staphylococcus, and the myriad other food and water-borne bacteria that cause illness.

The director of inspections for the Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Health Unit knew back in high school he wanted to work to help protect the environment.

"I've always been interested in water quality, and went to Ryerson for the public health inspection course," said Hudgin, 48, who's been with the local health unit as inspections director since 1985.

Scrutinizing the preparation of food in restaurants, nursing homes, hospitals and other institutions, as well as testing water quality of wells are the bulk of a health inspector's job.

And, when people become ill and food or water is suspected as the cause, Hudgin and his team of nine inspectors go to work, testing food and water samples, and obtaining medical results from those afflicted.

But linking food or water-borne bacteria to illness is often difficult, says Hudgin.

"To safely say food poisoning is caused by a particular food product, you have to have a sample from the food, and be able to test the person. But often people think they got food poisoning from the last meal they ate, when in fact it was two or three days before. In those cases, it's almost impossible to track down the cause."

The Picton native, while at Ryerson, was placed in the county as a student public health inspector and says he "knew right away that this was what I wanted my career to be."

Hudgin spent 14 years as a public health inspector for North York before returning to the Quinte area in 1985.

Although enteric (food or water borne) illnesses can be caused by a number of things, in general, most of the health unit's investigations have revealed that public eating places are high on the list.

And that's due largely to the fact that two-thirds of the population carry organisms such as staphylococcus, which can easily be transmitted to food during improper handling.

"That's why training staff in things like proper handwashing during food preparation is so important," said Hudgin.

And although most establishments "do very well in health-related

matters, there will always be a need for public health. There's always another generation that will have to be educated."

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