

GRAPEVINE

BURGER RUMOURS

No confirmation or denial of tantalizing rumours that an A&W will open in the building taking shape at the Petro Canada gas bar on Queen Street at Tanners Drive.

Repeated calls to the owner, Alfio Manarin of Rinarin Developments, builders of the Honeyfield subdivision, have gone unanswered. Also, no word when construction of another building on the site – this one 10,000-square-foot – will begin.

HOLIDAY SOUNDS

With O Holy Night, Gesù bambino and Ave Maria, the Acton Citizens Band, under the direction of Bandmaster Dr. George Elliott, will create The Christmas Story in Music at the Band's annual Christmas concert on Sunday at Bethel Church.

The Band's repertoire will also include favourite holiday songs and a carol sing with the audience and Band members.

Donations of food or cash will benefit Acton's FoodShare food bank. Refreshments will follow the 2 p.m. concert.

LIBRARY REGISTRATIONS

Registrations are now being accepted on-line for a slate of free children's programming at the Acton library – there's something for all from babes-in-arms to pre-schoolers, including songs, games, and lots of books.

To register you need a Family PIN and PIN for each child. On-line PIN applications are at www.haltonhills.ca/recandparks

Cookies, hot chocolate, families, songs and books. Can't imagine a better night than the Merry Christmas Storytime on December 18 at the Acton library at 7 p.m. Come celebrate Christmas – tickets are now available at the branch.

CHRISTMAS FEAST

Want to help someone with less have a Merry Christmas with a holiday dinner? The Acton Christmas Dinner committee that hosts an annual Christmas Dinner is looking for donations of food and offers of help for the feast, on December 25, at the Acton Town Hall Centre.

If you can help, view the on-line sign up sheet at www.SignUpGenius.com/go/10C0C4DABAA28A6F58-acton1/14246253

BENEFIT EVENT

Friends and family of Acton's Kim Townshend, 38, have rallied around the woman told she has six months to live after being diagnosed recently with a rare ovarian cancer. Townsend and her husband Mitchell are self-employed; they own Heritage Kitchens and Renovations.

The couple's family and friends are staging a benefit on New Year's Eve to help with medical costs, and have appealed to local businesses for raffles and a silent auction at the party, which will be held in a large heated tent at a Third Line property, south of Acton. For details, or to make a donation, visit <http://www.gofundme.com/5ird00>

SYNCHRO SWIM

Ever wanted to try synchronized swimming? Girls nine and under are invited to a Halton Hills Synchronized Swimming Club free tryout on December 18 at 7 p.m., at the Georgetown Indoor Pool. Interested? Register with Andrea at 416-876-5096.

NEW NAME

There will be a new name on the Prosperity ONE Credit Union in Acton in the New Year, but the amalgamation with the Teachers Credit Union will mean the "same team, same quality of service and same manager" at the Acton branch.

The Boards of Directors of Prosperity One and Teachers Credit Union announced a new CEO - Richard Davies - takes over January 1. The new Tandem Financial Credit Union will have assets of \$1-billion, including \$240-million from Prosperity ONE.

The Milton Community Credit Union - he predecessor of Prosperity ONE, bought Acton Community Credit Union in 1963, and the new Queen Street branch was built in 1999.

COUNTRY REFLECTIONS TO CLOSE

The closing of Country Reflections on Mill Street is bad news for the downtown business community, but good news for shoppers looking for good deals as prices will be slashed in an everything-must-go sale. The adjoining Dittos Boutique is not affected by the closing, which does not have a firm date, at this point.



HIKE READY: This hardy group, from left: Roger Grewal, Janet LeLievre, Heinz Rusche, Pat Ferris, Rob Curie and Sara Maedel - joined the Bruce Trail Club hike on Sunday. They marshalled at the Sobeys plaza and car-pooled to Arkel to hike a popular trail. - Ted Tyler photo

Greenpeace arrests show attempts to silence environmentalists continue

By David Suzuki

Early November marked the 18th anniversary of the tragic murder of outspoken writer and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight colleagues by the Nigerian government. Saro-Wiwa and the others had waged a long campaign to stop multinational oil company Royal Dutch Shell from drilling in the lands of the Ogoni people in the Niger delta.

Nigerian military harassed and intimidated members of the Ogoni community for years because they opposed Shell's drilling program. Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues defended their communities and local environment from a notoriously toxic industry. In November 1995, a special court established by the military government illegally detained and tried them on spurious charges. Convicted without due process, they were executed 10 days later, despite enormous international outcry.

Sadly, this is not an isolated occurrence. A recent report by human rights organization Global Witness documents the murders of more than 700 environmental and indigenous-rights activists over the past decade – more than one killing a week, on average. They reviewed databases, academic studies and news reports, and consulted with the United Nations and other international agencies. They found citizens are often harassed, intimidated, beaten up, sexually assaulted and sometimes killed for opposing endangered wildlife poaching, illegal logging, dams and activities of foreign mining companies – including some Canadian firms.

I experienced this reality in 1988 when we interviewed rubber tapper Chico Mendes about his battle to save the Amazon

rainforest in Brazil for *The Nature of Things*. He was assassinated two weeks later. The following year, Kaiapo Chief Paiakan asked me to help stop a dam proposed for Altamira, Brazil. My wife, Tara, and I helped raise \$70,000 for a demonstration, and the World Bank was persuaded to withdraw its project loan. Paiakan was then subjected to death threats. We brought him and his family to Vancouver until the danger subsided.

Many instances of persecution and killing have occurred in countries with atrocious human rights records, such as Sri Lanka, Guatemala and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Yet surprisingly, most attacks on environmentalists have been in countries such as Brazil, Mexico and the Philippines, with democratically elected governments, independent judiciaries and other institutions intended to protect their citizens' rights to voice concerns about the environment without facing harassment, intimidation and violence. These countries have also signed international agreements to protect human rights, like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As the recent incarceration of 28 Greenpeace activists and two freelance journalists by Russian authorities clearly demonstrates, human rights are vulnerable at a time when governments aggressively promote the interests of corporations over a healthy environment, and are willing to use heavy-handed tactics to ensure people who disagree don't stand in the way.

In this latest case, Russian special operations forces arrested the Greenpeace International activists, including two Canadians, Alexandre Paul and Paul Ruzycski, for attempting to hang a banner off the side of an

oil rig in Arctic waters. They were peacefully protesting Russian company Gazprom's plans to drill for oil in one of the most ecologically sensitive regions of the planet, and raising awareness of the consequences of climate change. For speaking out in defence of the Arctic, they were imprisoned for two months under difficult conditions and all but one were only recently released on bail. They now face the possibility of long, harsh jail sentences if found guilty on trumped-up charges of piracy and hooliganism.

Although leaders of the Netherlands, Brazil and Germany called for release of their nationals and other members of the "Arctic 30", Prime Minister Steven Harper and Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird have so far been silent. You can sign letters at Greenpeace.ca asking Baird to bring the Canadians home and Greenpeace.org asking Russian embassies to urge their government to drop the charges.

Too often, governments are quick to use excessive force and even pervert the course of justice to keep oil and gas flowing, forests logged, wild rivers dammed and minerals extracted. As the Global Witness study reveals, citizens are often killed, too – especially if they're poor and indigenous.

We must remember the sacrifices of Ken Saro-Wiwa, Chico Mendes and hundreds of other advocates and defend people's rights to peacefully speak out for the environment, without fear of intimidation, arrest and violence.

Learn more at www.davidsuzuki.org

With contributions from David Suzuki Foundation Ontario and Northern Canada Director-General Faisal Moola.