

Carpet controversy upsets all parties

The special town council meeting of last Thursday did nothing to diffuse the controversy about the way in which the Midland Public Library board went about buying carpet for the library, or about the way it was investigated.

After one hour, the council voted five to four to seek a legal opinion about the circumstances of the awarding of the work.

On Friday, Councillor Gail Barrie said the library board wasn't approached by her with questions before she reported her findings, because "The bank inspector doesn't tell the bank when he is going to arrive."

Library board chairman Norm Ranson's reaction to that explanation was that the councillor doesn't trust the board. The council has handled the matter "badly."

Councillor Barrie could say what she liked, after she had talked to the board, Ranson said.

The council didn't meet with the board on the matter until last Thursday, after the council meeting of Feb. 23. On Feb. 23 Barrie proposed deferral of payment for the carpet, and a joint investigation by the council and the board.

At the end of the Feb. 23 meeting, the council decided to invite the library board to a special meeting. "How can the council trust us from now on? How can we deal with them in the future?" Ranson asked on Friday.

Last Thursday, Mayor Al Roach, at the beginning of the special council meeting, revealed that he had asked Barrie to research complaints he had received from carpet dealers. The result was presented during the Feb. 23 council meeting.

Barrie talked to carpet dealers who were asked to bid, and to others who weren't approached. The library board members are upset because Barrie didn't talk to them.

"When I got into the facts, I realized that the unsuccessful bidders were asked to bid apples against oranges," Barrie told Councillor Buzz Brown last Thursday. Why didn't she contact the library board? "I wanted to find my own facts the way they flowed."

Ranson told the mayor that the board "went the best route we could under the circumstances." The board may have made an

error, "but there was no intention to defraud or to hide the facts."

"If people feel there was an error of judgment, that's the best we could come up with," Ranson said.

"We pay the bills. There's no room for errors of judgment," Barrie responded.

New carpet was part of the recently completed renovation and restoration of the library building. The board did not advertise for bids from carpet sellers. The board removed the carpet, and two other expenditures, from the general contract, to save an estimated \$2,000 to \$3,000. The board authorized its architect to act as a contractor, and to contact selected carpet dealers. Four bids were received.

Additional controversy resulted in that the board chose the second lowest bid. That bid was made by Huronia Office Services (HOS). HOS is the business of Moreland Lynn. Lynn is a library board member.

Ranson told the council that the board did not discuss with Lynn the bids until the contract was awarded to HOS. One of the issues raised by Barrie was Lynn's involvement before that point. Barrie described board meeting minutes as "generally skimpy, vague, uninformative and misleading." Ranson acknowledged the possibility of "minor discrepancies," while offering the explanation that the library staff and board were working under "enormous pressures."

When Barrie reported to the council, she had a copy of every bid but that of Huronia Office Services. She said she asked the architect to provide her a copy of the HOS bid some time ago. When she reported to the council, she said the HOS bid was \$21,139, based on information in library board meeting minutes. Lynn's subsequent statement that the library was billed \$14,107 plus tax, was news to her.

A copy of the HOS bid, dated Nov. 26, 1986, is for \$19,363.

Ranson said the low bid was rejected on the advice of the architect. The low bid in the architect's opinion did not include enough money for floor preparation.

However all of the bids were higher than the \$12,800 Ranson said the board had to pay for

carpet. Contingency fund money was used to make up the difference. The cost was lowered by switching to a different carpet than the type specified by the architect to the four bidders.

Barrie asked on Thursday why tenders were not called again. On Friday, Buzz Brown, the council's representative on the library board, said the complaints are about tendering. But the board chose a different, equally legitimate route, asking for quotes.

The board couldn't afford to stay another month in rented quarters at a cost

of \$2,000 a month, Ranson told the council.

The operation of the board, not the members' integrity, is being questioned, Barrie said on Thursday. She doesn't know what, if anything, would be done if the council is presented with the opinion of a lawyer that the awarding of the work of laying the carpet was improper.

Mayor Al Roach and Councillors Barrie, Robert Brush, Carolyn White, and Fred Pilon voted yes, and Reeve Bev Day, Deputy-Reeve Nancy Keefe, and Councillor Brown no, to getting a lawyer's opinion.

Candidate's priorities

Tourism, housing, and local jobs for young people, are priorities for Edith Nichols. She is one of four declared candidates for the Conservative nomination in Muskoka-Georgian Bay.

The Conservatives can hold the riding if they work hard, she said. If she is the MPP, she will plan a way to be in the Midland end of the riding, where 30 per cent of the vote is. "I almost think that you have to have an office here with somebody in it."

Nichols and her husband operate Edgewater Dairy Farm on the Muskoka River near Bracebridge. The Powassan native was schooled in Gravenhurst and Bracebridge. She has been a chairman of the Muskoka Board of Education. She has been a card carrying Conservative since the early 1980s. She was re-elected in 1986 to the Central Muskoka-Georgian Bay Association. She was a founding direc-

tor of the Muskoka-Georgian Bay PC Association.

As a previous elected office-holder, Nichols says she knows that she can attract votes. "If there's no support, there's no sense in running."

A candidates meeting will be held in Midland before the nomination meeting in Gravenhurst on April 23.

PGH births

Mr. and Mrs. Ken Yon of Penetanguishene welcomed a baby boy Feb. 15. He weighed in at 6 pounds 6 ounces.

Avela (Moreau) Neuen and Danniell Neuen of Midland welcomed a 9-pound-2-ounce daughter Feb. 15.

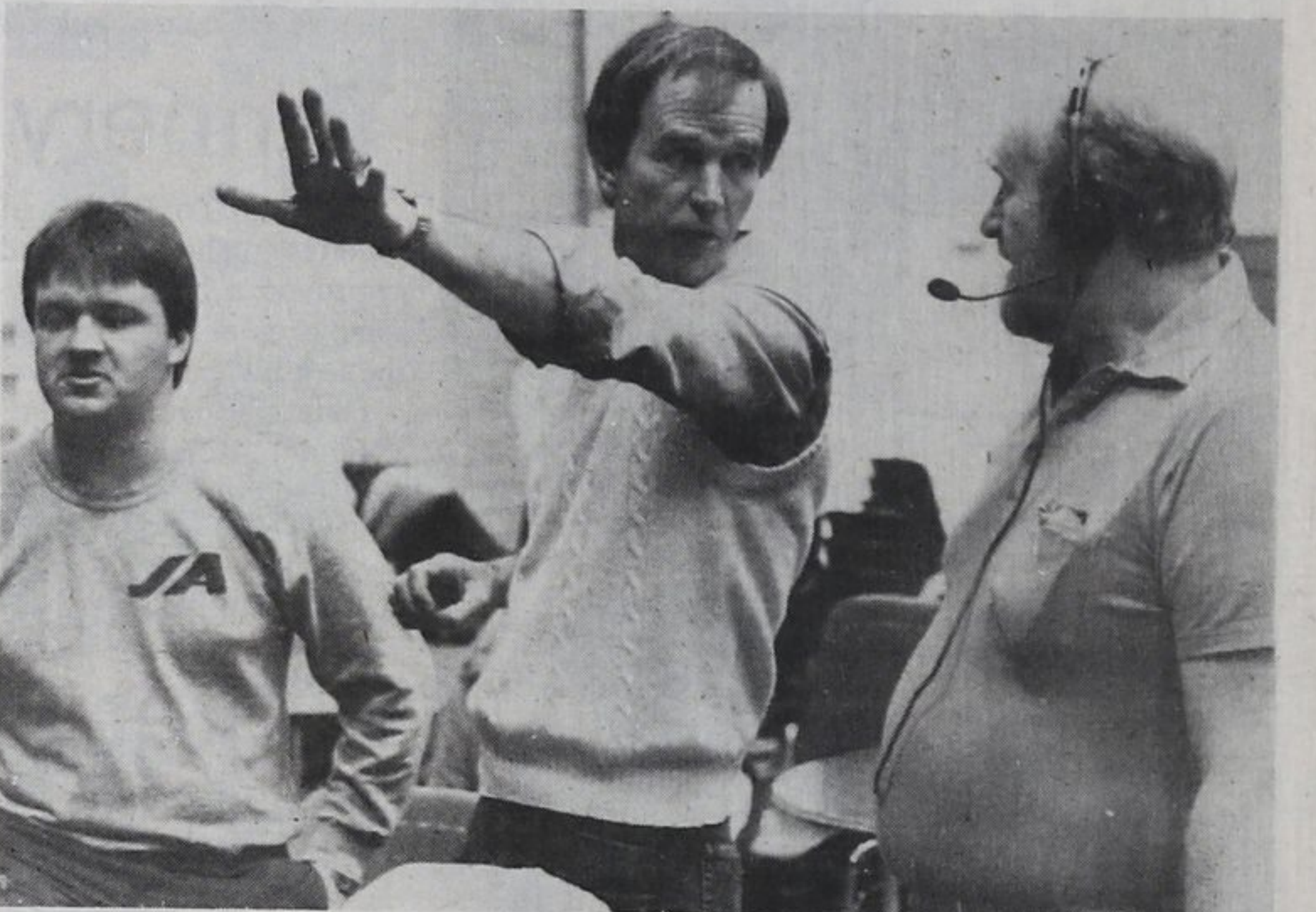
Mr. and Mrs. Bob Colyn, 17 Centennial Ave, Elmvale announce the birth of a son born Feb. 12. He weighed 9 pounds 13 ounces.



Continues Friday

The Huronia Players' presentation of the Neil Simon comedy, Plaza Suite, continues Friday and closes Saturday night at Midland Secondary School. Actor,

John Hudson and Audrey Hamilton enjoy acting in the play, which delighted audiences last weekend.



Special guest

Special director, Ron Payne, gave last minute instructions to sound and light man, Ray Holt last Saturday night. The Huronia Players invited Payne, a profes-

sional actor/director, to return to be a part of their rendition of the Neil Simon comedy, Plaza Suite, as part of their 25th anniversary celebrations.

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