

Brooks backs out of buying rural newspaper

By BRAD REAUME
The Champion

A suggestion of political conflict of interest has changed the attitudes of the new owners of the Nassagaweya News.

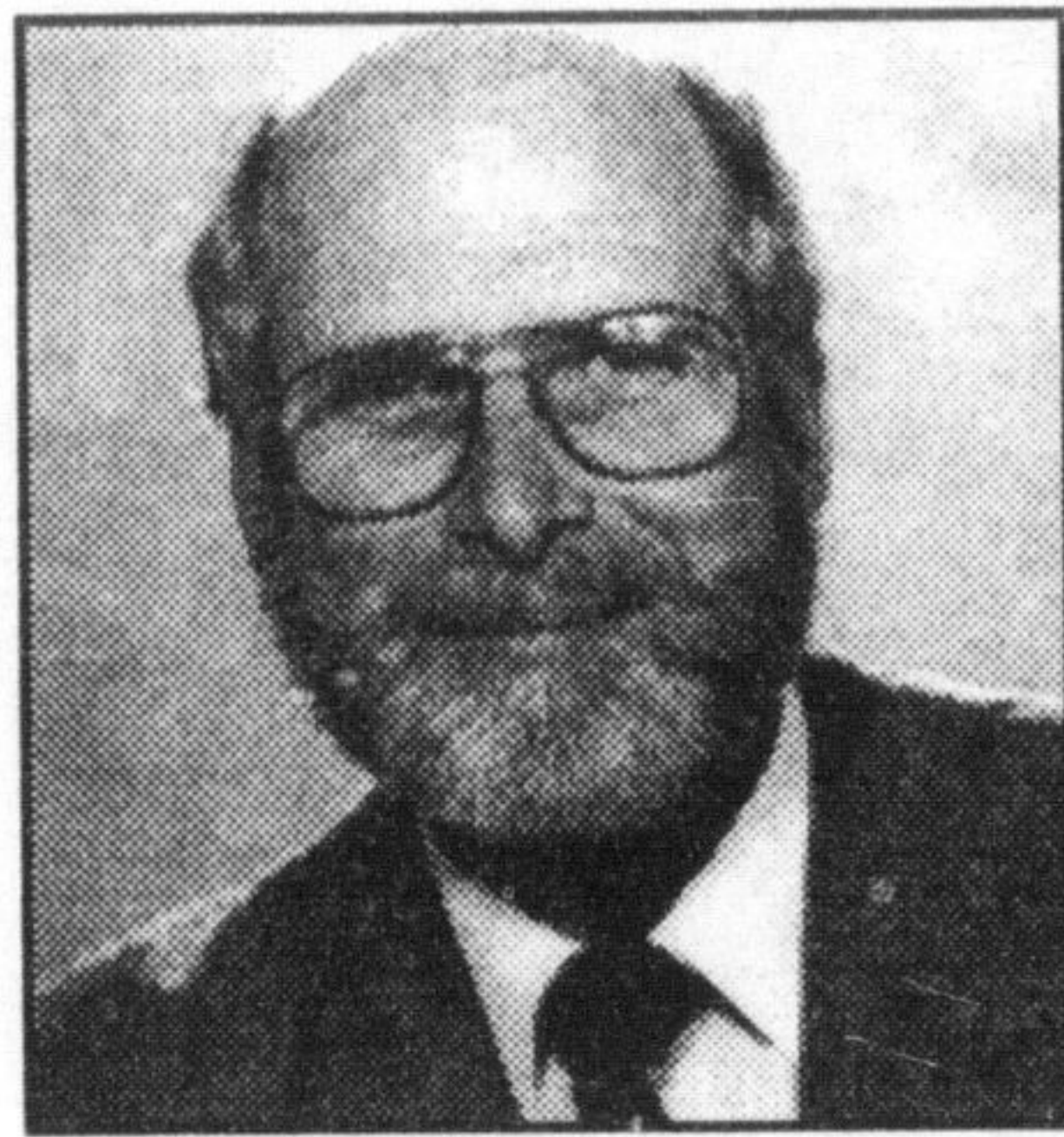
The monthly newspaper was owned by Dennis Snowden, who died this spring. His estate struck a deal to sell the publication to former town councillor Bruce Attenborough and Gerry Brooks, a current councillor.

Mr. Brooks first downplayed questions of impropriety due to his councillor status. However, less than 24 hours later he did an about-face, and announced he was withdrawing from participation in the ownership of the rural newspaper.

"I've decided not to become an owner of the Nassagaweya News," he told The Canadian Champion. "I see that some people are concerned about the potential for a conflict of interest and sometimes perception can be reality."

However, Helen Lisi, acting town clerk, said the Ministry of Municipal Affairs told her there is no legal difficulty with a municipal politician owning a newspaper.

Mr. Brooks said that he will help Mr. Attenborough with production of the publication. He said his role with the newspaper could change depending upon the outcome of the November municipal election. Mr. Brooks would not confirm if he will be a candidate, and said only that he was considering his options.



Gerry Brooks



Bruce Attenborough

As for his monthly column of six years, the two-term rural councillor said he had not given it much thought, however he would not rule out a return to print, given his changed status.

Mr. Brooks had said when he was still part of the ownership group, that he would cease writing his council news based column.

Mr. Attenborough expressed some bitterness regarding Mr. Brooks' withdrawal announcement.

"I thought it might be fun but so far the thing has cost me nothing but aggravation," he said. "Everyone sees a sinister plot when I'm involved in something. I don't need this. I wish I'd never got

ten involved."

Mr. Attenborough said continuing to run the newspaper is "the decent thing to do" adding that he would not want it to die.

"This is not really for me," he said. "There are some particularly political people around. They hear that I'm involved and their fur goes up."

He said that he got involved in the newspaper because his daughter is in the journalism program at Sheridan College and the News could provide a good learning experience.

Mr. Attenborough said the newspaper was not making any money, but he added he has no intention of changing its editorial focus. He echoed Mr. Brooks' comments on content, saying it was to be very community oriented and almost devoid of political news.

Mr. Attenborough said with the changed situation he will not seek a buyer but, "I'd sure as hell be happy if one knocked on the door."

According to Mr. Brooks the Nassagaweya News is dropped at about 8,000 doorsteps. It is distributed as far south as Britannia Road, west to Highway 6, east to Trafalgar Road and north of Rockwood.

Mr. Attenborough said he had some difficulty with the suggestion that Mr. Brooks might be in a position of conflict of interest.

• see CONFLICT on page 14

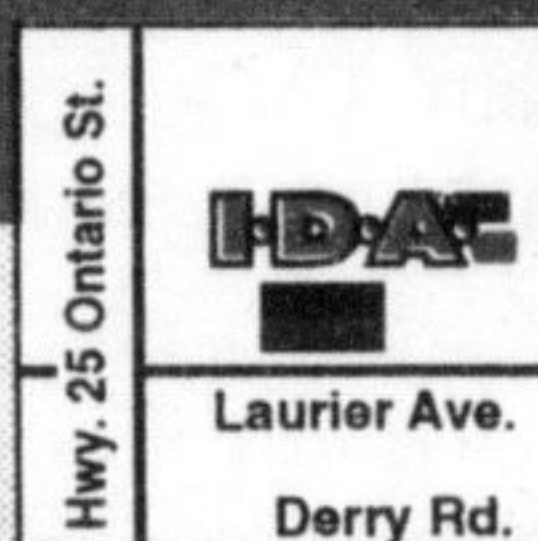
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