

GRAPEVINE



Santa letters

The 340 Acton area kids whose letters to Santa were collected at the Acton Santa Claus parade, and hundreds more, will each receive a personalized response from the North Pole – if they include a return address – thanks to “jolly” elves at the Acton Post office.

Citing Canada Post rules and Santa secrecy, Acton Supervisor Janet Lovegrove would only say that current and retired employees are helping Santa answer each letter – approximately 700 are expected – with a pre-printed letter, which they personalize. It’s the 29th year that Canada Post employees, called Postal Elves, have helped Old St. Nick answer letters that should be addressed to North Pole, HOH OHO.

Don’t forget a return address – Lovegrove has a big envelope of Acton letters without return addresses that they will try to respond to.

The New Tanner is curious what local kids want under the Christmas tree this year, and would like to publish a selection of their letters to Santa, which could be e-mailed or dropped off at the Tanner office on Queen Street, before being forwarded to the North Pole.

School fundraiser

Students at St. Joseph Catholic School raised over \$200 last week, and continue to raise money with Winter Wonderland pictures that are a hit with the kids who pay \$2 to don winter hats and mitts and pose for pictures with their friends. Proceeds will help pay for the school’s Boys’ Running Club to enter a Salvation Army marathon in Guelph on Saturday.

Right to Life

Five local youths will no longer live on the street or in sub-standard housing, thanks to a recent deal for a five bedroom Acton house for at risk youths enrolled in a Right to Life program that supplies transitional housing and early intervention.

A Halton housing official would not identify the property to maintain some privacy for the residents of the program that gets funding from the United Way of Halton Hills. He

said Acton was chosen for the new residence because housing is more affordable, and to meet the local need.

Intergenerational party

Participants in an intergenerational, interdenominational pilot project funded by a \$25,000 federal grant will meet for the final time on Saturday, December 4, at the Churchill Community Church annual English Tea and Bazaar. Local students and elders at three Acton churches (Churchill, St. Joseph and Bethel Christian Reformed Church), took part in the pilot project that taught students how to capture seniors’ life stories and spiritual heritage.

Project co-ordinator Nora Zylstra-Savage said the New Horizons grant allowed them to teach students how to conduct an interview, how to turn the information into a life/spiritual story and how to produce it in an anthology or booklet.

“We’re holding the final hoopla and celebration to get together one last time,” Savage said recently, adding the exercise allowed the students and seniors to develop “real, mutual respect” for each other.

Celtic Christmas

The Oakville Celtic Fiddle Club performs a Celtic Christmas show at Trinity United Church on Friday (December 3) at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available at the door. Call 519-853-2090 for details.

Warm welcome

The Acton Town Hall Centre will be a warming station and horse-drawn buggy stop during the Acton BIA’s Old Fashioned Christmas on December 11. The fun includes decorating gingerbread houses, a full costume dramatic reading of a scene from the classic *A Christmas Carol* by the Acton Town Hall Players. Centre volunteers are also beginning to sell tickets for the second annual New Year’s Eve family night festivities.

Stress buster

Dealing with family stress will be discussed at a parent seminar at McKenzie-Smith Bennett School on Monday (December 6). Hosted by the school’s Parent Council, the free seminar with a public health nurse will offer tips to help kids deal with stress.



FAIR FUNDS: Acton Agricultural Society President John Miller (left) recently presented a cheque for \$700 to Acton FoodShare officials Arlene and Norman Humphreys. The donation was proceeds from the Elvis show at the Acton Fall Fair. – Submitted photo

Leaders rally for tiger

By David Suzuki
with Faisal Moola



The Year of the Tiger ends in early February. Chinese zodiac aside, this hasn’t been a good year for the tiger. Even golfer Tiger Woods has had a better year than his namesake animal. And, as you know, his year sucked.

The situation for the tiger worldwide has become so precarious that politicians, scientists, conservationists, and bankers from 13 countries where tigers live met in Russia in November to discuss ways to save it from extinction. Government leaders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, and Russia signed the St. Petersburg Declaration, with the aim of doubling the world tiger population by 2022 – the next Year of the Tiger. The agreement calls for improved habitat protection and enhancement, and a crackdown on illegal poaching and trade in tiger parts.

Three of the nine subspecies of tiger are already extinct and the remaining six are endangered, two of them critically. A century ago, more than 100,000 tigers roamed the Eastern Hemisphere from the tropical forests of Malaysia to the subarctic woodlands of Siberia. Now, scientists believe only about 3,200 remain in the wild. Like Canada’s large iconic predators, including grizzly bears, tigers are threatened especially by habitat loss and fragmentation.

But tigers are encountering additional pressures. Tiger skins and body parts are valued by

poachers, in part because of their use in traditional Chinese medicine. Increasing conflict with people as human populations expand is also putting the tiger in danger.

As Vancouver writer John Vaillant notes in his excellent book *The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival*, it’s not just for the tiger’s sake that we should be concerned. Vaillant writes that “the tiger represents an enormous canary in the biological coal mine.” When a large predator like the tiger, or the grizzly here in Canada, is healthy, it’s a sign that the habitat and prey that support it are also healthy.

In a recent article, Vaillant writes that the tiger is “a bellwether for what scientists are calling the Sixth Great Extinction: the massive, human-driven loss of species currently underway across the globe.” He adds that “If the tiger is allowed to go extinct in the wild (and ‘allow’ is the operative word here), it will represent the first time in 10,000 years that such a large predator has disappeared from our collective landscape.”

Scientists believe the Earth has experienced five mass extinctions in its history, all caused by physical forces. This time humans are the cause. Biologists estimate that we are losing about 30,000 species a year, or about three every hour, through alteration of the landscape and atmosphere, pollution, over-exploitation of plants and animals, and introduction of alien species into ecosystems.

With the tiger, we have seen some small successes that should give us hope for the possibility of turning things around. In 1947, Russia became the first country in the world to protect the tiger, and the country’s population of Amur or Siberian tigers grew from a low of about 30 to 250 in the mid 1980s. As the Soviet Union started crumbling in the late 1980s, the tiger again became threatened because of the ensuing corruption and illegal deforestation and poaching. In 1992, Russia’s government implemented new conservation measures, which led to recovery and stabilization of the tiger population at about 450 today.

World leaders now appear to be taking the tiger’s fate seriously. With efforts and funding from a number of governments and conservation groups such as the Wildlife Conservation Society, Global Environment Facility, and the World Wildlife Fund, along with donations from individuals including movie star Leonardo DiCaprio, the tiger may be facing a brighter future.

If it is true, as Vaillant points out, that tigers are the bellwether for the Sixth Great Extinction, then we really have little time to lose. Our planet and its natural systems are resilient, but they have only recovered from past extinction events when the cause of those events dissipated. We absolutely must change the way we treat the natural systems of which we are very much a part, or we, as the cause of this impending extinction and as the top predator on the planet, will suffer the consequences.