



## Chamber partners with local business on democracy initiative

by Eric Doubt  
Communication Associates

When the citizens of Halton Hills, and those across Ontario, vote in the municipal elections this November, they will not likely turn out as a majority. But they will be exercising a right with origins dating back to at least 600 BC in India and Greece. After more than 2500 years of evolution from privilege to right, voting is available to a minority of the world's population. Today, in many of the world's democratic countries, the vote is largely free and universal but this has taken time.

In Canada, as elsewhere, the vote was at first limited to men of means and influence. Canadian women gained the right only in 1918 and the last of restrictions applied against aboriginal, religious and racial groups here was not lifted until 1960. Why do so relatively few people choose to vote and so many decide not to? Why is such a foundation of modern democratic society not more tightly embraced? Both concerned citizens and dismayed politicians ask these questions.

A local web applications and development company, **Ormac Inc.** (www.ormac.com), which specializes in ideas and technologies for business, decided to do something about voter turnout. Mark McIntyre, Ormac President, and his team developed an interactive election web site, **Letsvote.ca**, and approached the Chamber to launch it for the municipal election. Because a common excuse among people who do not vote is lack of knowledge about candidates and issues, the goal of the site is to provide a one-stop

cross-reference to election issues and the candidates' platforms. This will give voters with limited time for research, a chance to brush up and make a more informed decision. "If it works well at this level, we'll relaunch it for the next federal election," Mark said.

**"If Letsvote.ca works well at this level, we'll relaunch it for the next provincial election."**

*Mark McIntyre, Ormac Inc.*

With the cooperation of Sue Walker, General Manager of the Chamber, **Letsvote.ca** has become a vibrant partnership between Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce, **Ormac Inc.** and the community. The Chamber has developed the content for the site and **Ormac** has contributed the design, programming and its proprietary Content Management System. The Chamber has encouraged all municipal candidates to get their photos, platforms, bios, contact information and links to their websites up as soon as possible so full advantage can be taken of this opportunity.

Traditionally, turnout rates in Canadian municipal elections have been low, which is puzzling for those interested in local government

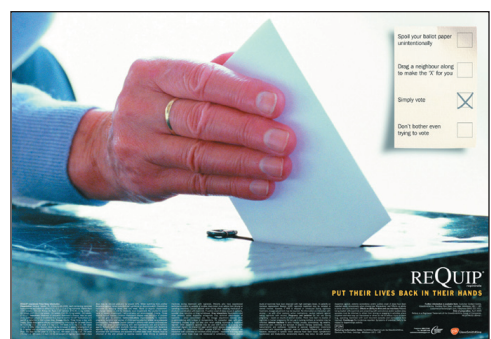
**What factors most influence municipal voter turnout?**

- **Municipal population size:** Turnout tends to be higher in smaller communities than in larger ones.
- **Election competitiveness:** Close mayoralty races usually have a positive impact on electoral participation.
- **Compelling local issues:** Examples include municipal amalgamation (e.g., the 1997 Toronto elections), the adoption of a new Community Plan, or public concern over a locally unwanted land use such as a landfill.
- **Questions on the ballot:** Referendum questions or plebiscites generally increase voter turnout.
- **Electorate demographics:** Higher educational levels tend to increase turnout. A greater proportion of homeowners versus tenants also increases voter turnout, since municipal governments focus primarily on services related to property.

The information on **Letsvote.ca** does not reflect the opinions of Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce or **Ormac Inc.** The goal is to increase interest in the election, the candidates and their platforms with the ultimate goal of increasing the turnout on election day, November 13. Information is supplied by the candidates and is not edited by the **Letsvote.ca** administrators. Information will not be edited for grammar or spelling and will be posted as submitted; however, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce **WILL NOT** post any items that contain personal attacks, coarse language or content of a questionable nature. Submissions deemed as unsuitable will be sent back to the candidate with an explanation outlining the reason it is being rejected. Candidates may update information/content at anytime, by resubmitting it to the Chamber.

In early September, the Chamber will poll its members to ask what they believe the top issues are facing the Halton Hills business community. From their response the Chamber will formulate three questions that will be sent to all registered candidates. Candidates will be given 7 days to respond, after which the Chamber will post all answers (or a lack of) on the website. Once answers are submitted, candidates will be unable to change or edit their response. As well, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce will be hosting a "Meet the Candidates" evening in October. This event will be open to the public.

Should you have any questions or comments please contact Sue Walker, General Manager, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce at info@haltonhillschamber.on.ca or 905-877-7119.



and communities. People ought to have a vested interest in the level of government that is closest to them, yet the statistics suggest that many are apathetic or somehow disengaged from the municipal political process.

Voter turnout averaged 34.6% across the GTA for the 2000 municipal elections. Toronto registered the highest voter turnout with 37.7%, while Halton had the lowest at 27.8%. Within Halton Region, Halton Hills had the highest with 39.2%

*Source: Local municipalities' and the City of Toronto's clerk's departments (data aggregated to regional level)*

**BusinessLink Profile**

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**BusinessLink on Holiday**

Pat McLeod of Tiburon Business Services vacationing on Merritt Island, Florida.

JOJO and Daniel in the hot sun at the Brisas Resort in Holguin, Cuba.

Eric Doubt, Communication Associates, doing relief work in Haiti with Healing Hands for Haiti Foundation.

Send in your pic reading BusinessLink on holidays, and you'll be on the front page, too!

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