

Six Nations should have its own area and postal code



By Gary Farmer

For years I thought, why do we have two postal codes — well, more like 5 postal codes — and two area codes and about twenty different phone exchanges like 445, 759, 752 etc. Why can't Six Nations have one area code and one postal code?

Our community would benefit in so many ways if we had one code for all. The idea came to me when I tried finding the telephone number for Chiefswood Park and called 411.

"Chiefswood Park in Ohsweken", I asked — and it's a no go.

"Chiefswood Gas? Uhh, no. "Try Middleport." No. "How about Caledonia?" No. "Maybe Brantford?" Yes, hold for the number.

So here I am, two miles from Chiefswood Park, and have to guess what city our own park is listed under. I found it frustrating and not right.

It seemed just another way to keep us apart. To me it is justifiable racism. 'Keep those Indians guessing.'

Seems a good reconciliation effort, if you ask me.

So I set out on an investigation by looking up Alexander Graham Bell who incidentally lived down the river from us Six Nations and who is the subject for a play I'm working on this summer.

The play is about his relationship with William "Smoke" Johnson who apparently had the first words said on a telephone line in Mohawk language.

The story is focused on their friendship and experiments with the telephone. The production will feature members of the Six Nations and Brantford arts communities at the Bell Homestead which is still up on Tutela Heights in Brantford, Ontario along the Grand River.

Tutelos are a tribe related to Six Nations—from my understanding if not for the Revolutionary War, we would have been 9 Nations, not Six. The Confederacy was growing with the Tuscaroras joining in 1712. The Delawares, Tutelos and the Wyandottes where in the process of joining the Confederacy around 1775 but for some reason that was diminished by the attention of the warring Colonists.

Funny thing — as I am typing this all our Indian tribes and nations above are also all apparently misspelled cause they are not in the English dictionary. It's like we still don't exist in the minds of Canadians. Case in point, I had a friend today on Facebook mention "Happy First Nations Day" and he had not one comment or even a like.

After some frustration in reaching anyone in the postal service to discuss my apparent bad idea with the proper officials I decided 'Well, this is a federal operation.' I found my person on Canada Post's website.

I need to talk with Jo-Anne Polak, Vice-President of Communications and Public Affairs with Canada Post, but no contact email, no phone, no nothing. How do you get to talk with Jo-Anne Polak?

So I took the matter to the federal member of Parliament for Brant, Phil McColeman. I write Phil a nice letter and sent a copy to Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill basically outlining my interest and frustration with being unable to discuss my concerns with someone in power in the whole Canada Post operation.

MP Phil's assistant called me back and asked if I had extinguished all avenues online and over the phone to talk with consumer interests. Which was basically 'call the info line'.

Chief Hill sent me back an interesting response. "We should explore having our postal address changed to Six Nations of the Grand River, Ontario. I know that the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte have

signs approaching their reserve, which says Mohawk Territory of Tyendinaga. Could you explore as to how we might be able to do that and have it apply to the whole reserve?"

// Our long and important history needs recognition for all our contributions in the making of this country

She's right. Approaching the Six Nations community you see not one sign anywhere except coming from Willow Grove down 4th line were we have our own sign. But no demarcation of our community on any road sign around the whole community.

Some of us think, that's good. The less they know the better. Certainly a challenge for anyone looking for us from far away. I know we were not even on maps till recently.

I ran out of patience trying to reach Canada Post.

I had some luck with the phone company and their corporate history. I

wish AG Bell's friendship with Smoke paid off better. Bell made 8.5 billion in profit providing service to everyone last year. We would not be worrying about the next lousy Indi-

an Affairs budget or whatever they call it now. Even 1% of 8.5 billion would be all we'd need to effectively operate our community.

Could you see the petition? "I hereby move; that we issue a resolution to Bell Canada from we the people of Six Nations would like to ask for 1% of Bell Canada profits each year since 1849 for our contribution to the discovery of the telephone" — and all 22,000 members of our community would sign it.

Seriously, I had better luck talking with corporate operations than public operations. Turns out

the public operations are not that public and corporate's got time to talk all day long!

I reached a man, of course no one gives their last name or any method of ever reaching them again by any means. So "Nolan" is my guy and he's not your usual guy. He's level 2 management. He tells me, "It's going to be really difficult to launch a new area code". You see 905 and 519 are routed differently. Different central offices.

"Nolan" did not really know where I was talking about so I had to work hard to help him understand our community boundaries.

"We are between Caledonia, Hagersville, Scotland and Brantford.."

Then he realized, "Oh you have a river separating the community" he said. "Well that's why, we'd have to run a line across the river."

Later at Erlind's Chinese Restaurant I run into a linesman. A telephone linesman and asked him why?

He said, no matter the river anymore it's all satellites now and the river don't matter. Hence, the cell phone culture is upon us now. Everyone is connected; you get your email, your messenger, your

phone and your camera all in one. Very few even have house phones anymore. It's the all new 226 is the rage. The chances of ever having a unified telephone system for our community is near impossible.

Not to mention the travesty of calling our police or fire departments. At one time you'd call for help. They'd ask 'where are you?' You'd say 'Beaver's Corner' and they'd know. Now, the police line goes to London. You say 'Martin's Corner' and they haven't a clue.

The lesson learned is always ask the worker bee if you want answers, not the corporation. The corporation is there to protect their privacy at all costs. Like in parliament; the filibuster. Just words to protect the status quo.

Every generation has to fight for the rights of the people. We must continue to ask the hard questions and work hard for the answers we want to hear. It's in our power to make the change we want to see happen for our people. We are the people of the Grand River and our long and important history needs recognition for all our contributions in the making of this country. It's time. We are on reconciliation time.