

Politics frustrating: ex-councillor

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer
Taxpayers should learn to expect gross inefficiency and excessive tax increases because that seems to be the way the political system is going to be, says a former Halton Hills councillor who decided against seeking re-election last November.

Former Ward 1 councillor Peter Marks of Acton told the Herald last week that one of the greatest frustrations of his past two years on council was watching good men and women wrestle with figures and concepts they were incapable of grasping.

"It was most frustrating because a lot of us were trying to do a job we just weren't capable of doing," he says. "And I'm including myself in that. Even with a background in engineering, I didn't always grasp all the implications of a situation. We were running a multi-million dollar corporation and it's getting bigger and bigger. The thing is bound to get increasingly complex as time goes on."

NO ALTERNATIVE
Mr. Marks sees no viable alternative however, since he wouldn't want the system changed so that the ordinary individual couldn't seek political office. It simply means that there are going to be an increasing number of mistakes and delays as ill-equipped councillors try to make decisions on highly technical, very intricate plans for their community.

Mr. Marks first entered politics at the ripe old age of 23. He was Acton's youngest councillor at that time and served a total of five consecutive years beginning in 1969. Both he and G.W. (Pat) McKenzie sought the regional council seat for Acton in the first election after the establishment of regional government and Mr. McKenzie won it by "five or seven votes, or something like that". Mr. Marks had been Acton's deputy-reeve while Mr. McKenzie was reeve of the town.

He considers that defeat a good thing, though, since he went back to school as well as changing jobs. That was when he began working for the Alcohol and Addiction Research Foundation in Oakville on a full time basis. He is now director of the Foundation's Halton centre and its staff of four.

THREE-WAY PROGRAM
The Halton centre follows a three-prong program. It works with the areas' existing counselling agencies to help them counsel people with addiction problems; it tries to provide an education and information program for Halton's schools; and it is working on an employee assistance program for the business community.

Rather than trying to hire counsellors to assist alcoholics and addicts, Mr. Marks says, the centre is trying to help the existing counsellors find more effective techniques and increase their skills in working with these people. Then they can go back to their daily routine with the extra knowledge to handle problem patients they may encounter instead of sending them to another agency.

The staff at the centre are helping to write a drug and alcohol curriculum for grades seven to 12, as well as training the teachers how to teach it.

"It is in the Physical Education courses now but we'd like to see it across the curriculum," he says. "It could be part of the values and decision making courses in social sciences, as well as in the English courses through essays and debates on the pros and cons of drug abuse and that sort of thing."



Peter Marks believes in physical, mental, spiritual and emotional balance for people and enjoys tennis as a way of getting some exercise both summer and winter. Mr. Marks is the director of the Halton office of the Alcohol and Addiction Research Foundation which is located in Oakville.

There is less opposition to such information than one might expect.

"There are still a few people around who think ignorance is bliss," Mr. Marks admits. "But the majority of educators feel that a well-informed person has a higher likelihood of making a responsible choice. It's not like when we talk about sex education and the reaction is almost like hitting a nerve when you get a tooth pulled."

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EMPLOYEE PROGRAM
In the employee assistance program the centre works through business managers, unions and the business community to develop a program to help employees with an addiction problem.

They also have a program in the business community aimed at preventing addiction problems.

"We're very impressed with the results in that program," he says. "Halton seems to be very open to hearing the current research and findings on the subject. We believe the consumption of alcohol and other drugs will continue to increase annually in every age group unless something is done. Halton residents are pretty progressive thinkers."

Mr. Marks has no heart-breaking connection with drug or alcohol abuse tucked away in the background as one might assume. He was a Big Brother for a short time in the late 1960s and, as a result, got involved with the drug counselling at Milton jail. He began conducting an awareness program at Acton and Georgetown high schools and, by the time he lost the 1974 election he had decided to make counselling a full-time career.

DROP OUT
Mr. Marks was born in Toronto and came to Acton as a child of three. He took his high schooling in Guelph and classes himself as a drop-out because he quit at the end of Grade 12. He entered the aircraft industry and studied metallurgy by night at Ryerson polytechnical institute. He began working on a social science degree about 10 years ago and is completing his masters degree in counselling psychology from Chicago's Adler Institute.

Mr. Marks and his wife Joanne have three children, Gregory 13, Leah, 11 and Gareth, 7.

Although he always championed the cause of recreation as a councillor, Mr. Marks says he is "not a jock enthusiast for the sake of it". He believes the key to a satisfying life is having a good balance, both socially, physically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally.

He plays tennis a couple of times a week and does a bit of swimming. Last year he played a bit of oldtimer hockey but found it hard to keep up with

the good skaters. He also played a bit of indoor tennis at a club in Guelph that has a bubble. This fall he and his daughter will be taking a woodworking course together.

While he was raised to believe that everyone should put a bit more into the system than they take out of it he feels the chances of him taking another crack at politics are slim. That was a phase of his life he enjoyed at the time, but he now

has other ways of making his contribution to the community. He places a high priority on being a husband and father, and being a councillor was very time-consuming for very little results, he says. At least, some of the time. Now he is just glad there are others around willing to put the effort into that work.

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