

GRAPEVINE



Dairy Queen coming?

Dairy Queen wants to come to Acton and is looking for a franchisee who is involved in the community, or from Acton, to put up a freestanding DQ Brasier restaurant with a drive-through and a patio.

DQ has had "several nibbles" since putting up a sign asking for interested people to contact them about an Acton store, but franchise development manager Sherry McNeil, said the sign site, the former Canadiana site on Queen Street and Acton Boulevard, is not the only location suitable for a DQ and they would like the successful franchisee to be part of the location decision.

A franchisee needs \$200,000 in unencumbered cash and a total investment of approximately \$800,000, not including the price of the land, to open a DQ.

McNeil said they want to come to Acton because of the projected growth rate, traffic rates, demographics and the small community atmosphere.

"We'd like to open in Acton this year, but we need to find the right candidate and then award the franchisee for that area."

School trips

It was history and civics for Grade 8 students at McKenzie-Smith Bennett School last week as they visited Ottawa and points between on the traditional graduating from grade school trip for public board students in Acton.

Two busloads from MSB spent three days in the capital being tourists and having fun, without incident.

While there wasn't enough interest among Grade 7 students from Acton's Catholic school this year, 40 Grade 8 students from St. Joseph School will head to Camp Tanamakoon in Algonquin Park next month for a five-day stay.

St. Joseph principal Colin Simpson, who has taken classes to Tanamakoon in the past, said the best part of taking the kids to the camp, now owned by a former Halton Catholic board teacher is seeing the transformation in some of the kids who come in "all cocky,

self-assured and street-wise."

"They suddenly come around and start acting like kids again - they lose that edge and appreciate what Canada is all about - the beauty and nature and expanse of Canada," Simpson said.

Fundraising successes

Acton showed just how generous it can be, digging deep for two worthy causes last week, including fundraisers to help send needy children to camp and for a new Acton Fall Fair building in Prospect Park.

The annual Tim Hortons Camp Day promotion in Acton last Wednesday raised \$5,316.44 - approximately \$1,000 more than last year - to help send underprivileged kids, including two Acton girls, to a Tim Hortons Foundation camp. The Acton girls will go to the camp in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, in August.

Tim Hortons owner/operator John Malinosky said he and his staff, who have sent at least two kids to camp for the past nine years, say special thanks to "all of the people and supporters of Tim Hortons for coming out and helping send these children to camp."

Four Ford Motor employees who live in Acton and several Acton High School students braved cool temperatures and stiff breezes on Saturday to raise \$440.42 at a car wash and raffle to benefit the Acton Agricultural Society's building fund.

The team washed at least 90 cars at the Toth Motors lot and held a raffle for a Web camera - Acton's Randy Christopher was the winner - and were thanked by Society president Hank Walsma, who gratefully accepted the donations following Saturday's event.

Walsma said the fair board is now looking at constructing a new building adjacent to the BoatHouse that would be about 75 by 100-feet, approximately one-third smaller than the building originally planned for Prospect Park.

Walsma said they hope to relocate the poultry barm, now used for storage for most the year, to an area near the old arena, and apply for grant money to restore it.



LOYAL: CUSTOMER: This was driver Karen Peterson's second trip through a car wash (driving different vehicles) at Toth Motors on Saturday to benefit the building fund of the Acton Agricultural Society. On hand were Society president Hank Walsma (second from right), local Ford mechanic Joe Mota (kneeling) Acton High School student Judy Robinson (hooded), Bryan Robinson, Steve Toth and (back left) Dan Zabukovec. The event raised \$440.42. - Frances Niblock photo

Oddities in the news

Two local news items recently left me with the immediate reaction - Isn't that odd? Let me run through them with you and see if your reaction is the same.

About three weeks ago, Halton Board of Education Trustee and Board Chair Ethel Gardiner announced a funding problem with the '02-'03 proposed budget. Normally, most of us pay little or no attention to what I have come to regard as the annual 'Chicken Little' rant. It's spring, the grass is growing, leaves are appearing and school boards across the province are crying poormouth.

What struck me this year was the programs the boards are suggesting may be cut. Those mentioned are Drug Abuse Resistance (DARE), Celebrating Literacy and Food for Thought. That seems to me to be an odd choice. I would think, given the social conditions today's kids live in, the DARE program would be untouchable.

I can't help but wonder why the school board would have the Halton Social Planning Council (Who are they?) running a literacy program in their schools. Aren't schools, by definition, a literacy program in their own right?

I never want to see any child go hungry but have always had reservations about school organized breakfast and snack programs. Shouldn't the schools be calling in children's aid if parents are sending their children to school without breakfast? After all, if spanking a child is supposed to be child abuse, what do we call not providing food for children?

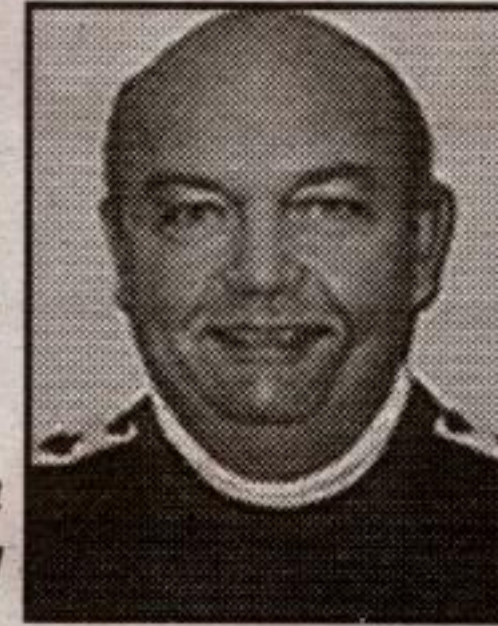
The newspaper article mentioned that these programs cost about \$170,000 to run. Not an insignificant sum, but not a major factor in a budget that is over \$281 million.

This brings me back to a question I asked in this space several weeks ago, a question which has gone unanswered. That being, "Why is the board holding on to Speyside school?"

I noticed last weekend that the grass in front of the school was cut. The rest of the property looks like crap but that's another story. I assume the school is heated and, that some maintenance is being done. It's a big building so I wouldn't doubt that it costs upwards of \$100,000 annually to keep that building empty. And it's been empty for years and years.

The Way I See It

with Mike O'Leary



So my question to Ethel Gardiner is; how can your board be short of money when you obviously have hundreds of thousands of dollars to fritter away maintaining empty buildings for decades?

It's situations like this that lead most taxpayers to be skeptical about anything school boards say. Remember the ridiculous proposal of a few years ago to sell off a portion of the MSB School playground? Speyside School was empty then, too.

I suspect all these announcements about program cuts are just the boards trying to put heat on the Provincial Government. I wonder when parents will finally get angry enough with the 'educrats', who insist on playing political games using children as pawns, to demand changes. Rather than cutting programs perhaps the senior board administrators should threaten to quit if they don't get additional funding. A few less administrators would free-up lots of program money.

But I'll be surprised if any of them act on my suggestion. It's much more effective to pick on the children.

I'm a sucker for a happy ending. I think most of us are. Why then would I not be pleased to see the picture of MPP Chudleigh, MP Reed, MP Mitchell (Sect'y of State for Rural Development), Councillor Robson and a member of the Localmotion Fundraising Team in the paper. The occasion was to mark a \$3.14 million grant being received for the new Georgetown Recreation Centre.

I have never been a fan of this project. I know the residents of Georgetown South need recreational facilities. It's all the bells and whistles that I object to. We can't afford to run a DARE program in our schools but we need a sauna? I especially think this project is foolish because there already is a 'recreation centre' 10 minutes away from this proposed location. That facility, I am told, loses upwards of a half-million dollars per year.

So I fear they are building a very

expensive white elephant.

The cost of this facility has skyrocketed, but will the town use the new money to reduce the cost to ratepayers? Pshaw - Don't be silly. As Town Chief Administrative Officer Steve Andrews put it "Without this money we would have had to cut back on the scope of the project." Gee, wouldn't that have been a shame? Instead we're going to have a bigger lobby, more glass (harder to heat?) more parking etc. Sounds to me like they're just spending money for spendings sake. But then governments never do that - do they?

What kills me is the attitude that this \$3.14 million is new found money that messers Chudleigh and Reed came up with. The reality is that while the money the town spends comes from you and I, the money from the feds and province comes from ... well ... you and I, actually.

So here's what really happened. The town was going to cut down on the frills because the costs were too high. The feds and province, armed with our money, rescued the day. So now we get to pay for a Lollapalooza of a rec. centre and we're supposed to be happy about it.

I really don't buy into the proposition that elaborate public buildings instill pride into the residents of a community. We must have recreational facilities but must we finance the town going into competition with private banquet facilities? I have no problem with politicians having delusions of grandeur. I just wish they'd pay for them themselves. And, as for the pride thing, what is Hazel McCallion's Mississauga known best for. Stable taxes. And, of course, that monstrosity of a City Hall she built. Which just goes to prove that even Hazel has the odd bad day.

What struck me as odd was the picture of the participants in this exercise. All had big smiles and 'thumbs-up.' I couldn't help but feel they were really celebrating the thought they had fooled us again. We're expected to be grateful that we've been bought with our own money. If they were honest, instead of a 'thumbs-up', they'd use a different finger.

Politicians run these dog and pony shows all the time. They count on us buying into them. Do they really think we're that dumb?

On the other hand, we keep reelecting them. Isn't that odd??

Funding shortfall...

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restructured our service delivery model. We now partner with community agencies such as the Children's Aid Society and Community Resource Services in an effort to meet the diverse needs of the students we serve. Workers from these agencies partner with our staff to provide service to students. However, despite our best efforts, Halton students are counted among the 37,000 students in this province on waiting lists for Special Education programs and services.

And what is the outlook for the Halton District School Board for the coming year? Gloomy, to say the least! Recently, the government announced an increase of \$350 million for students in Ontario. We have received our General Legislative Grants for next year and they simply reflect that announcement. The \$86 million announced from enrolment growth is not new money invested - it's part of the funding formula presently. Of the \$15 million announced for students at risk, a very small amount will come to Halton, nor do we qualify for any of the \$23 million for boards with declining enrolment. Further, the \$23 million announced for transportation simply makes permanent the

one-time grant announced last December. Again, not new money, but the re-announcement of money we are already spending.

Halton will receive approximately \$4.5 million, based on the \$100 per pupil amount. This represents a 1.5% increase for the coming year, while the Consumer Price Index for Ontario is at 3.1%. Under the law, we are required to pass a balanced budget. Make no mistake, in order to achieve a balanced budget there will be significant cuts which will dramatically impact the students we serve.

An analysis of the audited financial statements of all boards in Ontario, obtained from the Ministry, identified a \$1.1 billion shortfall in five key operating areas. Unless the upcoming provincial budget directs more money to public education, your children are at great risk. Unless the government increases funding to a level which reflects present realities, such as inflation, programs and services that parents value and students deserve will be in great jeopardy.

Sadly, school boards have no choice.

Yours truly,
Ethel Gardiner
Chair of the Board