

What Really Matters

in Guelph/Eramosa Township

with

Councillor Alan McDonald



The subject of my column this month, and I have addressed this subject before, is good communication with the electorate; even more so, the persons in our community. I will illustrate the importance of the same, by describing an occurrence in our community this last week, and by examining the psyche of a politician. No, I am serious. Please read on when you have finished laughing. Now that you have wiped the tears from your eyes, I say, the Corporation of the Township of Guelph Eramosa needs a better communication tool. Market research and constant customer survey is to what I refer.

Persons who are public servants within local government generally have little in common with one another. The reason being, to obtain office your only requirement is to produce \$100 and have your name placed onto the ballot. However, and I will say generally, again, one commonality they do possess is "a good intention." Their good intention is the rock from which all of their views and opinions are formed as they relate to the direction they will offer at the council chamber. They attempt to hear local opinion and translate it into action. They gather information on complex and often technical subject matter, and attempt to make decisions in the best interest of the corporation and the public. Sometimes the process is time sensitive, thus adding pressure. Sometimes confidentiality is necessary, thus adding discomfort.

Presently, my most influential communication tool for public

opinion is telephone calls I receive from the electorate on specific subjects. I will venture to guess that this is the same for most local politicians. I question the quality of product produced from this tool however. Does the squeaky wheel always get the oil? My colleagues and I must grapple with this pressure constantly, attempting to qualify and decipher the information we receive from the telephone.

The second most important "public opinion indicator tool" I have access to is the opinion and attendance at public information meetings hosted by the Corporation on specific matters. And I will refer to a politicians psyche to illustrate the use of this tool: "If no one, or very few attend, the public must consider our intended course of action to be a good one." Recently, this tool caught me off guard.

A public information meeting was held on a proposed communication tower in Lloyd Dyer Park. I was unable to attend the meeting but became concerned when I noted in the Agenda package I receive on the Friday before each general meeting of Council, that only three persons had attended the meeting. The report from the Clerk indicated four concerns raised from the meeting; of which three seemed to have reasonable solutions offered by the company proposing the tower. I had expected more of an outcry. I asked myself, "Was I wrong to think that most people in Rockwood would be opposed to this?" Although I cannot be in touch with all matters on public opinion, this one I thought I would know. I mean, hey, my kids play there too.

The Council meeting on

Monday night had the most members of the public present as I have ever seen in my time as a Councillor. The message was loud and clear. "We do not want a tower in our park!" But the message I gleaned from the meeting, as being the most important, was the one of communication.

Fortunately, a few persons rallied together and performed a job that some believe to be a failure of the Corporation of the Township of Guelph Eramosa to properly advertise for public input. The poor communication was centred around three mistakes; time, medium, and prominence within the chosen medium. The advertisement did not give our community enough time to address the matter. The advertisement was located in only one place of the chosen medium. The advertisement was not proportional in size to the importance of the matter it addressed. Each of these concerns were raised, more than once, by persons in the gallery at the meeting on Monday.

One other concern raised at the meeting was that of "Burden of Proof." It was the responsibility of the public to demonstrate reasoning, and compile information, when it should have been the Township's responsibility.

A clear and effective program of TWO WAY communication is required. Private enterprise uses market research and customer survey. So can we.

Live long and prosper.

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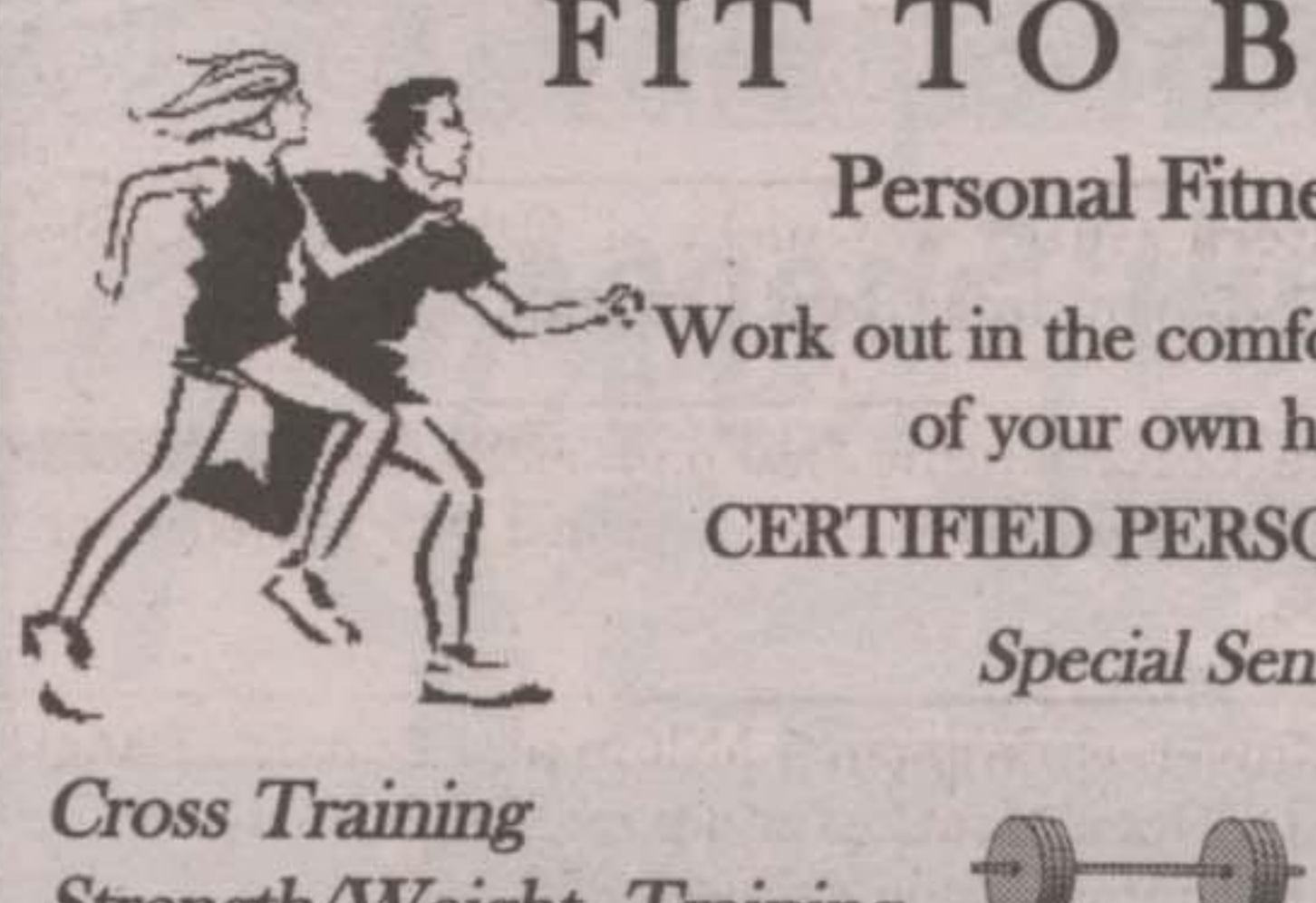
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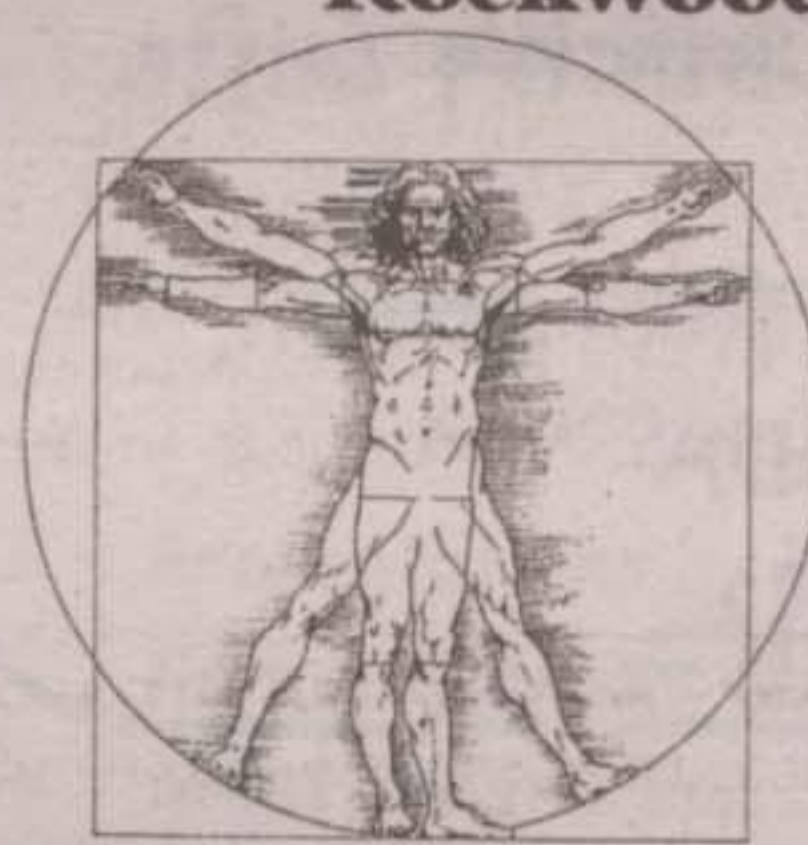
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Jump Rope for Heart a great success

BY DEBORAH QUAILLE
THE COMPASS

Rockwood Centennial Public School raised \$11,426.67 in April during their Jump Rope for Heart efforts for the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

"It's the largest amount we've ever raised," stated teacher Karen Noel. "Our highest amount previously was about \$8,600. Over 500 students participated this year, with 253 raising cash."

The Jump Rope program is run by teachers and parent volunteers. Students receive prizes based on the amount of money they are pledged, and the school receives a point total for the number of participants and the amount raised. Points are used to "purchase" items from a catalogue.

"Last year the school got a 25" TV, 2 VCR's, stop watches, sports equipment, an AM/FM Cassette player... The program is a really good deal and helps with all the things we need to replace. Jump Rope for Heart works out well for the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and for us. And we also get to donate to a good cause," Noel commented.

DOG DAYS



PHOTO BY DEBORAH QUAILLE

The First Rockwood Beavers were happy to host Jamie McDougall, his 10-year-old son David, and their guide dog in training, Tiko at an early April meeting. The McDougalls foster puppies for Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind in Manotick, which involves a great deal of puppy walking and socialization skills. The McDougalls are Guelph residents; Tiko is the second dog they've raised for Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind.

After the troop saw a video on seeing eye dogs, they were told that citizens who wish to have a guide dog are thoroughly screened to see if they can assume the responsibilities of an animal in their life. Each dog is carefully matched to an owner and the owner participates in a rigorous 28 day course on how the two should work as a team.

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- Small structured classes (12:1 ratio).
- Organized work habits.
- Development of creative and critical thinking.
- Full instructional day: 8:45 to 3:45
- Behavior code policy.
- Uniform and grooming guidelines
- Creating a desire for learning.
- Development of time management strategies.
- Drama festival for all students.
- Competitive family tuition package.

Inquiries to Director (519) 856-2633

Applications for September 2000 to our Elementary Division are still being accepted.