



GREG SORBARA



CHARLES BEER



DAVID RAMSAY



LYN McLEOD



STEVE MAHONEY

## Liberal leadership hopefuls give their premier performance

By ROB KELLY

In an unofficial leadership race five undeclared candidates worked an uncommitted crowd as hard as they could at the annual Halton North provincial Liberal fundraising dinner recently.

Lyn McLeod, Greg Sorbara, Charles Beer, Steve Mahoney and David Ramsay - none of them exactly household names - occupied a head table at Mohawk Raceway facing a crowd of roughly 200 faithful.

The audience had paid \$50 a plate to dust off dinner and their perhaps dormant political antennae as the Liberals slowly recover from the reeling election blow dealt last September by the NDP. Part of that exercise is to size up their party's leadership hopefuls.

Walt Elliot, dethroned in September by the NDP's Noel Duignan as Halton North's MPP, was master of ceremonies and the tuxedoed referee for the round of after-dinner speech-making by the five candidates. Elliot allowed each 10 minutes to pitch their positions.

The candidates all had three basic stances they assumed to varying degrees. The first was a fists-up belligerence toward the NDP government that had deposed them. The second saw them appeal with open hands for the support of their colleagues in what was usually termed the long road to Liberal party reform / recovery / re-election. The third was a commiserating arm around the shoulder offered to the suffering voter-taxpayers of Ontario.

Beer led off. He represents York North, is 49 years old, the son of a Quaker (although not one himself) and the former Minister of Community and Social Services.

### Ballinafad families help billet German band on exchange

By BETTY SOJKA

Several Ballinafad families are billeting members of a German Youth Band. This visit is part of an exchange set up by Erin District High School. Last year it was the Erin students who had travelled to Germany. The European guests arrived on May 24th and leave on the 31st. While here the group has been sightseeing which includes trips to Niagara Falls, Canada's Wonderland and a Blue Jays game.

Last week's UCW meeting was not lengthy. Gertrude Shortill and Mary Lawr headed the program and gave the devotion and bible reading. Last minute details were attended to for the dinner the ladies catered for on the 24th. About 40 people from a United Church in Toronto came out for their annual country dinner. This group has been coming out to the Ballinafad United Church for many years.

With the Minister away last Sunday, the choirs conducted the service. A collection old songs were sung, and bible readings were recited.

The Jim Dandies put away the Marauders last week with a score of

The NDP government is "inept, incompetent," he said. But even the Liberal party has its failings, he noted, because among voters in September the perception was that "we had lost our ability to listen" and in politics "the perception becomes the reality."

The Liberal party will "speak for reform, for change" in the way government conducts its affairs, Beer said, in a theme that echoed almost constantly throughout the evening. But paramount in the candidate's mind is the need to fill the fissures that threaten to crack Canada open. "Until we resolve the question of where the country is going, we will not be able to resolve (other) issues."

Former Mississauga municipal councillor Steve Mahoney, the Liberal whip at Queen's Park, charged that the current Premier has been happily visited by random chance. "Bob Rae is there by accident and he knows it's an accident."

The Premier runs a virtual dictatorship within his own party, Mahoney charged. "Even his own backbenchers are upset. All the decisions are made in the corner office (Rae's office)." The reason for that is a lack of second string strength in the government, Mahoney alleged. "Once he gets below Floyd (treasurer Floyd Laughren) and a few others he's extremely thin."

By contrast the Liberals "had a team and we have a team. There won't be any single-minded, dogmatic solutions."

"People are truly frightened," he added. "There is not a sense of confidence of any level of competence in that government."

McLeod toiled in municipal government for 17 years before becoming MPP for Fort William

in 1987. She has held three government portfolios, the ministries of colleges and universities, natural resources and energy.

McLeod said "there's a tremendous cynicism about politics and politicians today. I worry about that cynicism. The danger is that people will disengage from the process, they won't take part."

The Liberals "have to learn how to involve people" in governing and respect the differences among Ontario's diverse regions, she said. "We have to avoid one size fits all government."

The party should "be prepared to be more than opposition for opposition's sake." It must instead formulate its own policies and prod the government into adopting them in some form whenever it can, she added.

David Ramsay, an Oakville native transplanted to the north who has represented the Temiscaming riding since 1985, said "it's

tough right now to be a politician. People for the first time are becoming disillusioned."

The Liberal party must "get back to being driven by policy" rather than serving largely as "an election machine."

As well, the current parliamentary system "is a perversion of the original intent" because party discipline stifles individualism. "That has got to stop. People have got to be elected to freely express their ideas."

"This almost accidental experiment with socialism is not going well," said York Centre MPP Greg Sorbara. Sorbara has held an impressive array of government ministries since being elected in 1985; colleges and universities, skills development, labor, consumer and corporate relations, and he has overseen the Directorate on Women's Issues.

"The socialists are not going to be easy to defeat," Sorbara

warned. "They burrow in."

In an earlier interview, Sorbara stressed the importance of a Liberal economic agenda "appropriate to a post-industrial society." That includes "re-organizing the way we support business. Right now government is seen as a burden (by business) and increasingly under the socialists a deadly burden."

Sorbara also advocated a fixed term for parliament. "It's archaic to go to an election at the whim of the Premier," and a loosening of party discipline. He called for "dramatic" tax reform, although stressing that doesn't necessarily mean less taxes.

Sorbara warned that the current government is being manipulated by specific interest groups to which it owes allegiance, such as organized labor. The NDP government's commitment to such factions is so strong it is destabilizing, he indicated.

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