

# Halton Hills Outlook

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877-2202 877-2201  
**PUBLISHER**  
 Don Brander  
**ADVERTISING MANAGER**  
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**EDITOR**  
 Dave Rowney

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 Pam Lewis  
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## Their Outlook

The poll shows...

### Polling is overdone



#### Ottawa Report

By Stewart MacLeod

We've known all along that the federal government is obsessed with opinion polls, but who would have thought it would reach these ludicrous proportions.

Here we have it. In 1987 alone, the Mulroney government commissioned 319 different polls. And over the last four years, this government and its Liberal predecessor, commissioned no fewer than 799.

That should provide our legislators with a pretty good idea of how we are thinking on various issues.

And, incidentally, these polls do not include those regular ones on "if an election were held today, how would you vote?" The government lets newspapers pay for these monthly updates.

We don't know all the subjects covered by the polls, but information obtained under the Access to Information Act indicates that the results don't come cheap. While over-all prices were not revealed, it was disclosed that just 61 of the surveys cost nearly \$5 million.

Since that works out at an average of some \$80,000 each, we can guess that the 799 polls over the last four years cost us in the neighborhood of \$65 million.

#### INFORMATION USED

It's little wonder that pollsters represent one of the fastest growing industries in the country. And from the limited information available on the federally funded polls, we can assume that few major government initiatives are undertaken without first surveying public opinion.

It's known, for instance, that the government's white paper on defence was preceded by an opinion poll to "explore the public's awareness, understanding and

perceptions of the Department of National Defence and defence issues."

Similarly, an opinion poll on immigration preceded the government's recall of Parliament last summer to deal with the Refugee bill. There was an extensive survey on child care before Health Minister Jake Epp announced the new day-care program.

We've been surveyed on domestic air safety, on our attitudes toward Japanese investment in Canada. And since polls are now pouring into locked government filing cabinets at the rate of six a week, we can assume that few subjects are left untouched.

We can also assume that many of the polls represent a waste of money. Was it really worth determining our reaction to the Canadian Meat Month program?

Another poll tested American attitudes "towards Canada as a viable vacation destination."

#### OVER USED

It's not easy for the average Canadian to learn the results of these polls, since they are intended for internal use - or, as one set of guidelines says, to help government "provide leadership."

But there can be little doubt that polling is overdone. One senior federal official said it's not unusual for polls to be conducted before respondents know anything about the issue being surveyed. He pointed to assorted surveys on free-trade, conducted before the final text of the Canada-United States agreement was released.

"We've gone nuts with polls," said the official. And there is virtually no control over how many surveys are commissioned.

"If a department says it wants a poll on, say, public attitudes toward Canada Savings Bonds, then the department responsible for commissioning polls - Supply and Services - automatically goes ahead and orders such a poll."

### Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



THAT WAS CUTE! ... BY 12:15, YOU'D BROKEN ALL YOUR OWN RESOLUTIONS, AND WERE WORKING ON EVERYBODY ELSE'S!!

### Berry's World



Jim Berry  
 © 1987 by NEA INC. 12 3

"Why is it ALWAYS little boy babies that represent the New Year - and NEVER little GIRL babies?"

### It's rice-erroneous



#### Your Business

By DIANNE MALEY  
 Business Analyst

Wild rice, a quintessential northern crop, has flown south to California. As the market for wild rice grows, lake producers in northwestern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are facing stiff competition from southern paddy farmers. Canada is the loser.

Rice prices are falling so fast it hardly makes sense to grow it the old way, organically in northern lakes. In Saskatchewan, wild rice producers will be lucky to earn \$1 a pound for their crop this year, a third of what it was a few years back.

Rice-eaters will greet this news with mixed emotions. Wild rice is an ideal dinner gift, particularly for someone who is fond of game birds, like duck or partridge. But it's not something you pick up on the way home to serve with chili.

If current prices make wild rice impractical to grow, they also make it impractical to eat. In the food department of Simpsons, Manitoba lake rice, which is really a grass seed, is selling for \$16 a pound or more, depending on the brand.

#### PRICY RICE

The cloth bags with their drawstrings and northern names - Indian Head, Game Bird - make the organically grown rice popular with the health food set. The distinctive Canadian flavor of the packaging may also make the rice popular in Europe. At least that's what some Saskatchewan producers are hoping.

Sensing that they must move quickly to stay on top of the California product, Saskatchewan rice

farmers are expanding from lake rice into paddy production.

Even so, Californians are leaving northerners in the dust. The entire Canadian crop adds up to about three million pounds, according to the Financial Post. California harvested more than 24 million pounds last year.

The continued success of the Canadian industry depends on skillful marketing. Gourmet shops and health food stores in Europe would likely prefer the lake-grown Canadian product if they knew the difference. For one thing, the Canadian grain is larger than the fast-growing California crop.

Unfortunately, the same qualities that make the Canadian rice superior also limit the quantity that can be organically grown.

#### LOTUS-LAND WINS

That's why wild rice from California may soon force the larger Canadian growers out of business. Faced with shelling out \$16 a pound, most consumers will choose a cheaper product even if it comes from a commercial rice paddy in Lotus-land.

One obvious question is what happens to the rice from the time it leaves the farmer to the time it hits store shelves to take it from \$1 to \$16 a pound? The grain is threshed and packaged in small, gift-sized bags. It is shipped to the stores, which add on their mark-up.

Canadian lake producers want to step up their marketing efforts so they can stay in business. They're hoping to sell to health food stores in Europe and Japan.

Given the prices they are charging, this is a good idea. People in strong-currency countries such as Japan, West Germany and Switzerland may be the only ones who can afford to eat northern wild rice. Canadians will have to buy from California.

### Staff Comment



By BRIAN MACLEOD

### Sharing the spirit

I look forward to the Olympic games every four years as much as the next person.

The Olympics' ability to bring together athletes from all over the world competing in unique events like bobsledding and the biathlon is fascinating.

But when the hype about the flame first started with the "share the flame" advertisements on television I was skeptical. I thought it was just another neat publicity ploy by Petro-Canada.

I didn't bother to enter the contest even once.

Obviously, I blew it. I joined Herald Sports Editor Mike Turner on a trip up to Orangeville Jan. 6 to help capture pictures of two Georgetown residents, Tommy Dembie and Janie Reid, carry the flame for a kilometre each.

When I first saw the flashing lights of the OPP cars leading the two vans along Highway 9, it was the first time the spirit of the flame, and the accompanying nationalism it brings, had hit me.

I instantly wished I'd been given a chance to run with the flame.

It had to be a proud moment for young Tommy and Janie as they donned the special Olympic Flame track suits they were given by Petro-Canada to carry the flame. Only the 7,000 or so people who carry the flame will have the suits.

Proud but freezing. But even the chilling temperatures couldn't dampen the spirits of those who carried the torch and lined the route.

There weren't thousands of people cheering at the primarily rural point at which they carried the flame. But there were plenty of people smiling, waving, watching and wishing it was them who was carrying the torch.

When Tommy ran by me he was being helped a bit by his running escort as the flame must have gotten a bit heavy at the end of his run.

The flame itself is not the huge burning light I had envisioned. It's actually not that big. But its spirit, and what it represents, is very, very impressive.

Everyone who watched the flame go by had a smile on their face. Even in the freezing weather.

Petro-Canada should be congratulated for what they've done. They've taken the run past a publicity stunt and brought it to the hearts and minds of Canadians.

In future years all those who carried the flame will look back on the 1988 Olympics in Calgary with a special feeling.

They were a part of the Olympics. There's no doubt about it, people who didn't enter the contest to carry the flame are now saying to themselves, "I should have."

### Poet's Corner

Diurnally  
 I return  
 to this spot  
 as  
 a bump  
 on a near spent tire  
 no idea  
 what cycles  
 are all about  
 but sure  
 I'll be  
 around  
 for a while.  
 Marlowe C. Dickson