

Halton region's press woes underline misunderstanding

If there is one thing about covering regional council readers don't realize, it's the information vacuum in which we, as reporters, often have to work.

Actually, it's not so much a vacuum as a collection of toxic gases which inhibit the growth of accurate and informative reporting about what goes on behind the walls of Halton's administrative headquarters in Oakville.

Especially since last year's operating budget fiasco, there has been a prevailing smog of animosity between media members and regional staff and councillors. These gases rise from a number of "slow burns" smoldering in the thoughts of administrative members following leaked information, inaccurate reporting or just plain "bad press" at a time when the region needs all the good ink it can get.

Surely, regional pundits have long since wondered, with about a dozen newspapers and one radio station dogging us week after week there must be some way of using this resource to shed regional government's "green beached whale" image.

Well, with that in mind, the recently-struck advisory committee on public information sat down with reporters following last Wednesday's



STAFF COMMENT

By Chris Aagaard

council meeting. It seemed like someone had cracked the vacuum jar and a breath of fresh air was stirring some of those stagnant gases.

Despite some static (there's bound to be thunderstorms when cold, new air strikes a stagnant air mass), it was probably the first time councillors, administration members and the press had come together so uniformly on an issue: that Halton's residents are not well-informed about regional issues and, consequently, misunderstanding abounds.

GOOD POINTS
A number of especially good points were brought out: for instance, one reporter suggested the region should hire an information officer, a contact to whom press members could reach for additional information on issues which are only lightly discussed in regional council but have considerable impact for residents.

One has to wonder, however, at the autonomy such a position has from its administrative parent - whether or not a press officer would become a Ron Ziegler-like smokescreen behind which councillors and administrators could cover any time an explosive issue starts ticking.

A better solution, suggested by another reporter, would be to hold press conferences following committee and council meetings.

Many of the same questions which pour into regional chairman Jack Raffis' office or to chief administrative officer Dennis Perlin could be answered during these briefings.

SOME LAZY
But nothing undermined the administration's misunderstanding about the press more than Mr. Raffis' comment that he suspects some reporters are just downright lazy, relying on the phone as

their main information-gathering tool.

Certainly, it would be far better and more informative for reporters to sit down and talk with regional people behind the major concerns facing council. But it's absolutely necessary for a reporter covering several beats to find ways of getting the job done quickly while retaining the integrity of his copy. The telephone calls to regional headquarters are a time-saving device and the number of calls which all too often go unreturned makes one wonder whether the news source really gives a damn how the story appears the next day.

Ultimately the animosity which prevails in the region's relationship with the press will dissipate when the administration stops behaving like an armed camp. It is not a private corporation, its dealings are very much our business and the attitude of "what the press doesn't know can't hurt them" only further alienates the people from a government which is already held in low public esteem.

PLAY UP
If one wants to argue that the media in Halton tend to play up the region's faults at the expense of its admittedly innumerable good points, it's only because this government has dwelled in controversy ever since its inception in 1974.

Until the region's administration and politicians are prepared to open up and level with the members of Halton's press gallery then readily available "good ink" items will continue to go relatively unnoticed behind darker stories for which reporters have had to kick and scratch to file.

Concerns linger over gravel route

Fourth Line resident Al McFee, who raised some serious questions about the future of the Duenk farm near Acton when Ontario's transport ministry recently said it was interested in hauling gravel

from the property, has been promised to be kept informed about ongoing talks between the town and transport minister James Snow discussing the old farm's fate. Two weeks ago, councillors

and residents said they were concerned about seeing the property, now owned by Bot Construction of Oakville and J.C. Duff Ltd., listed as a wayside pit at the expense of good farmland.

In addition, opponents maintain, no agreement should be reached between the ministry and the town until the ministry has outlined possible hauling routes.

Because the property is located in an area where the Niagara Escarpment Commission has planning jurisdiction, they will ultimately decide if the owners get a development permit to operate a wayside pit.

Limehouse Canada Day

By MRS. A.W. BENTON
Herald Correspondent
Congratulations to Peter Stephens of the Fifth Line, who graduated with a Bachelor of

Arts degree in Fine Arts at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto, June 17. Sussann Sheppard of the Sixth Line has gone to Sask-

atchewan University, where she will be teaching. We hope she will be happy there.

Recent overnight guests of Mr. and Mrs. Clifford McDonald included Dalton Trearter, Nallie Clark, Vada Shaw, Dale and Jane Shaw and Marie Swin. The last three are a gospel singing group called the Evangelist Quartette. All are from New Brunswick.

Mrs. H. Moulden introduced our MPP Julian Reed, who led in singing O Canada as only he can do so capably to open Limehouse Canada Day celebrations at Limehouse W.I. Memorial Hall. She asked us to observe a short period of silence and prayer in tribute to Terry Fox.

Mayor Peter Pameroy, regional councillor Russell Miller and councillor George Maltby were also present and extended greetings. All moved inside to well-laden tables for a picnic supper.

Mrs. Bert Benton supervised races and games on the school campus afterwards. Although the crowd was not large those who attended enjoyed Canada's 114 birthday celebration.

Congratulations to all students who completed a successful year, and we wish them a safe and happy holiday.



OPTIMIST CLUB

Georgetown

Why? Because we love you

The 63rd annual convention of Optimist International held in Orlando, Florida June 28 to July 1 is now ended. The Optimists from our club all had a great time making new friends and meeting old ones.

The sessions and workshops were very good and informative. The entertainment was excellent, the oldtimers breakfast was great, Bev Berggren was a riot. Workshops were excellent.

The twin luncheon was an important event for our club. As you know, we are twinned with Indiana. But as of July 1, we now are twinned with all the Georgetown Optimist Clubs: Indiana, Texas and Kentucky, therefore making all the Georgetown clubs one group.

The youth and ladies who travelled with us were also well entertained with tours and luncheons.

Tuesday was Optimist Day at Disney World. At the front gates, "Welcome Optimists" sign hung. This is the first time anything of this nature was done at Disney World. Also, Mickey Mouse paid us a visit at our opening session. This is the first and only time Mickey has left the Magic Kingdom. Mickey said we were his kind of people, helping kids. This to me was quite in honor to think He did this for us on behalf of Disney World.

Next meeting is Tuesday. Bring a new member if possible.

McDermid attacks skilled labor deficit

There is a critical shortage of skilled workers in Canada and government measures are not ending the shortage, Brampton-Georgetown MP John McDermid told the Commons Monday night.

Training is of generally good quality, but there is not enough of it, said Mr. McDermid, and Canada can no longer rely on importing skilled workers.

Immigration emphasis on family reunification means that only 24 per cent of immigrants have skills and that will drop to 12 per cent in two years claimed Mr. McDermid as the Commons debated amendments to the Adult Occupational Training Act.

Two Names
Cauliflower has another name - "rich man's cabbage." It's sometimes called that because it's harder to grow than regular cabbage.

If Canada is to stay competitive worldwide, skilled workers must be trained and that can only be done in co-operation with the federal and provincial governments and union and management.

Mr. McDermid urged that the government end the "stick your finger in the dyke" approach to solving manpower problems and wait for reports from committees and task forces on labor.

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