

Profiles

with Jennifer Barr



Changing countries in mid-stream is not easy. It can be even harder for an impressionable teen who doesn't speak the language.

Not so for Monika Cook, who came straight to Acton from Germany at the age of 14.

Excited and enthusiastic, Monika was not only thrilled to start a new life, but she was coming to a new family having been adopted by the Oelrich family of Mowbray Place. She even had a new brother, Harry 13, who would help take the place of a sister left in Germany.

Monika is best known around town as owner of the Profile Beauty Salon in Acton Mews. A lively attractive woman who exudes optimism like good perfume. She's come a long way from a difficult childhood in Frankfurt.

Raised in Hessen near Frankfurt, Monika was born in southern Germany, and returned there for holidays. She remembers those days as horse-and-cart quaint-country-village times.

However, coming from busy industrial Frankfurt to the rural town of Acton was quite a shock.

"I was so excited about coming," she recalls. "Canada was the land of milk and honey. I visualized cowboys and Indians but my first sight of Toronto was China Town—and I'd never seen a Chinese person before!"

The week long boat trip to Canada in 1962 was made accompanied by her grandparents. Monika enjoyed the trip from Bremen to England and then Ireland but comments on the bad crossing from England to Ireland. "There was a hell of a lot of bad weather there for June."

"I remember Newfoundland and stopping at Halifax for immigration. The St. Lawrence reminded me of the Rhine."

A train journey from Montreal to Toronto gave Monika a good look at the "land of milk and honey."

She had two months of summer to learn English before entering grade 8 in Acton. In Germany she had finished her schooling and was ready to enter apprenticeship for hairdressing. However, she had to attend school here until she was 16 and was delighted to be able to learn English and become a Canadian teen.

"I was impressionable and got into trouble wanting to wear makeup and tight jeans. But I learned the language and got perfect in my second spelling test," she says proudly.

The space and quiet of Acton scared Monika at first after the crowds of Frankfurt.

"I felt like I was dropped off in nowhere."

Within days all her new brother's chums had come to look her over. New friends popped out of the wood work and Monika forgot to feel strange.

"Coming to Canada was the best thing I ever did," she claims. She returned to Germany twice, first for a visit in 1967 and second as a backpacking young adult in the early 70s. At that time she stayed and worked in Frankfurt for six months before travelling to England to work for the rest of the year.

With changed values, and a dose of maturity Monika came home to settle to marriage and a career with no regrets.

It makes her angry when Canadians complain about hardships and deprivation, remembering her awe at the food waste practiced in this country compared to Europe where every crumb was eaten.

She couldn't get over having meat every day in Canada.

Despite current housing difficulties, Monika feels Canadians still have it easy.

"Most people never own their own home in Europe, they live in row housing and rent. There are very few single dwellings."

The apathy about renting in Canada makes her angry and she is appalled by what she considers the prevalent attitude of "why bother fixing it up, we're only renting." "They still have to live there," she says indignantly.

Monika is very proud of her Canadian citizenship and states this is still one of the best countries in the world to live in. "If people don't believe that, they should go to other countries and see for themselves," she adds.

"Most Europeans still agree this is the land of plenty."

Two surprise goodbye gestures, a presentation, three lively speeches and a report on the downtown development studies kept Acton merchants and interested citizens glued to their seats Monday evening during the annual general meeting of the Acton BIA.

Departing secretary Janet Fleming was the recipient of a gray suede jacket from the Olde Hide House, in appreciation for all her work on the BIA. She was also presented with red roses.

Two Planner Mario Venditti was also wished a fond farewell as BIA members presented his wife Jackie with red roses too. Mario is pursuing greener pastures with another municipality.

Ted Tyler was presented with a plaque for his contributions "above and beyond the call of duty" in his efforts for Acton and downtown Acton.

Treasurer Jack Melnen gave his year-end report, giving a complete breakdown of all expenditures and revenues.

Community spirit was the theme of a speech by Ted Tyler who was a guest speaker.

Tyler, chairman of Actario, explained that the people at the dinner meeting at the legion were the people who already had community spirit, or they would have been at home instead of at the meeting.

"Actario is community spirit," he said. "You don't have to live in Acton for 35 years," Tyler said. "To be an Actonian." He explained if a person gets involved they are an Actonian.

"You can tell the people and businesses with community spirit," local businessman said.

Merchants must advertise their products as well as themselves. Tyler suggested various advertising methods in the Free Press the merchants could collectively implement.

Tyler explained that it was the local merchants who could be "blamed" for the changes in the local newspaper, and cried out "how about letting them know about an event before, instead of after." He decried the merchants for just complaining and not being willing to do anything about it.

Actario stands for all the good things in this town, Tyler said. Downtown washrooms, and meeting rooms for the young and the old could be common place if Actario could achieve its goals of saving the town-hall.

"The town hall is the very roots of our heritage. Imagine if there was no town hall!" Tyler pointed out the merchants are the backbone of the community.

He noted there were about 50 people at the meeting. If 50 people supported the Sabres, even if just by going out and watching a game, the difference would be tremendous. If 50 people purchased a quilt draw ticket, they would help the organization involved. If the 50 people purchased an Actario ticket, they would be helping the entire town. The BIA sold 16 Actario tickets last year, this year they have sold five so far. If everyone in this room bought a ticket, it would push us over the top.

"Get the spirit," Tyler urged, "it will rub off on other people."

"We can be an Elmira, an Elora, or a Sparks Street in Ottawa. We can be anything we want to be."

Tyler then showed a humorous film which



Monika Cook

Local winner at Royal Fair

An RR 4 Acton resident has taken top honors at the Royal Winter Fair.

Jack Pemberton received two firsts in the Green Meadow Four In Hand competition on Friday and Saturday, classes 25 and 28, coaching classes.

For more Royal Winter Fair results see next week's paper.

Boy suffers minor injuries

A seven-year-old Acton boy suffered minor injuries after being hit by a van when he fell crossing the road. Rodney Leech, Roseford Terrace, was taken to Guelph Hospital after the Saturday afternoon accident at the Given Road and Third Line. Rodney was crossing the road and fell as a van came around the curve. The driver braked, but Rodney fell again. The driver tried to swerve, but ran over the boy's foot.

Janet Fleming, Mario Venditti leave posts

Actario, townhall are our community spirit Ted Tyler tells Acton BIA annual meeting

can be applied to anyone in any situation if they are unprepared.

Chip Petrillo, chairman of the Leathertown Association, was the second guest speaker.

He spoke briefly on the past history of Leathertown, but emphasized the future plans of the organization.

He mentioned next Thursday evening's Wintario draw, and the Leathertown Days weekend May 14, 15, and 16 with a Monte Carlo Night, a Leathertown Market, a high school reunion, a large church service, baseball games and fireworks. Petrillo discussed a planned fashion show in an attempt to raise funds.

Four signs welcoming motorists to Acton, with the Leathertown logo, to be erected at the four entrances into town have been pointed and soon will go up.

Leathertown has been involved in a study of the facades of downtowns prepared for possible implementation in the future, to hopefully "package" the town to draw people in.

Many people have complained the tourist trade Leathertown hopes to pull in will not affect their business. Petrillo noted ways in which it could be made to help them. He suggested clothing stores could carry Leathertown T-Shirts, and other stores could sell souvenirs. "It will benefit all," he said.

"We'd like to see owners of the existing businesses in other towns come into town also."

The study of the history of Acton compiled by three university students this past summer is going to be fed into a work processor at the region, Petrillo said which will help in the formation of a brochure and hopefully a book.

Leathertown would also like to see about acquiring the Old Stone School, now being used as the Catholic School until their new school is built. Petrillo noted it would make an excellent museum.

The sole goal of Leathertown, Petrillo said, is to get people enthused again, to help in the unification of Acton.

Petrillo told the merchants the Hide House is the largest manufactured leather outlet in Canada, and one of the largest in North America. Acton and Leathertown are becoming known far and wide.

Acton's strength is its people, Petrillo emphasized. The mosquito bomber in World War II was named after this town because the people here raised more money per capita for war bonds than any place in Canada.

Acton is within 50 miles of five million people, he said. Those five million people need a place to go on weekends, and more and more people cannot afford to go north for a break. Instead they will be heading somewhere closer to home—Acton.

"Leathertown is super," he said. "It is healthy, it is alive and it is well."

Paul Nielsen was the third guest speaker, telling the merchants about the recently completed downtown development study.

He noted that this was an occasion when Halton Hills really worked, and equal attention was given to both Acton and Georgetown's business areas. He is looking forward to the immediate implementation of some of the suggestions in the consultants' report, and hopes the municipal council adopts the report.

Nielsen pointed out the possibilities of more off-

street parking as well as a small parkette downtown, parking on only one side of the street, and street scaping will revitalize downtown.

Nielsen introduced town planner Mario Venditti who said it will take years to fully implement the plans. He explained there have been a lot of rocky roads between the town and the BIAs, but this study went smoothly.

He explained town staff hopes the adoption of the policy can be done before the end of December by the Halton Hills councillors.

"If the goals are worth pursuing, then the BIAs should work together to try and achieve these goals."

BIA chairman Ed Wood made the closing remarks. He noted Leathertown is giving the town the image it requires. He also said he hoped the downtown study did not sit on a shelf gathering dust.



Acton BIA made three presentations at their annual general meeting Monday evening at the Legion. Left to right, Ted Tyler received a plaque for his contributions to Acton and downtown Acton; Janet Fleming received a grey suede jacket and roses as outgoing BIA secretary; and Jackie Venditti received red roses for all the work her husband Mario has done for Acton as town planner. He leaves Halton Hills soon to work in Guelph.

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Car stolen

Halton Regional Police say a car parked on Main St. South across from Superior Motors was reported stolen Monday night. The 1973 Chevrolet is owned by Linda Earle from out of town.

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