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Northerners taken for a ride because of high cost of gas

By Michael Swan

The average driver in Northern Ontario travels 30,000 kilometres a year, uses 8.7 litres of gas for every 100 kilometres driven and pays 2.1 cents a litre more for that gas than the average driver in southern Ontario.

This amounts to \$10,972,000 in extra charges to northern drivers according to Bob Spence, president of the CAA in Sudbury.

Sudbury MPP Jim Gordon would revise those figures upward. According to Gordon, the north pays \$71 million extra for gas per year.

"That means every man, woman and child living in the North pays nearly \$90 every year for the privilege of living here," said Gordon in a letter to northern municipalities urging them to press the provincial Liberals on the issue of gas pricing.

Higher gas prices will affect tourism and the North's chances to attract new industry, according to Vic Power, mayor of Timmins and chairman of the Northeastern Municipalities Action Group.

Power reasons that, all other factors being equal, a company that has to choose between a southern Ontario location and one in the North will choose the southern location when the difference in transportation costs are factored in.

Spence, Power, Gordon and a growing number of northerners think the oil companies are taking the North for a

ride.

Aurele Gervais, MP for Timmins-Chapleau, has gone so far as to say that some northern communities are being "gouged" by the oil companies. The oil companies say that analysis is naive.

According to the oil companies, 1.2 to 1.5 cents a litre of the difference in the price of gas is the cost of transporting it from southern refineries to the North. The remainder of the difference can be accounted for by less competitive markets in the North.

"You can't look at Toronto prices," Paul Jacko, spokesman for Shell Canada says. "That's not a fair comparison. Prices are very depressed in southern Ontario. It's hard to even recover costs."

The oil companies argue that extreme competition in southern markets has distorted prices, making southern gas an uneconomic prospect for the oil companies and an unreasonable measuring stick for Northern Ontarians worried about high gas prices.

The oil companies point out that the same competitive factors come into play in some northern markets.

In Thunder Bay, gas is selling for 43.9 cents a litre, virtually the same price as gas in Toronto despite the difference in transportation costs. In Chapleau a litre of regular gas costs 54 cents. "Sometimes it's a strategic, business-like move to sell below cost," says Bill Simpkins, spokesman for Petro Canada. And that is exactly

what's happening in markets like Toronto and Thunder Bay, according to Simpkins.

Bill McInerney of Sun's Petroleum Inc. concurs. The cut-rate chain of gas bars must maintain a price below the major oil companies' because it cannot offer gas cards and other services that Petro Canada, Shell, Esso and Texaco can offer.

Sun's is selling regular, leaded gas for 43.5 cents a litre in Thunder Bay, and that's less than it costs Sun's to pump the gas, McInerney claims.

According to David Ramsay, parliamentary secretary for the ministry of northern development and mines, the most recent year found a variation in price within the North of up to six cents a litre, and they've been able to find no other reason for the difference in price than the difference in the level of competition.

Ramsay says there is more disparity between centres in the North than between North and south. According to him, the government will reveal a plan for gas prices in the next Throne Speech, but he declined to say what that program will be.

"There's a price to pay wherever you live," says Bill Simpkins of Petro Canada. "Prices are simply higher in the North- it's a fact of life. But, on the whole, my impression is that people up there don't have it so bad."



Cheque for \$15,000

Sheelagh Hamilton, right, on behalf of the Auxiliary to the McCausland Hospital, is shown presenting a \$15,000 cheque to Sylvia McCullough from the hospital. The money went to purchase the hospital's new ECG (electrocardiograph) machine. Hamilton said that the auxiliary asked the hospital's board two years ago what specific item they needed. Hamilton said the auxiliary went through a lot but "we did it". She also said that people who donated over the years can now see the good purpose the money went to. Hamilton said this donation is in addition to the normal gifts the auxiliary gives to patients at Christmas and birthdays. The auxiliary has donated in the past 10 years, Hamilton said, in excess of \$60,000, not counting the ongoing parties, gifts and birthday celebrations they hold. She mentioned that this year the Auxiliary to the McCausland Hospital is hosting the Regional Auxiliary Conference on April 27. (With Sheelagh is her grandson Gavin).

Elementary students warned about drugs

By Ken Lusk

The VIP program (Values, Influences and Peers) ongoing at local schools is providing the students with sensible and factual information on societal rights and wrongs.

Students at Holy Angels School in Schreiber and St. Martin School in Terrace Bay had a special treat last week as Sister Alice Greer, a chemical dependency counsellor from the Smith Clinic in Thunder Bay, visited to inform them about the dangers of abusing drugs.

Greer told the News that she has visited most of the schools in Northwestern Ontario. "It is ongoing education for students," she said.

Her seminar focussed on the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs and the resulting effect on the self, the family and also friends.

How much do you know?

Greer, also with the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, started by asking the students questions about drugs and alcohol in order to see how much they already knew.

For example, she asked how many beer it is OK for the students themselves to drink. The responses included one, none, and 1/2 a bottle.

Greer also asked the same about cigarettes. The consensus of the class was that none should be smoked. The students added that if you take a drag, you will want more; cigarettes make you cough and you will become attached to them.

"What about aspirin?" Greer asked. She asked what would you do if your friend had pills that were prescribed for him and he asked you to take one. The students responded that they wouldn't take one because the pills were prescribed for the friend.

Effect of drugs on the body

Greer explained to the students that each of their bodies is still growing and it will continue to do so for a number of years to come.

She said that drugs have an "effect from head to toe- they see drugs page 7



Hockey hassle

These players from the Longlac and Schreiber teams had a slight confrontation in this game in the Thunder Bay District Midget Hockey playoffs. Schreiber hammered Longlac 9-3 in the

third game of the playoffs last Friday night. In this the championship game, Schreiber beat Longlac 11-2 to win the trophy. (More pictures on pages 8 and 9. Photo by Jim Fournier).