

# Youth serious about water

DON CROSBY

Sun Times correspondent

Ten years after the Walkerton water crisis, many residents of the community still do not trust municipal drinking water and many people are poorly informed about where their water comes from, a youth group found in a survey.

The Walkerton-area Ripples of Change group has, over the past year, researched and collected information about local residents' perceptions of Walkerton's drinking water. They conducted informal interviews, held a water-themed movie night with discussions and interacted with the local drinking water source water protection committee. They also conducted a community walk with local high school students that focused on water related aspects in the community. The group also distributed 100 copies of a survey questionnaire.

Last week the group helped organize a day-long career fair for high school students across Grey-Bruce at Walkerton District Secondary School.

Residents are passionate about water issues, but a significant group, including youth, are virtually uninformed about protection, treatment processes or even the sources of Walkerton's drinking water, the group found. Almost all survey respondents relayed the need for more education about protecting drinking water.

Of those surveyed, 14% believe bottled water is a safer choice than tap water and 14% don't know which is safer. Residents feel as though they should be able to strongly trust tap water but still, 10 years after the Walkerton water crisis, many do not.

"We are relying on chlorine



Supplied photo

From left are Dagna Pielaszkiwicz of the Toronto group Youth 4 Water; Kalena Metcalfe, Walkerton; Barry Randall, Walkerton; Taylor Reid, Walkerton; Braden Weltz, Walkerton; Katie Schaeffer, Walkerton; Ryan Hreljac, founder of Ryan's Well Foundation; Ameera McIntosh, Youth 4 Water; Shire Brandi, Youth 4 Water; Jae Hong Kim, Youth 4 Water.

and technology to make the water safe but that's not source water protection. When we ask people in town where their water comes from, especially the kids they say it comes from the tap... or before that a water tower and before that a water treatment system. It actually comes from the ground," said Barry Randall one of the group's coordinators.

"What people don't trust is the water so we have to spend millions and millions of dollars cleaning the water that we have actually have polluted with our sewage."

One Walkerton resident reported in the survey the need for residents to be better educated on the impact of what they put down their drains, or throw out the back door has on their water sources.

Those surveyed identified nitrates, E. coli, chlorine and coliform as possible water contaminants. Landfill runoff, leaching

from storage tanks and agricultural runoff were considered to be the top three sources of these contaminants.

Although residents are aware of these contaminants, there is little knowledge of how to deal with the issue.

Ripples of Change is one of five youth advisory committees that make up Ripple Effect Ontario. It was launched in March 2009 by the United Nations Association in Canada to engage youth in water focused initiatives under a national umbrella.

"Our group was created as a result of the Clean Water Act and gives area youth a voice for this important environmental topic which has directly affected the Walkerton community and a good part of the western world through the Walkerton water tragedy of 2000," said Braden Weltz, a spokesperson for the Walkerton group.

Members of the group participated in developing the Youth Statement on Conserving and Protecting Ontario Water — an eight-point declaration that highlights the vision of Ontario youth in protecting water as an essential resource. It was presented to members of the provincial cabinet and a copy was given to Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Weltz was six years old when the Walkerton water crisis hit and although he wasn't affected by it directly, he recalls that a neighbour's child was very sick.

The experience helped direct his interest to the issues surrounding water.

"Maybe not consciously but subconsciously I definitely thought it was important, especially since we are youth from Walkerton and to especially get our voice out on water issues," said Weltz.

## Two Paisley firefighters retire

Two retiring members of the Paisley and District Fire Department were recognized for their years of service at an Arran Elderslie council meeting last Monday.

Dave Cormack has served 38 years and Wayne Littlejohn has been a volunteer firefighter for 22 years.

Both were praised by council for their combined 60 years of service and presented with gifts of appreciation by mayor Ron Oswald.

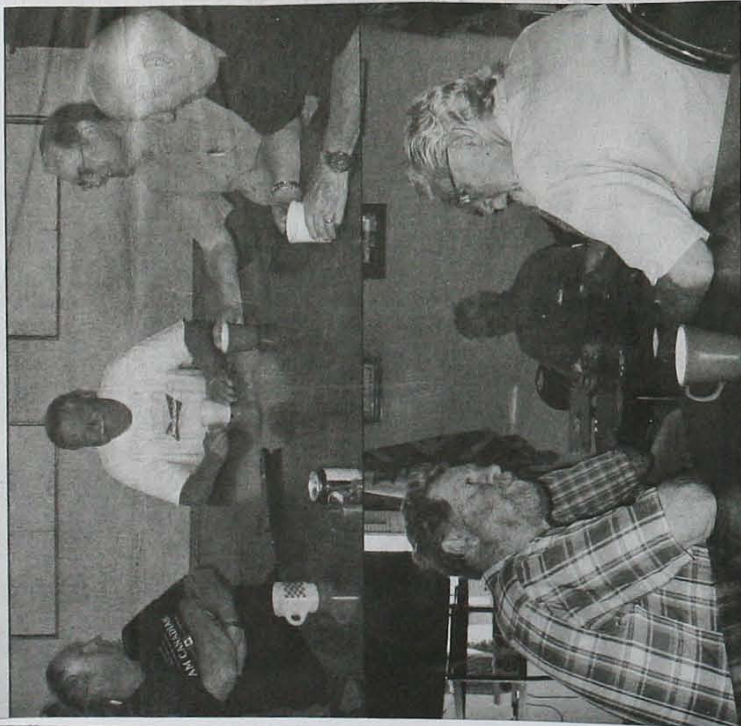
Tuesday, August 14, 2012



## Flags mark town's history

The Port Elgin Library looks even nicer now that new flags line its north wall. Printed with photographs from the 1900's, the flags mark significant moments in the community's history. The flags display teams, businesses and special assets of the town such as Port Elgin hockey, the brass band, vacationing spots like Gobles Grove and Kings Bus Line.

## Coffee Club for Men



Discussing important issues of the day (top photo, L to R) Gord Becker, Brian Smith, Brian Beech, & Jim Hood. In lower photo are Jack Riley and Bill Karcher.