

Carr to run for Region chair

By **TIM FORAN**
Metroland Media Group

Halton regional chair and former minor pro hockey player Gary Carr passed on something last week he was told by George Armstrong in 1975, when Carr was a teenage goalie being coached by the former Maple Leaf captain on the Memorial Cup-winning Marlboros.

"He said, 'You're only as good as your last game'," recalled Carr.

Carr is now hoping his last game, last Wednesday's council session, during which he and the council he leads approved a 2010 budget with a tax and water rate freeze, as well as an update to the municipality's Official Plan, is good enough to take to the campaign trail next year.

"I will be running in the next municipal election for regional chair," Carr confirmed.

After years of serving in provincial and federal politics, which are the subject of a book he is in the midst of writing, Carr said he has thus far enjoyed immensely the three years he has completed in his first term as a municipal politician and hopes to be able to continue in his role following this October's election.

Carr said he believes there have also been other successes during his term besides budgetary matters.

"Two years in a row Maclean's magazine has named us (Halton) one of the two safest communities in Canada," he said.

He also pointed to the success of Halton's recycling initiatives—the introduction of the Green Cart program has improved landfill diversion to 60 per cent from 40 per cent.

And he said the introduction of a new Natural Heritage System designation in the regional Official Plan will protect the environment and agriculture.

However, he didn't deny fiscal responsibility would be one of the things he'll voice as a success to voters.

"I think it's very important," Carr said. "It's really a team effort," he added, crediting staff and council for supporting what he feels is part of his mandate.

Over the past four budgets including 2010, that team has effectively cut in half the tax and water rate hikes seen in the previous three-year term under for-

mer chair Joyce Savoline. But that doesn't mean Carr and his team have been tight-wads. In fact, it's the opposite.

The Region's overall budget has jumped to \$1.1 billion in 2010 from \$759 million in 2006, with the municipality buoyed by more property tax dollars coming in from the industries, businesses and residents locating in Halton over the past few years.

However, the percentage of the budget coming from property taxes and money paid by residents and businesses on water bills has dropped to 42 per cent from 50 per cent over the same time period.

So who's picking up the slack, if not local taxpayers? The two groups Carr has harangued for money since arriving at regional headquarters— developers and the upper levels of government are major contributors to the Region's coffers.

To Carr, growth is growth and somebody's got to pay for it besides taxpayers.

"We have finally got it to where growth is paying for itself," he said.

That attitude isn't shared by all his colleagues however.

Halton Hills Regional Councillor Jane Fogal, Burlington Mayor Cam Jackson and Milton Mayor Gord Krantz have all questioned whether development-related charges in Halton are getting too high to keep new homes affordable or to attract industry, the taxes from which help keep property taxes for residents low.

Carr, however, has sometimes asserted his primus inter pares— first among equals— status on council and used public email campaigns as a way to gather support through council.

During a particularly heated council session this past summer, when Mattamy Homes bused in hundreds of construction workers from across the GTA to council chambers to protest an extra \$8,000 charge, Carr came prepared for the fight. He plopped down thousands of papers onto the chamber desks, and printed emails from constituents backing his position in favour of the charge, he told his council colleagues.

"I'm elected by the people, not by council," he said. "As the chair, I take the lead. On the things that were important for me, that I ran on, I got support on."



GARY CARR

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