

Festival writers rally to preserve Eden Mills bridge

Special to The Rockwood Miller
A majority of members of the Eramosa Township Council have declared their intention to demolish the historic bowstring bridge that is the central architectural feature of the village of Eden Mills — home of the highly successful annual Eden Mills Writers' Festival. This 81-year-old bridge, with its reinforced-concrete arch and picturesque setting, is listed by the Ministry of Culture as one of the ten most valuable heritage bridges in Ontario. The township intends to replace the village's one-and-a-half lane

bowstring bridge with a modern two-lane bridge, claiming to be acting out of a concern for safety. But according to the written assessments of two international urban planning experts who visited the village in July, widening the bridge poses a greater safety risk. Jan Gehl (Professor and Head, Urban Design Division, Royal Academy of Arts, Copenhagen) remarks: "It is now established knowledge among urban planners and traffic engineers that the correct way to deal with a danger spot in a street is not to widen the street at that point, but rather to make it

narrower. "Drivers conduct themselves according to the perceived risks of a situation: a safe road is therefore one which enables drivers to 'read' the risks well in advance and which induces them to drive more slowly. Replacing the Eden Mills bowstring bridge by a wider bridge would at one stroke make the main street of the village significantly more dangerous." Village residents, including Festival organizers, fear that the destruction of the bridge (along with the inevitable road widening and the resulting increase of high-

volume heavy traffic) would destroy the rural atmosphere and the community spirit of Eden Mills, which have together permitted the village to develop and sustain one of the most important literary festivals in Canada. Writers who have read at the Festival over its five-year history, including Margaret Atwood, Graeme Gibson, Barbara Gowdy, and Jane Urquhart, to name a few, are rallying to the cause of the bowstring bridge. And as Michael Keefer, English professor at the University of Guelph and co-ordinator of the

Eden Mills "Save the Village" committee points out, "there has only been one accident at the bridge in living memory, in 1967, and that was caused by driver impairment." While the Eramosa Township Council voted last week, by a narrow majority, to construct a new bridge, residents of Eden Mills continue to fight to preserve the old bridge. If you'd like more information, contact the Eden Mills "Save the Village" committee, c/o Michael Keefer, at (519)856-1081, (519)824-4120, ext. 3247, or by fax at (519)766-0844.

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Writers' Festival a 'great success'

BY FRANCES NIBLOCK
The Rockwood Miller
Famous writers, village residents and approximately 2,000 visitors came to Eden Mills last Sunday to attend the Sixth Annual Eden Mills Writer's Festival. With more than 20 authors reading from their works at three locations, several publisher's displaying their books, and the village atmosphere of Eden Mills, the day was considered a great success. The Festival began six years ago with a book-signing at the General Store for resident writer Leon Rooke, one of the festival organizers.

"That first year we had 13 writers and we expected about 50 people to attend, but 500 came. Since then it has grown from its meagre seat-of-the-pants beginnings to a national event," Rooke said. Asked to explain the vast motherlode of creative talent in Eden Mills, Rooke first joked that it must be the water. "We seem to have a generous outcropping of talent but there are people writing in closets all over the country in extraordinary numbers," Rooke explained Sunday. "There are painters painting in secret sky lofts and the artistic spirit moves everywhere." Rooke was hard-pressed to pick a favourite moment of the day but said he enjoyed the performance of his play 'A Woman's Guide to Home Companionship' and all of the readings he attended. A major part of the festival is the new writer's contest, and this year cash awards and books were handed out to more than 20 winners. Acton's Justina Lynn Pembleton, 14, received a \$100 cheque and numerous books for taking first place in the children's writing division.



WE LOVE A PARADE!

Piper Don Gordon and Town Crier Shelagh Rogers (of CBC Radio) lead area residents from the old hotel to the Bow String Bridge Sunday to officially open the Eden Mills Writers' Festival. The sixth annual festival was a great success, according to organizers. (Lori Frechette photo)

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