

Editorial

Shoot the messenger

The 'Shoot the Messenger' syndrome appears to be alive and well in Halton Hills.

This is unfortunate, because it could also lead to other social maladies such as the curtailing of freedom of thought, freedom of speech and freedom of opinion.

Ills that reportedly have been cured in a supposed free society.

We are referring here to the brouhaha that has erupted in the enclaves of Halton Hills over a letter published last Wednesday in the Herald's People's Forum, which referred to certain perceived abuses at the Acton Food Bank - commonly known as Foodshare.

The Herald had contacted the particular letter-writer, prior to publication of the letter, to verify identification and discuss the letter-writer's concerns and subsequently, the letter was published. All well and good, one would assume.

Since the publication of the letter, however, this Managing Editor and a reporter, have received numerous telephone calls criticizing the newspaper simply because we published the letter.

As one caller noted, "Did you have to print something bad about something that is doing good for people?"

In a word, yes.

The Herald's People's Forum is just as it proclaims. A forum for the people of the community to air beefs, toss brickbats and even the occasional bouquet.

The People's Forum letters are edited, where needed and yes, even censored when profane language is used to stress a particular point.

For the most part, however, letters in the People's Forum reflect the views of the people of Halton Hills. As far as this Managing Editor is concerned, these sometimes divergent views also reflect a caring, concerned and vibrant community willing to air opinions on sometimes controversial subjects because it is the community as a whole that matters rather than individual peccadillos.

This is the crux of the matter behind the Acton Food Bank issue.

The letter-writer, whether the perceptions were correct or incorrect, felt concerned enough about the community to go public with a perceived wrong.

As letters in this edition of the People's Forum appear to indicate, perhaps the letter-writer was wrong in these perceptions. That doesn't alter the fact that the letter-writer, in our society, had every right to go public with perceived concerns.

A number of telephone calls the Herald received were from people who felt they had been identified in the letter.

Relax. Chill out. If such had been the case, on the particular day the letter-writer made reference to, the Food Bank facility would have to have been overcrowded - to say the least, in terms of the number of calls the Herald received.

What was most objectionable about the telephone calls, however, was the fact that the majority of the callers refused to identify themselves.

And comments such as:

"I would write a letter, but I know it wouldn't be printed." (ESP or just no guts?)

Or the most laughable:

"You don't know me, but we didn't like what your paper printed about Acton."

Yep, shoot the messenger, alright.

Only print the good stuff and ignore everything else. Don't rock the boat.

Well, to mix metaphors, these people are barking up the wrong boat.

The Herald will continue to serve the community of Halton Hills in a number of ways and will not shy away from controversial subjects.

Writer, editor wrong

Dear Editor:

I cannot believe that you would print this kind of letter when you know as does everyone that we are in a recession. This woman obviously must have forgotten this.

If she was so upset why did she not ask Joan Waldie what was going on? Did this woman not consider that maybe the first couple was taking those groceries to deliver them to people who could not get out to pick the groceries up themselves?

For the second couple she saw inside the food bank, just because the unknown woman is in need of a food bank does not mean that

she cannot dress nicely. Can't this unknown woman keep some of her dignity.

There are too many people who are in need and because of this letter from a woman who did not check into the matter and an editor who did not care about what he was doing when he printed this letter, some people may stop giving what is obviously desperately needed.

I should say that I do not use the food bank, I do give, and I leave the decisions and screening of the people to the staff of the food bank. I have faith in what they do!

Name and address withheld by request.

The Halton Hills

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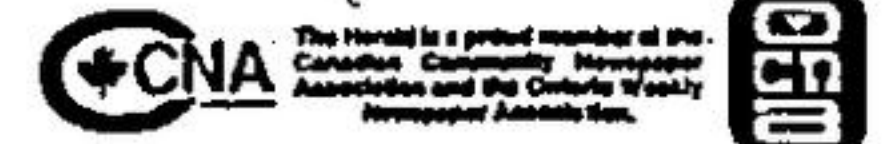
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How the food bank works

Dear Sir:

Things you may have wanted to know about Acton's Food Bank but didn't know whom to ask.

In order to correct possible misunderstandings about the Acton Food Bank known as Acton Foodshare, I offering the following information:

Hours of operation: Tuesdays 9 to 2 p.m. and Thursdays 1:30 to 4:00 p.m.

Food is provided to needy clients once in two weeks - but not only food. Clothing, shoes, blankets, children's toys are also available for those who need them.

The Coordinator, Mrs. Joan Waldie, bless her heart, works long hours without pay to administer the service and to acquire the foodstuffs, etc. She is a remarkable and dedicated caring lady.

All people wishing to receive help from Acton Foodshare are interviewed and screened to ensure that they fit the financial criteria set forth by the Board of Directors. Further, would-be clients are checked against the Georgetown Love in Christ Food Bank and the Oakville Food Bank to ensure that there is no duplication and abuse.

When persons are registered with Foodshare, they are not allowed to walk through the store and take whatever they want. Volunteer assistants to the Coordinator fill orders according to a fixed schedule allowed to specific family sizes. For instance, a family of four is given 28 pounds of food on average, sufficient to ease the anxieties of feeding a family for about 3 or 4 days. For Foodshare is a supplement to family diet, not a substitute for grocery shopping. Bread and potatoes we have in plenty and these often make up the bulk of the order.

A typical order for a family of

four might contain 3 cans of soup, 1 pkg. of brown sugar, oatmeal, spaghetti, spaghetti sauce, 2 cans of pork and beans, 1 kidney beans, 5 lbs. of potatoes, bread, a small bag of flour, rice, powdered milk One can see that the purpose of the food bank is to assist a family in feeding the children mainly and is not a substitute for regular buying.

Should a visitor to the area see someone pushing a shopping cart filled with bags, he should understand that a volunteer is pushing the cart and that the cart may contain the groceries for two or three families. Clients are not allowed to use the carts.

Sometimes where no other transportation is available or the client is sick or pregnant, the volunteers make home deliveries.

If a receiving person looks well dressed at Foodshare, that person's circumstances may be such that having lost the normal family income, those are the clothes he/she must wear. (One need not be poorly dressed to be in need these recessionary days.) The people served by a food bank are often people who have lost their jobs, live on severely restricted incomes, and cannot afford the basics they need for minimal daily living - so they may be compelled to make their

way to a food bank. Often they are embarrassed but their children must be fed.

Too often we who are more fortunate are too ready to think the worst of other people and too quick to suspect, wrongdoing. It is easier to be critical than to trouble ourselves to learn the real circumstances of others lives.

Many who use the foodbank wish to help in some way to show their appreciation and they do. One woman, a client of Foodshare, takes used clothes, makes them over for herself, for her children, and for others who visit Foodshare.

Acton Foodshare needs people who will help with donations of food, donations of cash to purchase food, or who will volunteer their time to help the foodbank work.

Foodshare will end when there is no more need. But as long as there is a need, you can help. Why not phone Foodshare at 853-0457 and tell us how you would like to help - a far better thing to do than levelling undeserved criticism.

Gerald Rennie,
for Foodshare,
Councillor, Ward 1, Acton.

More letters
on page 11

Write us a letter!

The Herald wants to hear from you. If you have an opinion you want to express or a comment to make, send us a letter or drop by the office. Our address is 45 Guelph Street, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 3Z6.

All letters must be signed. Please include your address and telephone number for verification.

The Herald reserves the right to edit letters due to space limitations.