

# EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

## We're all ready

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas... all over the place. We may not have snow but just about every other part of a traditional Canadian Christmas is in place ready for the merriest time of year.

Of course, the Santa Claus parade always sets off the commercial aspect of Christmas and activates shoppers on their quest to buy gifts for loved ones. Tradition says that gift giving started when the Three Wise Men brought gifts to the Christ Child in the humble stable at Bethlehem, following the passage of a bright star which guided them to the stable.

Santa Claus, which is a derivative of St. Nicholas, a bishop of Asia Minor in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., became the patron saint of Russia and Greece as well as that of children, sailors and travellers. Renowned for his generosity, especially to children, the saint's appearance from long-robed prelate to a right jolly old elf occurred when Clement Moore, an American poet, penned the classic, 'Twas the Night Before Christmas.

Is it our imagination or have you noticed that the number, and quantity of lighting displays started earlier this year? Some people had their lighting display switched on before December started, some modest and unassuming and some tastefully done, others have gone overboard with taste and relied on quantity. It's a fairyland out there in the evenings, worth the drive to see the different expressions of joy.

Psychologists may say that the tragic events of September 11 and subsequent war on terrorists have set off the wish for familiar and happy times. Light is always an expression of joy and the multitude of colours its highest expression.

Last Sunday was the first Sunday in Advent, the prelude to Christmas Day when the Christian Church prepares to commemorate the time of Christmas. Although some may have forgotten this is what CHRISTMAS is all about - the birth of a baby in Bethlehem - it is the reason for the season.

Advent, much like Lent before Easter, is a time of preparation for the commemoration of the birth of Christ Child. It found its expression last Sunday afternoon at Bethel Christian Reformed Church when the traditional Advent service of lessons and carols was hosted by the Acton Ministerial Association. It's also a time of reflection and meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation, the Christian doctrine of the union of divine nature and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ.

Although the weather has not indicated a traditional Canadian Christmas of snow, jingle bells, plum puddings and gorgeous fowl dinners, all the other trappings are in place. And there's still time for that white stuff.

## Needless tragedies

Careless smoking and use of candles, especially during the Christmas holiday season, create just the right situation for a fire.

That's the lesson from the recent tragic house fire on Trafalgar Rd., Georgetown, where three people lost their lives and one is in critical condition at Hamilton General Hospital.

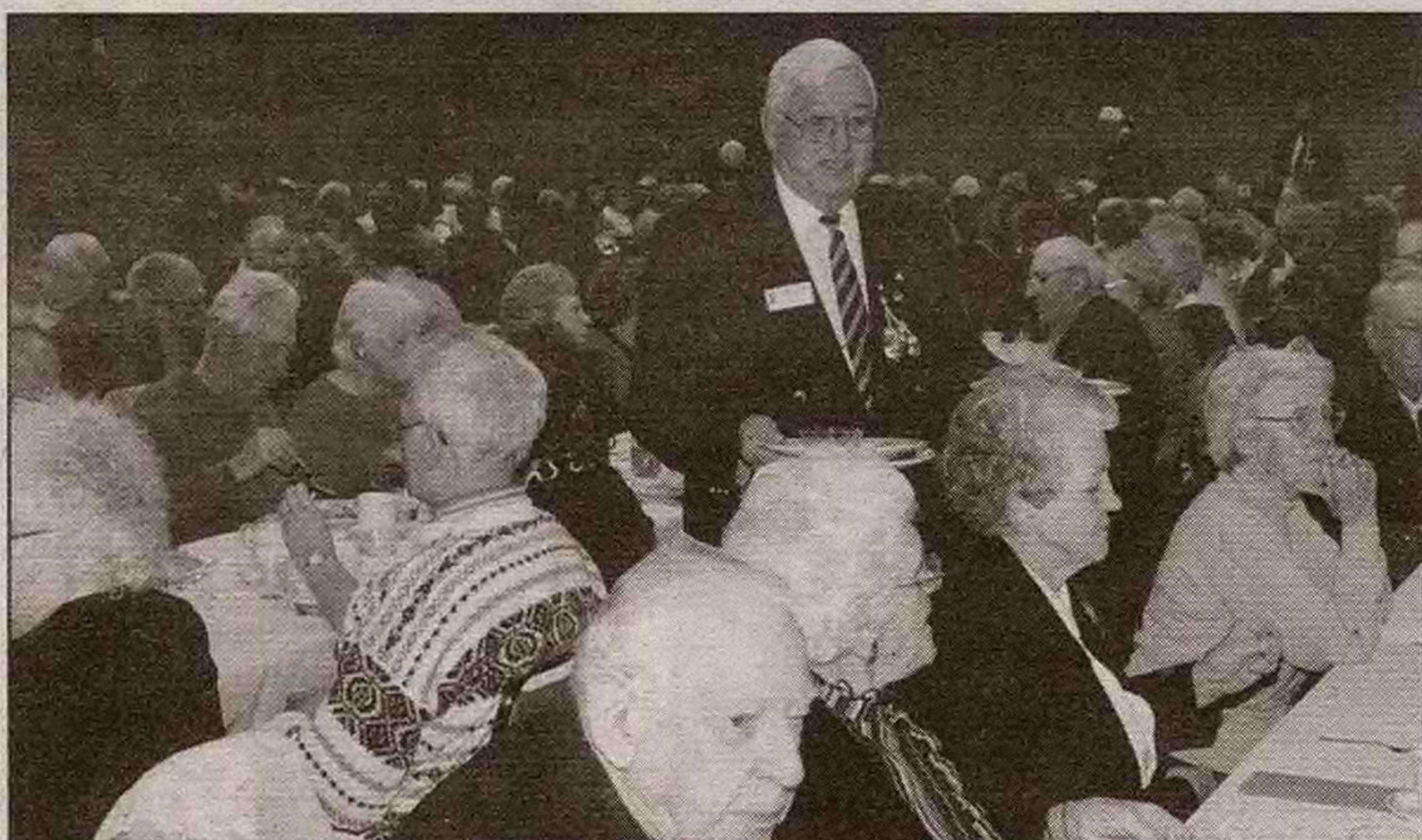
The Office of the Fire Marshall has determined the fire was caused by either careless smoking or a burning candle in a bedroom. Flames from there engulfed the entire house. Others escaped when their smoke alarm went off, noting the importance of smoke detectors in homes.

All three people, two adult and a baby, lost their lives due to smoke inhalation. It's possible their lives could have been saved if they had been warned in time to leave the premises.

Firefighters continually advise people to check the batteries in detectors when they turn back their clocks each year. It's good advice and could save your life.

The chances of fire happening are compounded when people live in multi-family dwellings where there may be people who smoke in bed, or burn candles, especially during the Christmas period when candles and festivities go hand in hand.

Be careful this Christmas season. We don't need further tragedies to blacken what should be one of the happiest times of the year.



SENIOR SERVANT: Legion Poppy Chairman Frank Spielvogel was among the Legionnaires and Rotarians serving the 300 plus Seniors at the annual Christmas dinner.

## Green budget would boost security

Canadians can expect new money for border security and the military, but not much else. That's the word on the coming federal budget and, if true, it's not bad because taking some active steps to protect the environment would not just help the natural world, they would also improve public health and increase Canada's security as added benefits.

The horrific September 11 attacks on the US have Canadians understandably shaken. The threat of bioterrorism is very real and people are on their guard. Without a doubt, we are living in a disturbing new world, where what was once unthinkable has become reality.

But we have to remember that improving national security doesn't end with adding more border guards and airport police, or buying new helicopters and other equipment. Maintaining public health, safe food and water, and a secure energy supply are also vital to national security. And that could be bolstered with a budget that looks at issues of security beyond just the defence of our borders.

Consider public health, for example. Although anthrax and other terrorism concerns are certainly legitimate, we have to keep them in perspective. Sadly, 24 Canadians died in the World Trade Center attack. Yet federal government statistics show that up to 16,000 Canadians die prematurely every year as a result of air pollution. These deaths may be less dramatic, but they are no less traumatic for family members who see the lives of loved ones cut short because of dirty air.

Having safe water and reducing

### Science Matters

—by David Suzuki



our exposure to toxic substances are also national security concerns. The tragedy in Walkerton, Ontario, that resulted in seven deaths, and the hundreds of boil-water advisories across the country have made Canadians acutely aware of the connection between ecosystem health and human health. Medical professionals are all too aware of this connection. The Canadian Institute of Child Health, for example, says that exposure to toxic substances in the environment has likely contributed to a 25 per cent increase in childhood cancer over the past 25 years.

The financial costs of treating people affected by environmental pollution are very high. The Ontario Medical Association, for example, says that health problems caused by poor air quality costs taxpayers \$1 billion a year in Ontario alone. Provincial governments have been hard at work lobbying the finance minister for more health care money in the coming budget, but a focus on prevention, as well as on treatment, would help save money and have other benefits.

One of those benefits would be to reduce Canada's dependence on volatile global energy markets. By reducing our consumption of polluting fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, Canada could become less vulnerable to fluctuating world oil prices.

Improving energy efficiency in our buildings and transportation systems, and taking advantage of Canada's own renewable resources like wind would also cut air pollution and create new jobs. Unfortunately, most of the generous tax incentives available to the fossil fuel sector are not available for renewable energy projects. Energy efficiency has been generally ignored in favour of single-site energy megaprojects that are capital, rather than job intensive.

Canada would do well to start changing those policies now, because we have international obligations to meet. Under the Kyoto protocol, we have agreed to cut our greenhouse gas emissions by six per cent below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012. The sooner we start making those cuts, the greater the benefits will be in terms of job creation, improved public health and lowered overall costs of health care and environmental damage. Those cuts are also important because global warming is considered to be one of the greatest threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Experts say a warming climate could cause tremendous environmental and economic damage, which would greatly increase global insecurity.

On the surface, national security may just seem like a matter of policing and military defence, but it is much more than that. Public safety ultimately depends as much on a healthy environment as on secure borders and airports. With the right incentives and allocations in the coming budget, we could have both.

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



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