

What we have lost with no gain in sight

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It was a time for goodbyes on June 27 as the Rotary Hall staff catered their last function. It was fitting that, in their last month, the foursome — three of whom are part-timers — saw 1,900 visitors, a thousand of them in the final busy week.

Despite the fact the staff was leaving, every person to enter the Rotary Room or Keeler Centre pad in that difficult final month was welcomed with a smile.

Usually when a final day is reached, there is a sense of closure. Not this time. The community still begs the reasoning behind the closure of township-operated catering in what has become the Cramahe Community Centre. Council has refused to listen to the eloquent requests of its taxpayers, leaving everyone to speculate.

What have we gained?

Using the accounting methods employed by Cramahe, the Rotary Hall will lose less money in 2008 than it did in 2007. The base cost for the room sitting empty is about \$28,000. Even if the cost of the new hall manager/bar-tender is included in the cost, it will be less than council said we lost last year using figures presented by Treasurer Mora Chatterson.

User groups who get the room free will gain the bar receipts at the municipally owned facility, as will those who pay a rental charge.

What will we lose?

If council goes ahead with the proposals made in April, we lose the bar and catering revenues. More importantly, because council appears to lack the vision to see the broader concept of a community centre, we lose one of our most ardent promoters.

It is not an overstatement to suggest that Donna Rusaw has become the heart and soul of the Rotary Hall during her tenure with the township. She took her job description and ran with it, exploring opportunities, fostering dreams, building a welcoming environment and staffing it with local residents. She has become more than a catering and special events manager. She has made the Rotary Hall a centre of which we can all be proud. She has built bridges with other communities and organizations, drawing visitors from across the area and across the province. She made the Keeler Centre THE place to entertain in this township. Largely through the reputation which has grown with her efforts, Cramahe has boasted a venue



BOB OWEN / SUN MEDIA

The staff of the Rotary Hall took time for one last photo on June 27 before they finally cleaned up and went home. The women wanted to take the opportunity to express their thanks for the support they had received from the community. From left are Jean McCrory, Donna Rusaw, Mandy Clarey and Dora Cheng.

which has drawn accolades from near and far.

Because council cannot see the broader picture and hid behind an arbitrary allocation of 70 per cent of Ms. Rusaw's salary to catering, the hall's operational costs are inflated. All that was needed was an administrative adjustment by council to reflect the much broader service Ms. Rusaw provided.

This was the council that received an overwhelming mandate based on promises to consult, listen and respond before it acted. And so it did for the first year of its tenure.

An argument that a service provided by the township should be cut because it costs is specious. Community services are not expected to make money, the roads department is not expected to make money. If Mrs. Rusaw's salary had been accurately portrayed, we would see that the catering business in the township does make money — the community service which filled the bulk of her time did not. One quick look at the bookings in June will attest to that.

Along with the one catered wedding, the Colborne Masons' 150th anniversary gala and a bus tour, the catering staff made nine Meals on Wheels, hosted three weekly Rotary dinners and an Optimist's dinner, were present for two Probus meetings, a breakfast, a CD release party for a local artist, two 80th birthday parties, four graduations, a Diner's Club meeting, and assisted with the growing Caribbana celebration and the end-of-year ENSS teacher's luncheon.

We have lost the ongoing and successful promotion provided by a woman who lives among us and who wears her Cramahe heart on her sleeve. Ms. Rusaw has been our greatest ambassador in the past few years, bar none.

For five years she has served with Community Policing acting as its treasurer, for six years she has been on the board of the Apple Blossom Tyme Festival, and in her second year as chair saw it make over \$5,000. She has fundraised for Community Care to help keep down the cost to seniors of the meals she creates in the Meals on Wheels program. For four years she has served as president of the Union Cemetery Board. The Police Services Board and the South Cramahe Reunion Committee have both benefited from her active work. On a broader scale, she has worked on the annual Northumberland United Way campaign in Cramahe.

With the need to find work and re-focus her career, Ms. Rusaw has had to give up some of those volunteer efforts, and the organizations will miss her. I

What lies ahead? Even our council appears not to know as it attempts to lurch forward and begin consultations on the future of the Keeler Centre.

The ill-begotten decision to end township-operated catering has cost us all — none more than Mrs. Rusaw who we have grown to value and respect for her proud contribution and service to our community. She has graciously borne the private pain in a highly public position and has been pilloried for caring too much, for rising above the crowd and establishing a larger persona — for doing more for the community than was expected. It has happened before, and sadly, now it has happened again.

As one observer put it last week, "Why is it that whenever we create something special in Cramahe, we have to destroy it?"

Perhaps our councillors know.