

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Time for action

It's hard to believe that there are over 13,000 households in Halton Region spending over 30 per cent of their total income on housing but even more so that 11,000 of those households are renters, earning less than \$30,000 a year.

But these were the figures presented recently to Halton Region's Health and Social Services Committee, the result of a survey released by Halton's Non-Profit Housing Corporation division.

"Thousand of households are at risk of losing their housing because of unaffordability or inadequacy," maintains the director of the non-profit housing corporation, Gwen Maloney. She notes very little new, affordable housing is being built, although as the population increases the demand for it will continue to rise.

The survey projects that Halton's demand for affordable housing over the next 10 years will increase to 14,350 homes, which suggests an affordable housing crisis may be compounded unless steps are taken to remedy it.

Recommendations from the survey included urging Halton Region to continue urging the senior levels of government to accept their responsibility to provide housing programs to assist the poor in Halton. And reiterating to the Minister of Community and Social Service how inadequate the shelter allowance of social assistance is now, and the need to increase it.

There have been affordable housing crises in this area before and they've been met with practical solutions. After World War 2 the federal and provincial government collaborated with the municipal governments to produce so-called "war time housing." Both Acton and Georgetown built dozens of affordable homes under the program to provide affordable housing to returning veterans and others.

These "wartime houses" were bare-bones, possessing only the barest of amenities but they were snapped up. Over the years they've been enlarged and improved to make comfortable homes for many. Their value has increased tenfold.

The Kingham Hill subdivision, a unique partnership between the builder and the old Town of Acton, provided dozens more with affordable housing. And, of course, there have been geared-to-income houses that helped ease the crises, although their reputation suffered when people who "worked the system" corrupted it.

It led to the Province cancelling further affordable housing projects, and the start of another affordable housing scarcity. The belief that private contractors would fill the breach has evaporated. There's no relief in sight.

It's time officials at all levels of government to put their collective heads together and think about solving this problem.

Christmas spirit

Acton Seniors could never get a better start to the season than the Christmas dinner and entertainment provided by Acton branch of the Royal Canadian Legion and Acton Rotary Club annually in the Legion hall.

Cost for Seniors is only \$2. For the nominal fee they enjoy a turkey dinner with all the trimmings as well as first class entertainment. Guelph's Royal City Ambassadors provided the after-dinner enjoyment this year and delighted over 300 Seniors with their versatile barbershop choruses and quartets. And, of course, dinner music from Acton Citizens' Band was excellent.

It's a credit to both organizations, endowed with the real spirit of Christmas, that they can brighten up the holiday season for so many people. It is very much appreciated.



SNOW SCENE: The first real snow of the season turned Elizabeth Drive into a veritable winter wonderland. Raging winds later Tuesday, however, turned the fairyland into a day and night of treacherous roads and slippery sidewalks. Better weather is promised by the weekend.

Reporting has sad memories

BY ANGELA TYLER
The New Tanner

The headline in The Globe and Mail a few Friday's ago read, "Slain Teenager's Calgary Funeral Filled with Tributes." For me, the story brought memories that started over a year ago.

I'm not sure even how it happened, but last November, I ended up covering the story about the young man from Manitoulin Island who was killed at the now oddly famous, 4th Line railroad crossing.

In a weird turn of events my sister also ended up covering the same story. It was a completely different feeling for me. I always think of her as the newspaper person and me the newspaper hobbie-est.

However, at that time, it was just a story. Unfortunately, none of us knew the young man who was killed. It was a matter of finding out the facts and putting it down on paper for people to read.

This past October, we found ourselves in the same predicament. Only this time it wasn't just a matter of facts, it was about local young men and their families.

Toth, Dick and Everson are names that I can't put out of my head. I lived that story for a week and it has stayed with me ever since. It was more than a newspaper story.

Just after the accident, Acton was

crawling with out of town media. Some I recognized from television and some I knew. Within no time, they were calling the boys' families, friends and the schools. They needed to get the facts and get pictures, not only of the accident scene, but also more personal photos of the boys. It was their job to go to the families homes, knock on their door and ask questions.

How does someone go to a family who has just lost their teenage son in a devastating accident? When I told Hartley I wanted to do the story to go along with my photos, I forgot I, too, would have to do that.

I never knew Travis, Mark or Rory. I probably saw them around town, but the first time I 'met' them was on my computer when the Police Services e-mailed their photos to me. One by one, I clicked on the i-con above their names. For the longest time, I just looked at their photos.

The day after the accident, I received a call from a man I know who told me that a group of young people had gathered at the crossing and thought we might like to take a picture or talk to some of them.

I thought that this might be their friends opportunity to tell people what the boys were like, what they did and any memories they had. In a way, it would be the last thing wrote about them.

Instead, a reporter from The Independent and I were bombarded by

furiously angry high school students. We were called every rotten thing a person could be called. I was chased away, even though I kept a reasonable distance when trying to take pictures. I even had one young man come so close to me. He was so angry, I know that if the police officers weren't there he probably would have hit me. Even though I didn't know them, I already felt awful about the whole thing. Then to have this happen didn't help make things any easier.

I did everything I could to avoid calling their families. Then by Saturday, I knew I could no longer avoid it. I felt like a slimy paparazzi stalking type media person. I held my phone in my hand for a long time, then I finally called the families. Two of the families agreed that I could drop by and talk about them and pickup some photographs.

Monday, the day of the funerals, I was to meet them. It was the day they chose. At the Dick home the front door greeted me with the overwhelming aroma of fresh flowers. On the right side, were two skateboards, perhaps Rory's.

The interviews are a little bit of a blur to me, however, the families aren't. Their strength and composure went way beyond admirable. I don't think about the boys as often now, however at each railroad crossing I

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