

GRAPEVINE



Tims for soldiers

Want to buy a soldier a cup of coffee?

Canadian soldiers in Kandahar, Afghanistan will continue to enjoy a free coffee thanks to the generosity of students and families at St. Joseph Catholic School that donated Tim Hortons gift cards for the troops.

A pre-Christmas drive garnered more than \$300 in gift cards from the St. Joseph community, eager to give Canadian soldiers a little taste of home at the Kandahar Tims that opened in 2006. The father of a St. Joseph student, a retired soldier, suggested the Tims program when asked what the school could do to help the troops.

Donations can be sent to the Military Families Fund, Canadian Forces Personnel and Family Support Services, 4210 Labelle Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K2.

Community donations

Thanks to the generous funding from Prosperity One Credit Union's Community Action Fund, a large number of local groups, organizations, sports teams and others were able to continue their work.

The foundation donated over \$33,000 to groups including Habitat for Humanity, the Halton Learning Foundation, Terry Fox Run and the Canadian Cancer Society. A recent survey found that Ontario credit unions increased their support for community projects to \$5.3-million in 2008, up 10 per cent from the previous year.

The 11,000 Halton members of Prosperity One said that active community involvement is an important factor in choosing Prosperity One as their financial institution.

Clinic a success

Canada Blood Services officials offer a big thanks to the 78 people who attended the blood donor clinic on Thursday at the Legion. They collected 67 units of blood – including three from first time donors.

Mark your calendars for the upcoming Acton clinics including: January 3 from 4 to 8 p.m., at the Acton arena/community centre, February 18 from 21 to 7:30 p.m., at the Acton Legion and March 4, from 4 to 8 p.m., at the Acton arena/community centre.

Local history

Do you have any old photos depicting early life in Halton's settlements and hamlets? Local author/historian John McDonald is working on his second book – Halton's Heritage – and is collecting photographs to help tell the tale.

Part of the book will tell the story of Major William Halton, the man the county was named for in 1816. Halton served as secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor and McDonald has been able to collect his military seconds and letters written at the time.

The second part of the book will delve into Halton's development through photos and a brief story – past to present – of each settlement or hamlet.

McDonald's first local history book, Halton Sketches Revisited, is available at Acton's Pharma Plus.

Family fun

Looking for something for the whole family to do on New Year's Eve? Check out the Town Hall Centre on Willow Street that will feature three rooms of fun and food including a video dance party, a family Wii challenge, arts and crafts, and fun and games.

Each child in attendance will be entered in a draw to ring the bell at 10:30 p.m. and Acton's 2008 Citizen of the Year, Hartley Coles, will do the bell ringing honours at midnight.

The festivities kick off at 7 p.m., and include a cash bar (beer and wine), door prizes, a 50/50 draw, a balloon drop at midnight and party favours.

A family pass is \$35 and everyone is welcome. Tickets are available at Trendz, Acton Optical and at partycinema.ca.

a feeding, the Dude and I were lying in bed half asleep watching the baby monitor when he turned to me and asked, "Have you noticed that even though we aren't getting hardly any sleep, it's not that bad and you're not that tired?" I couldn't have summed it up any better. Who needs sleep... we have a daughter whose only want in life is to be cared for and loved. What a great early Christmas present.



CHRISTMAS SPIRIT: This fully furnished doll house, constructed by Mr. Crechiola's Grade 10 construction class at Acton High School, was donated to Halton Women's Place. The class includes, back row: Carolyn Peirson, Justin Corbet, Rachel Peirson, August Kranendonk, Jesse McFadden, principal Bert O'Hearn, Nick Grant, Rachel Treleavan and Ashley Kenny. Front: Halton Women's Place rep., Derek Dercatch and teacher Mr. Crechiola. Absent; Corbin Resch and Andrew Clifford. – Submitted photo

Memories of Christmas Past

At this time of year children are on their best behaviour (usually). Their excitement is palpable as they anxiously await Christmas morning. Adults, in between nervous breakdowns, are busy with planning, shopping, cleaning and the myriad of tasks that Christmas brings.

Now that our children have grown and gone I find myself becoming more nostalgic every year. I don't get visited by the ghosts of Christmas past. Yet, I still have some way to go before becoming an official curmudgeon, but rather find my mind wandering into the mists of memories.

Looking back I have to say I've had a very fortunate life. I was born into a working class family, my dad was a service station manager, that was short on cash but blessed with abundant love. I've never known parents could say the same thing.

My earliest memories of Christmas were that I was spoiled although I didn't realize it at the time.

Being able to buy "wholesale" was a big deal in the 50's. In the days before big box stores and discounters there was only two price structures; wholesale and retail. My dad was a wheel-dealer and took great pride in having access to wholesalers.

I remember one Christmas where I got an electric train from Santa. No plastic in those days, the track sections snapped together if you were lucky and the electricity was delivered direct to the tracks

The Way I See It

with
Mike O'Leary



via a transformer. I'm surprised many of my generation didn't end up electrocuted.

This particular train would whistle and send up puffs of smoke when one dropped a pellet down the smoke stack of the engine except mine didn't. I can still see the stony face on my mom, as my poor dad went from frustration to resignation while trying everything he could think of to make the damn thing work.

Irish housewives didn't take failure graciously especially where the firstborn son was concerned. I don't remember how long my poor dad was in the doghouse but the story was told until she died years later. If my poor dad ever mentioned the word "wholesale" again my mom would react as if he had uttered a blasphemous obscenity.

Even though our family had some financial challenges, Christmas always brought one big gift, one small one and a myriad of homemade scarves and mitts. The majority of the gifts are long forgotten but the joy and celebration of Christmases past are forever etched in my mind. These traditions I carried with me as Mary and I started our own family.

When the children were small picking gifts was easy. We would listen to them as they watched T.V. and chirped

"I want that" to every toy commercial. Then we would pick the things we could afford with four children to satisfy. I have a strong suspicion that Mary would stretch the budget and worry about the consequences in January.

I've been fortunate to have found a person with whom I've been able to spend 40 Christmases. Mary presented me with four beautiful girls which is the greatest gift I have ever received.

So what was the best Christmas I can remember? I think all of them and I'm looking forward to this upcoming one albeit with an irreplaceable hole in my life. The children are all coming home. They have their own lives now and responsibilities to others who share their lives. I try to be gracious about these things.

I remember when we were first married I can vividly remember the mad dash we made every Christmas trying to satisfy her family in Picton and mine in Toronto. That lasted until after our second child was born and then Mary put her foot down and we alternated. I'd like to think I've learned that lesson and am prepared to be understanding in a selfish kind of way.

If you have grown children I hope you give them a break at Christmas. A little understanding, especially if they have little ones, will only strengthen your relationship.

When you get to my stage of life the memories of Christmas past form a big part of the celebration. I hope yours are as precious as mine.

Merry Christmas

Life, love...

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Little J, weighed in at 8 lbs, 5 ounces, which if you add them together is 13 and even more oddly and unplanned, there are 13 characters in her name. 13 is her lucky number and ours.

Everyone said our lives would change with her arrival and it has considering until she arrived I had never even changed a diaper in my life, however, it is an awesome change.

One night about 3 a.m. after