

# Taking action

## Castleton parents want first-class education — including gym — for kids

By Eileen Argyris

Castleton people are tired of being treated as second-rate.

They are fed-up with waiting for the Northumberland-Clarington Board of Education to make good on its promise to build a gymnasium for Castleton Public School, and they are taking action.

They are organizing to protest their "unequal treatment" to the board, and to the Queen's Park, as well, and the council of the Township of Cramahe is behind them.

Mae Dingwall of Castleton, part of the "loosely formed" Build-a-Gym Committee, says the board promised parents and taxpayers 10 years ago that a gym would be added to the 65-year old school property no later than 1992.

But, 1992 came and went, and there was no sign of a gym in Castleton's future.

Now, to add insult to injury, the board has suggested that the township contribute about \$300,000 to the estimated \$630,000 cost of adding a free-standing gym and community meeting room to the school property.

### COMMUNITY TO RAISE FUNDS

The board has suggested that federal-provincial infrastructure grant money be used by the township and by the board to construct the building, which would be open for use by the community, when not being used by the school.

The Castleton Sports Club, of which Mrs. Dingwall is also a member, was approached to spearhead a fundraising drive that would augment the \$60,000 that the board suggested the township council commit.

That would leave over half a million dollars to be raised in the tiny hamlet of Castleton, presumably by the sports club and/or interested parent groups.

The parents say this is unfair. They point out that all other elementary schools in the board are equipped with gyms, paid for wholly by the board, and that they are paying over 62 cents on their property tax dollar to the public school board, now.

"The board can have all our support — they already have our money!" Mrs. Dingwall wrote in a letter to the editor published in last week's *Colborne Chronicle*.

### DISADVANTAGED

Last week at a meeting of Cramahe council, two more parents added their voices to the protest.

Dan and Linda Marshman of Castleton pointed out in a letter that students of Castleton Public School are disadvantaged when they reach high school because they have not had the same opportunities to play indoor sports as students from other schools across the board.

Mrs. Marshman, who was a student at Castleton Public School, said parents of her generation were "patient" waiting for the board to rectify the unequal situation.

"We cannot afford to be patient as our parents were," she now believes.

Council agrees with her. Deputy Reeve George Blyth pointed out that the small, independent school boards turned over Castleton Public School to the amalgamated school boards "at no cost."

In other words, unlike newer schools, the board did not have to pay for the construction of a school in Castleton.

Councillor Lee Dekeyser commented, "I feel for these people; what can we do?" Mrs. Dingwall says she has made independent inquiries of building contractors to see if the board's estimate of approximately \$630,000 for the construction of a free-standing 270-square-metre gym with a stage, washrooms and change rooms, foyer and mechanical room and community kitchen, is realistic.

### GOLD-PLATED NETS

She says contractors have asked her whether the board plans to coat the basketball nets in solid gold, in other words, the job should be able to be done for much less money.

Mrs. Dingwall believes, from her research, that \$400,000 would be a much more realistic estimate.

"For school boards," she points out, "only 73 cents must be raised for each dollar from the federal and provincial governments," under the infrastructure grant program.

She adds, the direct cost to the board of erecting a \$400,000 building in Castleton would therefore be only \$97,320.

"That's less than the cost of their name change!" she notes, with irony.

Last year the school

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## Gym worth fighting for

board changed its name from Northumberland and Newcastle to the Northumberland-Clarington Board of Education, to accommodate a name change by the regional municipality of Newcastle to Clarington. Logos, letterheads, signage on all school board property had to be changed, not without cost.

### \$1 MILLION A YEAR

Over one million dollars flows out of Cramahe each year for public education, Mrs. Dingwall points out. That contribution by taxpayers is supposed to guarantee all children in the board's jurisdiction an equal education, but it doesn't.

Mrs. Dingwall believes that other areas will attract growth and industry because their schools offer a "more complete" education than Castleton can provide.

### COBOURG GETS BETTER FACILITIES

She says the new Terry Fox School in Cobourg is a case in point. Mrs. Dingwall toured the school in May and found that "the facilities are enviable, a testament to modern architecture and design."

Why, she wonders, is the board's treatment of students so different between Cobourg and Castleton?

She is aware that the school board has stated that Castleton Public School could use a \$2.6 million upgrade, and she says she believes that such a large sum could probably be utilized at the school, built in 1929.

### PARENTS FEAR THREAT OF CLOSURE

She says she is sure that parents have not made more noise about the lack of a gym because they fear the school board will make another attempt to close the school.

The school board did

make such an attempt in 1981. But a well-organized community protest, furnishing proof that the school population (then around 100) was going to increase, saved the school.

Today the school's enrollment is around 190, necessitating the use of several portable classrooms.

The township deputy reeve, George Blyth, a former member of the public school board, called the board's offer to split the cost of a new gym, "an insult to our intelligence," at Cramahe's council meeting last week.

"We (Cramahe taxpayers) have helped to pay for every structure in the board's jurisdiction," he pointed out angrily.

The township council, with 150 miles of secondary roads to maintain, has already allocated all its grant through the federal-provincial infrastructure program elsewhere.

Mr. Blyth said he hoped the school board would not use council's failure to contribute money to the project as an excuse not to

proceed with a gym at Castleton.

"They're asking us to pay double," Councillor Dekeyser agreed.

Councillor Jim Williams, who is employed as a teacher by the public school board, proposed a motion that the council

send a copy of Mr. and Mrs. Marshman's letter (see page 4 of this week's *Chronicle*) to the school board "saying we (council) support their request."

"The board should supply a gym at board expense," said Mr. Williams.

Councillor Lee Dekeyser seconded Mr. Williams' motion, adding that copies of the letter and the motion should also be sent to the Ministry of Education at Queen's Park, and to Northumberland's members of provincial and fed-

eral parliament, Joan Fawcett and Christine Stewart.

Members of the Build-A-Gym Committee are the following: Mae Dingwall, Mario and Lisa Meekes, Kevin and Carol Stout, Mary Kristensen, all of Castleton.

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