

# Garbage from cities, towns can create jobs

In nature, one creature's waste is another's opportunity. An elephant's dung, for example, is an ideal food source for insects, micro-organisms and plants; spawned out Pacific salmon carcasses provide nourishment for mammals, birds, insects and trees; and on it goes. Uniquely among animals, humans have created a global crisis in what we do with our wastes.

Gigantic cities like London, Cairo and Mexico City have enormous problems of what to do with the daily garbage of tens of millions of people. New York City alone produces 26,000 tonnes of waste a day.

Recently, Toronto's garbage crisis, created by the imminent closure of its main landfill site, blew up over the chosen solution – transport-

ing a million tonnes of it a year 600 kilometres north where it would be dumped into a lake formed in an old mine pit. In order to ensure that the chemicals leaking out of the garbage wouldn't contaminate the surrounding water, engineers proposed to create negative pressure by constantly pumping water out of the mine pit. Of course, that meant contaminated water being removed would have to be treated, but it was suggested that such a scheme could operate for hundreds if not thousands of years! And if anyone believes that, have I got a bridge to sell them.

Thanks to a technicality, the contract was eventually cancelled, but now the crunch is on. How will Toronto deal with its looming problem? By renegotiating the mine solution, searching for other

## Science Matters

by: David Suzuki



landfill sites, or by seeking sustainable alternatives that might emulate nature?

I heard that Edmonton had decided on a radical approach to garbage by dealing with its wastes as an opportunity rather than a crisis. So I dropped in to see what they have done and I was very impressed. A city of 650,000 with an annual output of 225,000 tonnes of residential waste, Edmonton was faced in the 1980s with the need for a new landfill site. Of more than 100 possible sites, every one was rejected, most because of op-

position from the local people in a classic NIMBY (not in my backyard) response.

Stymied city councillors considered other options including burning, shipping elsewhere and composting. To their credit they realized a long-term solution was needed and developed a 30-year plan that was passed in 1994. The solution used recycling and composting of residential waste to radically reduce the amount of material that would go into a landfill. You see, anything made from living material – cloth, paper,

wood, meat, vegetables – should be reducible by microbial action into compost (some long-lived organic material like plastic or rubber was to be treated specially).

Composting facilities in Tennessee, Georgia and in Europe provided guidance on how to do it, but the scale that Edmonton chose was unprecedented. The city accepted a bid by TransAlta Energy that has now diverted 70 per cent of residential waste from landfill.

The result is a world class facility and operation. Householders place all of their garbage into plastic bags. The bags are collected and spread out on the sorting floor of a huge building where workers remove plastic material, metal and anything else to be recycled. The contents are then pushed into a series of sepa-

rators where non-compostable materials are removed. I expected to be overwhelmed by the smell but to my surprise, I was not.

Outside, the treated material was covered by a thick layer of tree waste, like bark and sawdust, to remove odours from the compost. Over time, what remains is a rich material ideal for adding to gardens and fields as fertilizer. What excited me was that most of the machinery and technology was developed by local companies, so Edmonton may well stand to reap economic benefits of spreading its know-how to other communities that, as they grow, will likely encounter a crisis with their own garbage.

To discuss this issue with others, visit the discussion at [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org).

## Is Canadian law out of tune with changing needs of families?

Many Canadian laws and social programs are based on assumptions about how people organize their personal lives – who they live with, trust, care for and depend upon to meet their life-needs. "In today's world, where adults' relationships and family patterns are continually changing, some of these assumptions are out of date or inaccurate," says Nathalie Des Rosiers, President of the Law Commission of Canada. "As a result, some laws and benefits apply to more people than they should, whereas others exclude people whom they should

perhaps cover."

The Law Commission of Canada has come up with a series of stories about adults' relationships to illustrate its point. One story describes a young university student, who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and has chosen to receive medical treatment. The medication helps, but occasionally he has a setback. Then, his prescriptions have to be changed and he has to take time off from his studies, which he is continuing part-time. Each time he has a setback and has difficulty caring for himself, his parents take time off from work to be

with him. But, in the three years since his diagnosis, both of his parents have used up their paid leave. The result: a significant drop in family income.

"The situation in this story is fictional," says Des Rosiers. "But many people find themselves in similar circumstances where someone must take time off work to care for a family member or friend. Should some type of employment benefits or supplement for lost income – like those available to most parents of newborn or adopted babies – be available for other types of family care-giving situa-

tions? If so, should this support apply to family relationships only, or to other relationships as well?"

This scenario is just one of the stories that will be discussed in a webcast which will be held live on the Internet on January 31, 2001. Des Rosiers is inviting Canadians to participate in this one-hour interactive webcast, which will be moderated by well-known journalist Francine Pelletier. The webcast audience can respond to questions on the scenarios and send in their comments via their personal computers. This feedback will be incor-

porated into the panel discussion as it progresses.

The webcast is being hosted by the Law Commission of Canada, an independent federal agency that engages Canadians in the renewal of law to ensure that it is relevant, responsive, effective, just and equally accessible to all. In June 2000, the Commission released a discussion paper on how the law recognizes and supports close personal relationships between adults. Input from the webcast and other consultations on the discussion paper will be considered as the Commission drafts its final report to be released later

this year.

The webcast will be held in both official languages as well as in a special format for the deaf and hard of hearing. More information about the webcast, the discussion paper and scenarios is available at the Law Commission's web site at [www.lcc.gc.ca](http://www.lcc.gc.ca). We can also be reached in several other ways: by mail: The Law Commission of Canada, 473 Albert St., 11<sup>th</sup> Floor, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H8; by fax: (613) 946-8988; or by e-mail: [getinvolved@lcc.gc.ca](mailto:getinvolved@lcc.gc.ca).

For those unable to participate on that day, the webcast will be archived on the Commission's site.

## Barb's birthday, hockey book and greetings in this stew

This column is like grandma's stew, it has a lot of everything in it.

★★★★★

My wife Irma and I attended a 65<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration Saturday for former Actonian Barb Smith. The event was at the Cutten Club on College Ave., in Guelph and we were delighted to see so many former Actonians there to help celebrate Barbara's 65<sup>th</sup>.

Daughter of the late John and Ethel Smith who lived on Main St. and Knox Ave. for decades, Barb recently retired as secretary to the president of a well know Guelph firm. She moved to Guelph several years ago and comes back to her home town frequently for visits with friends and relations.

Barb's friendly, gracious manner has won her many friends, many of whom were able to attend from various parts of Ontario. Among former Actonians there were Bruce and Marilyn McArthur

### Coles' Slaw

with  
Hartley Coles



from Peterborough, Brian and Helen (Benton) Barbeau from Burlington, Bernie Benton, Isabel Ritchie (sorry didn't know married names), Pat Terry (same), Jacqueline and Kathleen Nolan from Waterloo, David Marcoux from Toronto and others I probably didn't recognize.

Barb brought her late sister Mary's family and their children over from England for the occasion and for a trip to Disneyland following the party. They fly home again after the trip to Florida.

So it's happy birthday, Barb, from this scribbler and friends in your old home town.

★★★★★

I was delighted recently to

receive a parcel from former colleague and Actonian Denis Gibbons who's living in Burlington with his wife Chris. Denis, of course, was sports editor of The Acton Free Press and Georgetown Independent for many years and news editor at The Burlington Post. The parcel included a new book which Denis helped to edit on the history of hockey, one of the most interesting on the game I've ever read.

Title of the book is Century of Hockey and was produced by The Hockey News which Denis does assignments for on a regular basis. Lavishly illustrated the book celebrates the entire century

on ice. It includes a look at hockey from its infancy and dedicated a full page to each of the NHL's 83 seasons including the final 1999-2000.

Century of Hockey also includes a Perfect NHL team which should evoke a lot of controversy. It also contains features of players outside of the NHL.

Denis, incidentally, an expert on international hockey with his facility with language, including Russian, is editor of a newsletter for the Society of International Hockey Research, based in Toronto.

★★★★★

Bill Yundt obligingly saves his copies of the Ellicottville N.Y. community newspaper for me to scan. It usually has a lot of homespun wisdom and common sense in its pages as well as humour stories. One that caught my eye was the politically correct way to say Merry Christmas or Season's Greetings or what ever:

"Speaking of tell, I would like to tell you to please ac-

cept with no obligation, implied or implicit, my best wishes for an environmentally-conscious, socially-responsible, low-stress, non-addictive, gender-neutral celebration of the summer solstice holiday, practiced within the most enjoyable traditions within the most persuasion of your choice, with respect for the religious/secular persuasions and/or traditions of others, or their choice not to practice religious or secular traditions at all...and a fiscally successful, personally fulfilling, and medically uncomplicated recognition on the onset of the generally accepted calendar year of 2001, but not without due respect for the calendars of choice of other cultures whose contributions to society have helped make America great (not to imply that America is necessarily greater than any other country or is the only "America" in the western hemisphere), and without regard to the race, creed, color, age, physi-

cal ability, religious faith, choice of computer platform, or sexual preference of the wishee. (By accepting this greeting, you are accepting these terms.) This greeting is subject to clarification or withdrawal. It is freely transferable with no alteration to the original greeting. It implies no promise by the wisher to actually implement any of the wishes for her/himself or others, and is void where prohibited by law, and is revocable at the sole discretion of the wisher. (This wish is warranted to perform as expected within the usual application of good tidings for a period of one year, or until the issuance of subsequent holiday greeting, whichever comes first, and warranty is limited to replacement of this wish or issuance of a new wish at the sole discretion of the wisher.)

Or, as I wanted to say before the lawyers got a hold of it...Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year in Ellicottville or wherever you are."