

Rockwood student 'Premier' in Legislative Assembly

By Rebecca Ring

Ontario secondary school students gathered in Ottawa recently to participate in the Ontario Model Parliament, lead by "Premier" Jeremiah Rivers, a Grade 12 St. James Secondary school student from Rockwood.

The unique process began back in April, when the students met at Upper Canada College to choose party leaders and hold an election to choose their "Premier." After their election process was complete, they went on to Queen's Park where they spent three days holding a "Legislative Assembly" in the actual Provincial Parliament.

The students were divided into age groups and three political parties of their choosing - Liberal, Progressive Conservative and New Democrat. Rivers joined the Liberal camp and decided to run for party leader. His platform was based on party involvement and representing their principles. His "slogan" was: "A famous man once said, 'These are my principles, if you do not like them I have others.'" He says he did not expect to win and was even tempted to vote for someone else, but in the end he did indeed vote for himself as did many others. They went on to hold leadership debates and then the election, where Rivers' Liberals won a minority government.

Guest speakers addressed the students, speaking to the main issues of the election - health care, post-secondary education and the budget. The students then met with their Parties to write bill for each issue.

Rivers' Liberal Party developed a health care bill that included digitizing medical records to replace paper records to increase efficiency; creating physician units or teams of four or five that share patients and information via electronic documentation; expanding the medical clinic system to take pressure off emergency departments and having a nurse practitioner on duty at all times to fast-track care; and finally, advertise these clinics and physician teams to promote public awareness of alternatives to emergency rooms.

Their post-secondary bill included a tuition cap limiting increases to one per cent per year for four years; facilitating meetings of post-secondary institution heads to develop financial strategies; and setting aside \$150 million for four years in emergency funding for any post-secondary institution in serious difficulty. Rivers says many Ontario colleges and universities are at a critical stage, as costs are accelerating beyond revenue, so education suffers because the schools channel more finances into research, which has a higher financial return.

Some very innovative elements of the bill revolved around combating "brain drain" via scholarships, bursaries and student loans. Geographically based scholarships would require students to live in Ontario for at least five years prior to attending post-secondary school. Extra funding would be awarded to students who choose to attend a college or university in a 200 km radius of their family home.

Jeremiah Rivers Liberal leader in Model Parliament

Students enrolled in post graduate programs could have 90% of their OSAP loans paid by the Province if they used their degree for gainful employment in Ontario for four years. Rivers says the idea is to encourage deep community roots in Ontario so that people will choose to attend school and work in the Province.

Their budget featured two key elements intended to increase revenue, highway safety and fight crime. They included re-implementing photo radar, while maintaining an OPP presence on the highways, and increasing the cigarette tax, while spending more on policing the black-market tobacco and drug trade. The

third component of their budget was to restore the safety net fund to \$750 million, as it has been depleted by the recession. This was based on projected recovery and substantial growth in the economy.

Rivers' government presented their bills to the assembly and then broke into caucus meetings to discuss and refine them before voting. Rivers' says this is where he shone. He used leadership skills learned while volunteering for his church youth group, where he lead meetings every week.

"I learned how to have a feel for the room - to know when to stimulate discussion or when to calm things down," he says. His strategy was to hold a general discussion, then narrow it to specific points, and finally to form a plan of action. When the bills came to a vote, the health bill did not pass because there was no time for amendments, the education bill passed by a small margin, and the budget passed easily, giving Rivers' government a vote of confidence.

Rivers' has participated in the model parliament program for four years. He says it gets better each time and he can now envision a career in politics. He is taking a step toward it this September, when he will begin studies in Political Science at the University of Guelph.

'Pirates and Princess' dinner dance on Pioneer Day June 13

Pioneer Day in Rockwood is on tap this year for Saturday, June 13, and organizers are again planning a day filled with family fun and entertainment.

Hand-in-hand with the celebration, Animals Homeward Bound is sponsoring a Pioneer Day 'Pirates and Princess' dinner dance to be held at Lloyd Dyer Park

in Rockwood from 6pm to 1am. It includes a barbecue dinner, family fun and door prizes.

Tickets for the dinner dance can be purchased at the Rockwood Vet Clinic (519-856-9002) or by calling Diane Lea at 519-856-9154 as well as Lisa Logan at 519-856-9570 or Maria Reid at 519-856-9819. Adults are \$20 but a

family of four including two under 12 only costs \$50. Children under five are free.

Animals Homeward Bound is a non-profit registered charity providing aid for orphaned or injured wildlife or domestic animals including critical care, veterinary care, rehabilitation, release or placement.

Pioneer Day

"The Pirates & Princess" Dance
Sponsored by "Animals Homeward Bound"

Costume is optional.

Prize for best dressed Pirate or Princess

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

6pm - 1am

LLOYD DYER PARK, ROCKWOOD

Adults \$20

Family of 4 incl 2 under age 12 for \$50

Children under 5 free

Includes: BBQ Dinner, Family Fun, Door Prizes, etc.

TICKET HOLDERS ONLY

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT:

Rockwood Vet Clinic - 519-856-9002

Lisa Logan - 519-856-9570

Marla Reid - 519-856-9819

Wellington O.P.P. Report

On Wednesday, May 27, 2009 at about 10:50pm County of Wellington OPP officers investigated the driver of a 2008 GMC Pickup located driving on Mill Street, Erin. When police spoke to the driver, they found he had been drinking.

A 64-year-old Hillsburgh man has been charged with Impaired Driving and Over 80 mgs under the Criminal Code of Canada. He is scheduled to appear in Guelph court on July 6, 2009 to answer to the charges.

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