

DESTINATION

Wow! The County sure is beautiful over the last few days. I have not ceased to be amazed at the lilacs. Whatever road you travel, you are surrounded by the magnificent sight and if you are lucky with the gentle subtle aroma of these beautiful bushes.

One day, when Valerie and I were driving down the Old Milford Road, one of the more beautiful sections, I remarked on why we didn't have a Lilac Festival. She replies that we did on a limited basis but setting a date for such a festival is very difficult due to the maturation date of the blossoms which varies depending on the weather.

I accepted this and felt sorry for the thousands of visitors we get in the summer who have never seen this beautiful spring display.

I was reminded of this late last week as I sat in a conference in Kingston dealing with Rural Development. The theme was 'From Striving to Thriving in Rural Eastern Ontario'. What jolted me was an example of a small town in a rural area in another location which set up various discussion groups to explore what might be done to attract visitors. After much deliberation they came to the conclusion that their drawing card was Lilacs. Over the years 100 varieties of lilac adorned the town. That surprised me because I thought that lilacs were limited to several shades of purple and white but one hundred varieties – WOW! The town embarked on an advertising campaign and now attracts thousands and thousands of visitors from around the world.

Times have changed in our economic structure. In the past farms came first and villages and towns rose to serve the farms. Now the towns have grown and become centers of economic growth themselves and farmers depend on them for services. It seems to many people that this has resulted in a somewhat skewed importance of the urban over the rural to a province or country. This area of concern has grown so lately that we at CFDC – PELA explored ways that we could assist since our role is economic development in generally rural areas.

problem was to become aware of what circumstances impacted on the County and Lennox and Addington and this required an affiliation with a research center so we developed a formal relationship with Monieson Center in the business school at Queens University which also has a link to the Canada/USA Fulbright Program.

This led to a number of research studies conducted in our area that ranged from Attracting Doctors to Rural Eastern Ontario to In and Out Migration in Eastern Ontario. These studies made us aware of other studies undertaken throughout Canada and the U.S. as well as other countries around the world. We decided with Queens to set up a conference where distinguished researchers and other experts could discuss their findings and experience in the question of issues in rural versus urban areas and thus the Eastern Ontario Rural Vitality Conference was born.

It amazed us at the interest of various organizations to assist in sponsoring such an event. On top of the Monieson Center of Queens and PELA, Fed Nor, Industry Canada and the Trillium Foundation became sponsors and over 30 individuals from the private, public and educational sectors participated in panels and individual presentations on numerous aspects of the rural problems in Ontario. Of great interest is that over 150 persons registered for the Conference.

To ensure that we kept our situation with regard to rural problems in perspective, Dr. Michael Best, one of the speakers, outlined the projects he participated in, in India and Liberia where incomes in rural areas ranged from 30 cents to 60 cents a day and in the case of Liberia over 500,000 people had been killed in a Civil War and 1,000,000 were rendered homeless out of an original population of 3,000,000. Such insights into rural problems on a world scale I found very provocative and sobering.

So where do we go from here, I hear you ask. Well we are assessing our findings and identifying areas that require further study and attention. It is certain that we will sponsor other conferences in future years.

Just in case you think that I have become one of those persons my mother used to describe as 'Too heavenly minded to be any earthly good' I must advise that as I returned from Napanee to the County today I relished the beauty of our County in bloom and loved the sight and fragrance of the Lilacs and felt a little more sure that we, here in the County, will have a promising future.

- John A Jackson

NOTICE

All enquiries regarding use of the Milford Town Hall should be directed to the County offices at 476-1159

Our first