

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles

Reverse rewards

New Tanner columnist Mike O'Leary said it bluntly about the stunning increase in user fees for schools: they're gross.

Here we have local social, leisure and recreational groups, dedicated to serving the youth of Halton Hills, having to dish out thousands of dollars in fees for the use of schools which they own. For instance, if the Acton Girl Guides continue to use the gyms at two Acton schools it would cost \$12,500 annually to run their programs.

Fortunately they may be able to use the Acton Scout House for their activities. But there are other groups who must shell out big bucks for use of the schools they own, such as the badminton club which faces a 134% increase.

Halton Hills council has ameliorated the impact of the fees by delaying implementation of the agreement until September of next year but user groups will eventually have to pay the piper.

The whole user increase goes right back to the new funding formula from Queen's Park for non-educational uses of schools. The funds were cut, as a New Tanner story last week noted. The cash-strapped Halton school boards and the Town have worked out a revenue neutral reciprocal deal for use of each others' facilities, staff operating time and maintenance.

School costs, under the deal, will see the more than 80 user groups in Halton Hills paying the increased fees. In the tit for tat arrangement the Town, in turn, will charge the school board for its use of parkland adjoining school sites.

This compound-complex arrangement which replaces the traditional open use of public property is designed to make users pay, an arrangement which in most cases we could call fair and equitable. But not where it concerns clubs and organizations such as the Girl Guides, which provide pursuits for young people, which keeps them off the streets, and out of trouble.

It's ridiculous that we should penalize these activities with prohibitive fees when they do so much to provide good, clean programs for young people. It's especially galling, as columnist O'Leary points out, when we are compelled to pay \$81,000 for a needle exchange for drug addicts.

It's obvious the system is out of whack. Instead of reward the good and punish the wicked, it's reward the wicked and punish the good.

If you're perturbed about not only these user fees but about the direction society seems to be taking us, let your elected representatives know, from local councillors all the way to the Region, Province, and Federal levels. Shake 'em up a bit!

Good budget?

Finance Minister Paul Martin delivered his much heralded 2001 budget, entitled *Securing Progress in Uncertain Times*, to the House of Commons on Monday of this week.

If you heard the critics before you found out what the budget was all about, like this writer, then you knew there was little that was right about it. No money for this, no money for that, and we're heading down the tubes - again.

Then you hear the government's defence of the budget and you think maybe the critics are just blowin' in the wind.

"With this budget, the government is striking the right balance and inspiring confidence," says our MP, Julian Reed. "It addresses the new global reality while maintaining good fiscal management and investing in the environment. It ensures that commerce flows freely across the Canada-US border by investing substantially in security infrastructure." So when you cut through the bafflegab obviously the budget's a good thing for the country.

But who is a feller supposed to believe - the critics or the government?

It really doesn't matter because no matter what we may believe the government in power holds all the aces. All we can do is grouch.



SENIOR SERENADE: The Robert Little Junior Choir entertained at the Seniors' Recreation Centre on Monday afternoon with a program of seasonal Christmas music under the direction of leader/teacher Mrs. June Tribe. The Seniors' thoroughly enjoyed the youngsters' choir which is composed of students from guides 1 to 5. - Ted Tyler photo.

Watching IGA grow fascinating

By: Angela Tyler

The new IGA has been a focal point in my daily life since August. I had just returned from Florida and as I passed by work to go home, the sign was there like it had a glowing light around it "Home of the new IGA Marketplace."

Every day at work had been a new adventure. Conversations at work revolved around the daily construction developments. What was the big orange tarp for? Is that where they are pouring the concrete pad for McDonalds? What's with that huge triangle, are they trying to summon aliens to Acton? Later I found out it was the ornamental roof structure. Why were they tearing up freshly laid asphalt? How many times a day can Mike Manes drive by to check the progress? Every day for months we watched, observed and waited.

When opening night came, I too had to flock to the new store. I was happy to see the wide selection yet sad to see my daily nosiness come to an end.

I was tempted to avoid the crowds on the first night and do my shopping either late at night or early in the morning. A 24 hour a day store was just like the Winn Dixie near my parents' condo in Florida. There had been many a night when we stopped there to pick up essentials. It was then I had the idea. "Hartley, I want to do a column on late night IGA shopping and staff." It seemed perfect and intriguing. I had previously written something about Acton's downtown after hours, but I wondered who shopped at 2 a.m.?

By Wednesday I had planned to avoid grocery shopping until Friday. I decided I would do the weekly chore then, maybe after midnight. By Thursday, my refrigerator was bare and I could wait no longer. I thought I could still research on Friday, but by



Allison Clemmens

11 p.m. I was in dreamland.

Saturday became an alternative. Following a Christmas party, with my camera in tow, I went to IGA around 11 p.m. There were a few cars in the parking lot, but the store was like a ghost town. There were only a few shoppers and a handful of staff keeping the place going.

I was hoping there would be a student working that night to interview. On the opening night, the cashiers were like soldiers in their new uniforms. Slender high school girls with sandy blonde hair in a pony tail, which could have been clones. I had heard one of the most popular shifts for the high school students was 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. This way they could go to school, work full time hours and still manage to cram some sleep in. I just thought they would be the most talkative.

There was a woman on cash and one of the high school girls at the photo desk. She even had the sandy blonde hair. Perfect I thought. After introducing myself, I asked her name. Her tag said Allison, then I asked, "Last name?" She told me it was Clemmens. I looked up from my pen and paper. I felt a hundred years old. Here was little Allison Clemmens, the girl who rode one of

the bus routes I drove occasionally a few years back. My dad always said you always remember the really good kids and the really bad ones. Fortunately, Allison and her sister were the good kids. My story had taken a curve and we ended up talking briefly about the store and more about her.

A grade 10 student at Acton High School, she also worked in the old IGA. She told me it was different working here, more busy and the other store was more quaint. She confirmed what I had heard about the shifts. I asked her about another thing I heard where cashiers weren't permitted to chew gum, which she also confirmed. She told me they also didn't want them to have any facial piercings (chalk one up for IGA!).

She is learning to balance a 20 hour a week job which may find her working on a Saturday night, cramming the studies in between and trying to have the teenage social life as well. Allison was well versed, pleasant and had only positive things to say about her employment.

Following the click of my camera, I had a good feeling. It was nice to see that she was still one of the 'good kids' I remember, even though it did make me feel ancient. It was then that I saw a cart full of goods. I was hopeful it might be a midnight shopper I could chat with. Instead it was an employee restocking all the "don't want its" from the check outs.

I was going to try again on Sunday to do the middle of the night shopping adventure. Then on Sunday afternoon, reading the National Post, found they had scooped my story idea. They had already done a story on people shopping in the middle of the night. At that point I decided it was time to let IGA go and get some much-needed rest.



THE NEW Tanner

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Distributed to every home
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