

The Namibia connection: Cramahe

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On the job the Canadian team of four disseminated their knowledge of the issues, working with staff and politicians. One aim was to improve financial management practices and move them toward computerization. Their municipal staff members are highly educated, often with masters degrees from foreign universities, but they lack the practical skills that municipal employees in Ontario have.

They have great plans but haven't considered their ability to achieve them. Mr. Dewing says comparing their approach to ours is like comparing checkers to chess. They look at it move by move. We like to see the puzzle from beginning to end. People in their culture also seem to be less results-oriented than we are. Regardless, both groups have the understanding that they are working to make the city a better place. A better-run city will better help its residents.

Management of municipal services and planning for replacement were also high on the agenda. Right now modular planning makes the most sense.

On this trip he met with water supply officials, tribal leaders and bankers as well as municipal and elected officials as he tried to assess the impact of the city's strategic plan.

More toilets needed

He noted that people living there had minimal expectations.

Asked what the biggest problem was in the community, a councillor responded, "not enough public toilets".

Mr. Dewing's first reaction was to think that the man was misinformed. But not when his thoughts had been explained.

The thousands squatting in the city, which is very flat, have no facilities. When they need to relieve themselves they do. Their animals roam as well. In rainy spring season all that waste sits in cesspools on the ground spreading disease. People get sick and have insufficient medical facilities. The current solution being tried is communal dry latrines. There is no capacity left in the city's sewage treatment plants.

Hospitals consist of rows of beds where patients lie in sweltering heat as flies circulate overhead. The sanitation that we know is lacking. Yet security at these institutions is stringent.

At the administrative level there is more formality than he is accustomed to here. People clap when you have said a few words. There is no heated debate or derogatory comments, or even raised voices. It is a black culture founded on respect.

Community development is one of the models of service promoted by FCM. In that context Mr. Dewing visited the city's Rotary club where he gave them a Colborne Rotary banner. A banner from the host club is being sent on to the Colborne club.

A beautiful country

There are two reasons for returning to Namibia. It is a beautiful country, and he is doing some good. If it weren't for his family commitments he admits he would stay longer and do more.

Mr. Dewing admits that he thrives in situations where there are issues to be dealt with. That's one reason why he moved to Colborne. He didn't want to move to a community where he would become a caretaker.

He enjoys advising council on its administrative and operational matters. He sees himself as part of the process of informed decision making. Once he has presented the alternatives the experience of the culture comes into play through the decisions of council.

As an administrator he can give the solution that is technically correct, but it may not be in the best interest of the community.

Will he return?

The question of going back in May is open right now, but it looks doubtful.

He gets one month a year vacation in his three-year contract with Cramahe. He'd like to spend more time with his family. And in the spring he plans to be looking for more long-term accommodation in the area for him and Roxanne.

On the other hand he has "grown into this Namibia thing". And he loves the travel in exotic places. His eyes light up when he talks of fixing the fan belt in a game park where leaving the car was discouraged because of lions. Or driving along a road with a herd of 14 elephants walking along beside the car.

This time they got to watch the elephants lumber by. Last trip a nearby elephant charged, forcing them into a quick retreat.

On this trip they didn't have the four-by-four usually hired for the trip. That vehicle gave them the freedom to explore the paths and back roads of the country.

One of those trips led him to the highest sand dune in the world. It was on that excursion that his room was ransacked by baboons looking for food.

When his party returned to their rooms they found that everything had been gone through. Everything was opened in the search for edibles.

Another drive took him to a traditional village where he was welcomed. At one place a woman cured clay pots on fires fueled by cow dung.

One day they drove by a pride of four lions lying by the side of the road.

He and his companions drove nine hours once without seeing another vehicle.

In hilly areas some roads are signed prohibiting trucks and buses. The grade on one was 25 per cent.

The greatest danger facing a traveller is a flat tire. It's too hot at 42 degrees Celsius to be standing around.

He encountered his worst experience shortly after arriving. He and his associates joined a 60th birthday in the adjacent room and ate some traditional chicken. For two days he couldn't move or drive.

Donkeys, cows, warthogs and goats create problems for drivers who generally travel the main roads at 140 km/hr. The animals graze along the side of the road and sometimes step out onto the roadway. For that reason, most people don't drive at night.

A man who loves travel

He's been told by people there that he has seen more of the country than they have.

This is not his first travel experience. He has been to Mexico numerous times, spending a month at a time, travelling its length and breadth, often on local buses. That's given him the common sense that he uses to keep him safe in Namibia. On one occasion he drove to Mexico from Canada to see if it was feasible. He hopes one day to retire there. The Caribbean and Venezuela have also been on his destination list.

Cramahe was his choice

In the meantime he plans to

continue in Cramahe. He could have taken a position with more pay or responsibility. At one time he managed a staff of close to 200. And he could have taken any one of many positions available now because of the retiring phalanx of baby boomers. He finds the quality of life a more important factor at this point in his life. He already has the best five years completed for calculation of his pension.

Working in Cramahe gives him the opportunity to work hands on and see projects to completion. He's working harder but getting more job satisfaction seeing the impact of his efforts. The staff here is great, all working to get the job done.

And his work here has benefited from his work in Africa. Faced with a situation where the sewage plant was at capacity he looked to Ontario and learned of the small-bore technology that Cramahe is planning to use to service the industrial park.

He was pleased that his work in Africa was supported by council. He sees that it is a feather in their caps that a member of their staff is involved in this work. It also makes him a better employee with more skills to bring to the office each day.