

Teressa Gibson Smye new face for Ward 3 of Guelph-Eramosa

By DEBORAH QUAIL

Ward 3 of Guelph-Eramosa Township has a new face in its council seat: Teressa Gibson Smye is the first woman behind the table in many years.

A previous mayoral candidate,

Ms. Gibson Smye has studied municipal law for the past three years, and is a local business owner who runs a massage therapy office in Rockwood. Before becoming a respected therapist, she worked for five years at the City of Kitchener as a small business counsellor for a department now known as the Ministry of Economic Development.

"I managed the office, ran seminars, and was a liaison for community groups that promoted small business. It was very interesting work, and well suited to me because you have to be detail oriented to stay in touch with trends and developments," she says.

When she decided to run for a local political appointment, Ms. Gibson Smye felt that she could offer something unique to the community.

"It's hard to feel that you can make a real impact on the future development of a community from the outside, so I wanted to run in Ward 3. I found the previous council was not receptive to new ideas and I wanted to try to advocate change from within. In this country you do that through an election.

"It feels good to be an agent of change. When I ran in the last election it was to create change. I was pleased that during my first attempt at politics I had terrific support. In a way, this is being a role model for people to see that a difference can be made."

Teressa Gibson Smye believes that citizens' groups in Guelph-Eramosa can be a way for others to get involved and become a resource for council, and possibly in another three years time those same people may feel comfortable trying for their own council seat.

"We used to have a very active

volunteer committee system that has eroded over the past few years. A new group format will give everyone more familiarity with the council and its systems. Although this is something that council will have to decide, I've had good feedback on the concept so far." As well, she finds that "costs have been steadily increasing under the present arrangement where committees must have a township employee sitting in on meetings and taking minutes. Those people have to be paid for that time, but it increases costs unnecessarily. Instead, the chair could very easily give a monthly progress report to council."

A group of people came forward after the last election with "all kinds of wonderful ideas, but none were implemented, such as walking tours, hiking trails, downtown garbage cans, flags, and other things to spruce Rockwood up a bit." Ms. Gibson Smye would like to see numerous local improvements and has a few of her own in mind, such as looking into the feasibility of a skateboard park built by volunteers, or possibly a splash pad for younger children to play. The soccer fields in Eden Mills have never been completed, although resident teams are desperate for game sites.

"To the best of my knowledge, no one claimed that taxes were the only issue of concern. Bridges, water, our environment and youth services are of major importance. I feel that by looking for efficiencies and cost reductions within what we currently have we would be able to

reliance on consultant reports which are costly and not acted upon. I'd like Rockwood Cemetery come back under our control instead of the City of Guelph. I can't believe that it can be cost efficient to have staff from Guelph travelling here with equipment. I think the costs have been steadily increasing under the present arrangement where this used to be a volunteer group who took care of the grounds.

"Another idea I had was for Rockwood to become a Centre for Environmental Excellence, having reuse/recycle policies, a greater voice on issues like waste management facilities for Ospringe which impact all of us, energy audits, and a paint exchange similar to the program in Elora."

Continuing with her environmental beliefs, Teressa Gibson Smye is a contributor of trees to the planting program for the Township and has made a personal commitment to donate 100 seedlings for community enhancement. As well, she recently created a wonderland of bears (the symbol of goodwill and caring) in her office on Main Street South so that people could drop in on the night of the Farmers' Parade of Lights. "The \$2 admission and a donation to the food bank gets you a guess at how many bears are hanging out at my place. We have a few prizes for fun. The money will be turned over to a local community group."

Another aspect about town growth about which she is adamant is that, "My vision of downtown Rockwood doesn't include a Tim Horton's. We have wonderful shops and businesses and we don't need a corporate entity; we need to get out and discover our own stores."

In this way, she believes, residents will gain a firmer sense of community. "Maybe this election was the first thing to bring people together. Margaret Mead said, 'Never doubt the capacity of a small group of dedicated people to make a difference.' This is the same philosophy I hold in my work: I care for the people who live here. It's how you get to know people and make friends. And I want to share what I have to offer with the township."



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