

OPINION

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Phone: 905-873-0301
Fax: 905-873-0398

Rights lost in cyberspace

Whether or not Georgetown resident Craig Harrison is found responsible of posting hate propaganda on a Toronto website is something that won't be determined for months.

Not that Harrison, who spent two years in jail for assaulting a black Georgetown shopkeeper while shouting racial slurs, will likely care as he stormed out of his three-day Canadian Human Rights Tribunal hearing in Toronto after only a few hours and never returned.

The hearing, which wrapped up Wednesday, was prompted by a complaint from Ottawa lawyer Richard Warman who testified he found several racist or threatening messages on a website that he believes were posted by Harrison.

If found responsible for the postings, Harrison faces a penalty of up to \$10,000 and a permanent court order preventing him from posting hate propaganda on the Internet.

As distasteful as this case is, the bigger issue is how the Internet can be misused and what little power police and the courts have to deal with that misuse.

Law enforcement officials admit they are dealing with outdated laws that have not kept pace with the Internet. Hate propaganda has been made more accessible through the Internet and police are often hamstrung when trying to prove who posted the material.

Blogs, "community forums", comment rooms and other such avenues on the Internet are becoming more popular, but do not face the restrictions (i.e. libel/slander laws) that mainstream media do. Inaccurate, malicious and damaging material can often be found on these sites but the people administrating the sites and/or posting messages can hide behind the cloak of anonymity or the all-encompassing "right to freedom of speech" argument.

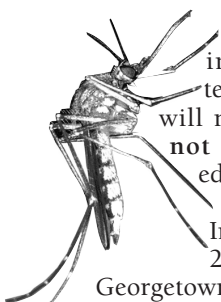
But what of the rights of their targets? Should they not have legal recourse? Is everyone and everything fair game?

Certainly no one wants to see Big Brother controlling cyberspace but when blatant abuses have occurred there must be just penalties in place to protect the rights of those maligned.

It's time our lawmakers catch up with the technology.

Something bugging you?

Send us a letter!



Letters to the editor must include an address and daytime telephone number. Unsigned letters will not be published. Letters should not exceed 200 words and may be edited for content and/or length.

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Independent & Free Press,
280 Guelph St., Unit 29,
Georgetown, ON., L7G 4B1

E-mail:

jmcghie@independentfreepress.com

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Steve Nease



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CASHh proud of record helping patients

Dear editor,
Re: Cancer groups have common enemy (May 10 letter).
We regret that Linda MacKinnon-Ringuette and family have had to live a parent's nightmare of having a child diagnosed with cancer. I wish to clarify that Cancer Assistance Services does not consider what we do versus the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) is out of any malicious squabbles against them.

We are proud that over six years ago, a few good volunteers felt very strongly about keeping practical services for cancer patients and their families. This is why we were formed. CASHh realizes that, while research is important, much-needed practical help is vital also. Since the CCS has stopped funding most practical assistance it was important to our community that we continue to provide quality service that many deserved and expected.

We are different and while we support research with excess funds, our main priority is being there for the patient in a serviceable way. The fact that close to 500 people have come to us for support makes our organization needed, successful and appreciated. Many referrals come from the CCS itself.

Because we are different and have a different mission for our donated funds, perhaps the many organizations soliciting for research funds should be under the same roof. We are proud this community cares and

generously supports the quality service we provide. The many special events are a tribute to how our municipality feels about being kind to those struggling with cancer.

We are fortunate that having cancer in this community means you will be cared for and have a special place to go for comfort and service.

Our greatest wish would be that cancer didn't hurt people, but until a cure is found and the phone stops ringing and there is no need for people needing personal attention, we will be here for them.

Sheila Smith,
Executive Director,
CASHh

Town right not to fly Pride flag

Dear editor,
Re: Town accused of racism for not flying Pride flag (June 7 *Independent & Free Press*).

Personal preference is not an issue of national, provincial or municipal importance, unless you are conducting a marketing survey.

Gay and lesbian lifestyles are a personal preference. Terry Fox did not contract cancer by personal preference, but, through compassion for others who may and did go through what he did, chose to do something to benefit society.

Canadian soldiers who took part in liberating Holland 1945 did so out of national pride and duty to benefit society.

I prefer uncola drinks, others may prefer cola drinks and, oh yes, then there is Dr. Pepper. Should we fly soft drink flags to celebrate our personal preferences. No!

Canadian society is the most accepting in the world, be it on issues of national origins, religious

preference and lifestyles. If the parties involved are not happy with the response of Halton Hills council, then don't live here. Go to other countries and see how your demands for social change are accepted. I applaud council's decision on this issue, for not being influenced by badgering from Halton Pride.

The problem with accepting some minorities to equality (which is proper) is that they then want to have special rights and privileges above those who have graciously accepted them as equal.

To Mr. Domenic Padula (of Halton Pride), I say, "Be thankful that here in Canada we have the social structure which enables us to have our own personal preferences and quit with the flag-waving!"

Kenneth Asseltine,
Georgetown

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STAFF DIRECTORY

Publisher

Ken Nugent

Advertising director

Steve Foreman

(sforeman@independentfreepress.com)

Retail advertising manager

Cindi Campbell

(ccampbell@independentfreepress.com)

Managing editor

John McGhie

(jmcghie@independentfreepress.com)

Business manager

Carol Young

(cyoung@independentfreepress.com)

Distribution manager

Nancy Geissler

(distribution@independentfreepress.com)

ADVERTISING

Retail Sales:

Jennifer Spencer (jspencer@independentfreepress.com)

Adam Spinney (aspinney@independentfreepress.com)

Brendan Louth (blouth@independentfreepress.com)

Andrew Key (akey@independentfreepress.com)

Michelle Wan (features@independentfreepress.com)

Real estate:

Sue Spizziri (realestate@independentfreepress.com)

Classifieds:

Kristie Pells (classified@independentfreepress.com)

ACCOUNTING

Rose Marie Gauthier, Jennifer Christie, Michelle Wimmer

EDITORIAL

Cynthia Gamble: News editor

(cgamble@independentfreepress.com)

Ted Brown: Photography

(tbrown@independentfreepress.com)

Lisa Tallyn: Staff writer

(ltallyn@independentfreepress.com)

Eamonn Maher: Staff writer/sports

(emaher@independentfreepress.com)

PRODUCTION:

Mary Lou Foreman, Kevin Powell,

Shelli Harrison, Dolores Black, Debbie MacDougall