

"Little we can do" about water taking from private property: Coun. Johnston

COBORG CHRONICLE

BY MANDY MARTIN
STAFF WRITER

OCT 3/02

There's nothing the provincial government can do to restrict or monitor a private water-taking operation from a vacant property on Ventress Road in Cramahe Township.

Property owners, Mark and Mary Jo Collins of Brighton, operate a small business, Brighton Springs. They extracting 200 18-litre bottles of water (3,600 litres total) per day from the 31-acre Lot 17, Conc. 2 former orchard property on Ventress Road.

Provincial government regulations require official Permit To Take Water for amounts of 50,000 litres per day or more. Brighton Springs falls well below that level with a maximum 3,600 litres per day.

"We've run our business for eight years," Mrs. Collins said Tuesday. "The first seven years, we drew water from leased property in Brighton Township. The owner decided to get into the business. We began drawing water from the property we purchased last April. We bottle the water in the Brighton Industrial Park. We welcome anyone to come by and see our operation and review our records"

When Mr. Collins lost his job nine years ago, the Collins investigated options.

"Someone approached us about selling water from a property where water had been drawn for sale years ago, so we went into it," Mrs. Collins relates. "We both started

it (the business) part time and are now full time. We don't have any salespeople. We're low key and small. We're not doing anything illegal," Mrs. Collins assures.

Over the years, they have built a regular clientele for their bottled water. The bulk of product is in 18-litre jugs of water cooler size.

"We go as far as Cobourg, Campbellford, Trenton and Belleville and as far as Napanee," Mrs. Collins says. "We're a small business and want to stay that way."

The water drawn from the Ventress Road property qualifies as natural spring water because the dissolved salts it contains are less than 500 parts per million.

"With respect to municipal jurisdiction on this matter, please note that municipal control zoning could, therefore, eliminate such commercial ventures through zoning restriction such as incompatible use," Minister of Environment and Energy Chris Stockwell wrote in an August 7, 2002 letter. The matter had been referred to the provincial Minister by Northumberland MPP Dr. Doug Galt.

However, existing Cramahe Township zoning regulations permit the Ventress Road water-taking operation because it is not a commercial enterprise. Further, even if it was deemed to be so, it would be termed a home-based business because the property owners are operating the venture without on-site employees or buildings.

"Water extraction is self-regulated," Ms. Haferkorn outlined to the Cramahe Economic Council (CEC) September 19. "That means it is the property owner who records how much water is taken out and sold elsewhere."

"There is very little we can do providing the owners are extracting less than 50,000 litres a day," Cramahe Councillor and CEC member Mike Johnston said.

"In essence, it's a commercial venture in a rural zone, is that what you're saying?" CEC member Clare Musselman asked.

"There's nothing wrong with bringing to our attention, but I'm just not sure what we can do," Mr. Johnston continued.

"It's the same thing as with the spreading of biosolids," Cramahe Deputy reeve and CEC member Lee Dekeyser noted. "You have to take it up with the Ministry of Environment."

"Other than out sympathy, I'm not sure what we can do," CEC member Marc Coombs empathized.

"My overall concern is that I can foresee we're going to have more years of drought," Ms. Haferkorn said. Further, "what is preventing others who are like-minded from purchasing properties for sale in Cramahe" to extract water for sale, she asked. If water-taking is self-regulated, what guarantees are there the regulations are actually being followed. Further, there is no underground mapping that delineates where the sources of water are located and in what amounts they exist now.

"There has been considerable money and recommendations regarding the whole watershed," Mr. Johnston noted, referring to a watershed and well monitoring studies now underway.