

Corby closure Quinte's latest cruel blow

Officials dismayed as 170 workers lose jobs

By Henry Bury
The Intelligencer

A "black day in Belleville and the Quinte area".

That's how civic officials describe Thursday's announcement by Corby Distilleries to close its doors in September, throwing 170 people out of work.

Thurlow Township's Deputy Reeve Gerry Masterson said he's "quite upset" with the Corbyville plant's decision to shut down after a 132-year association with the township.

"I don't feel very good about the fact that 170 people are being let go in these tough economic times. The company has been a vital part of our township and pretty soon there will be a big void to fill", Masterson said.

The township, he acknowledged, is also concerned with the loss of corporate taxation once Corby closes later this year.

Corby has been paying more than \$500,000 in corporate taxes annually to Thurlow for the past several years "and now we're going to lose all that assessment."

Added Masterson: "We'll be in a real jam losing all that tax revenue. I don't know where the township will be able to pick up that \$500,000."

All the township can now do,

Masterson said, is "hope and pray" another firm will take over the Corby plant next fall.

"Other than that, there's not much the township can do," Masterson said.

Belleville Mayor George Zegouras said Corby announcement is "shocking and devastating to me and the city as a whole."

"Corby has its roots in Belleville.

Henry Corby and his family were from Belleville and the Corby name is associated

with the city library and a parkette. The company has given a lot to the community but today's announcement puts an end to all that," the mayor said.

Zegouras said the plant shutdown is a devastating economic blow to the city and Quinte area — another in a series of plant closings or workforce reductions announced over the past few weeks. These include the 130 layoffs at Northern Telecom, 80 at

Westwood Pharmaceutical, as well as dozens more for the upcoming closing of Miracle Food

Mart at the Quinte Mall and GTL Transport.

"The payroll of 170 people at Corby's easily approaches millions of dollars, as well as the economic spinoff generated by Corby. That will now go out of our community...the city will hurt as will the entire Quinte area."

While accepting the company's decision, Zegouras said he blames federal and provincial governments for imposing excessive taxes on alcohol and tobacco.

"Drinkers and smokers shouldn't carry the full load for taxes."

Zegouras hopes he's seen the end of plant closings.

He maintained the positive side is the impending opening of the huge Sears catalogue distribution centre and the Coca Cola fruit juice production plant. Both firms will collectively employ 2,000 people.

"Given these two plants, certainly the prospects are very much improving."

Zegouras said he hopes Corby workers, as well as those from other affected plantings closings, will be "prime candidates" for positions with Sears and Coca Cola.

"The city will do all we can to assist employees get new jobs in the community," promised Zegouras.



George Zegouras



The Corby plant as it looked in 1989; the future is a question mark.

'There were tears in some eyes'

Workers shocked by closure

By Jack Evans
The Intelligencer

CORBYVILLE — "There were tears in some eyes."

That's how a Corby Distilleries union president Lorne Meeks of Local 96, Distillery Workers' Union described reaction to the surprise announcement at a staff meeting Thursday that the plant would close.

He added that many employees are in "a state of shock" and predicted that "some houses and cars will be going on the market."

He said he recognizes the company's predicament in terms of pressures the industry in general has been under, but the announcement that the entire plant will shut down Sept. 30 still came as "a complete surprise."

Meeks was at a meeting in Toronto recently involving the industry, including Corby president Donald MacMartin "and there was no inkling of a possible shut-down."

Meeks said most union members believe company officials are sincere in regretting the plant's

closure and in its efforts to provide both a reasonable severance package and efforts to help find other employment. "But we still hope to have a meeting with the company to discuss the severance package further," he said.

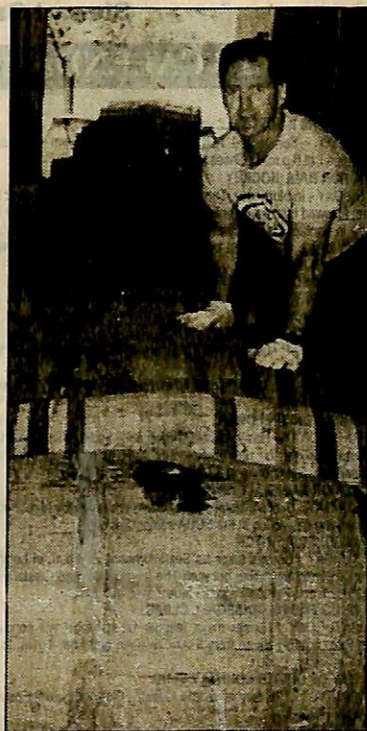
He expects the move will impact severely on a large number of the hourly-rated employees, most of whom have five to 25 years of service and therefore not eligible for retirement. He himself has 29 years.

He also said that at least some are second-generation workers at the plant.

A former employee, Keith Baldwin of 94 Sidney St., Belleville, said he retired several years ago and "considering the taxes they've placed on alcohol, I'm surprised the plant made it to this point."

Following the announcement and a question period Thursday morning, all workers were given the rest of the day off, "probably to get used to the shock" speculated Meeks. But normal work resumes today and until the plant shuts down, line by line.

Meeks also commented that the modern trend by "big outfits" such as the corporate giant Corby is now a part of, is to "take the short way around."



Rolling out the barrel

Corby closure ends chapter a long and colorful history

The shutdown of Corby Distilleries closes a long and colorful chapter in Quinte's corporate history.

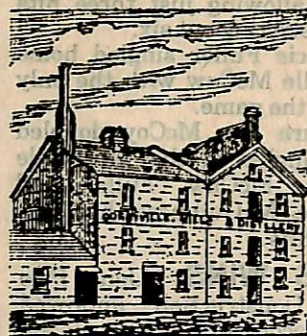
The Corby complex, nestled on the Moira River's banks in Thurlow Township, can trace its roots to 1859 — and prior to that to 1812 as a mill, making it easily one of the region's oldest industries.

Indeed, operating before Confederation, the distillery had grown in tandem with the region's evolution, its products — like Wiser's Deluxe — carving themselves a substantial niche in the North American spirits market.

In 1855, Henry Corby Sr., already a prominent businessman, purchased a grist mill at Hayden's Corners from Salyer and Robert Reed. Quickly, Corby — destined to become Belleville's mayor and member of the provincial legislature — added a distillery. In

1881, the senior Corby turned the reigns over to his son, Henry Jr. Hayden's Corner was renamed Corbyville in his honor.

The distillery flourished under the junior Corby, who continued his father's tradition of commitment to community. The family's lasting legacy manifests itself in Corby Library in downtown Belleville and the colorful Corby Park rose garden.



First mill