

Opinion

Resource centre has a uniquely northern niche



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



For decades, northerners have complained about a chronic scarcity of health care professionals, particularly in smaller communities. Simultaneously, northerners have imagined the creation of a medical school in northern Ontario as a possible cure for our health care woes. The NDP even called for one in a report issued in February 1990, only months before they assumed office, in a report they called *Operation Critical*.

The Health Sciences Resource Centre, set back in the trees at the corner of Balmoral and Beverly Streets on the eastern edge of the Lakehead University campus in Thunder Bay, is *not* that medical school. But its official opening in September marked a renewed quest for solutions to northern health care.

The President of Lakehead, Bob Rosehart, says the University "has been very aggressive over the last few years trying to promote more training of health professionals in the north. Yet at the same time we realize that because of economies of scale and the types of equipment and people required, we may not have complete programs here in the north. So we started a few years ago to get involved with linkages with other programs." Rosehart says the Centre "is a very good foot in the door as far as a medical school goes."

Dr. Peter Neelands, a practising pediatrician in Thunder Bay, has been involved for years in continuing education programs for northern medical practitioners. He's now the Chairman of the Northwestern Ontario Medical Program (NOMP) at the Centre. NOMP was established in 1972 as a collaborative venture between the local and regional Medical Societies and the medical school at McMaster University in Hamilton. By 1976, NOMP had expanded to include all five Ontario medical schools.

Different themes to different people

Neelands says the Centre "has different themes to different people. The government sees it as their contribution through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund of commitment towards increasing health sciences programs in northern Ontario. The University, which donated the land, is interested in health sciences programs coming on board at LU and probably becoming part of the university at some future time in a complete sense."

Neelands is also involved in the Northern Health and Human Resources Advisory Committee, which has been working for more than two years on a report to the province on how to recruit and retain more northern health care professionals. Neelands says the Committee "views the building as sort of focal point for a northern and rural division which will begin to produce not only practitioners who will understand the northern and rural environment, but which will study various things related to the northern environment."

Neelands challenges the staff at the Centre to strive to meet the high expectations and dreams northerners with various agendas have placed on it. "The people in there now have a lot of housekeeping to do and then they've got to start being very proactive as far as the public is concerned. They've got to do public relations. The building has to have a mission statement. I want to see that place so damn busy that the rugs get worn out in less than six months."

Well on the way to achieving vision

With so many programs already housed in the Centre, it's already well on the way to achieving Neelands' vision. Dr. Steve Arif, who practiced in Atikokan for four years before deciding to return to school to get his Certificate in Family Practice, is now taking a year of studies at the Northwestern Ontario Family Medicine Residency Program, an offshoot of NOMP. It links with McMaster's Medical School to provide postgraduate residency training for medical school graduates seeking Certification in Family Medicine.

Arif says he wanted to take the extra training because "you have to do a lot more in a rural practice. I wanted to offer some of the things that specialists do, because people do need care that specialists normally provide. But it's a hardship for them to have to travel to Thunder Bay for a half hour or an hour test. And where it's something the community can afford — and a skill that you can learn and maintain — then I'd like to try and provide it."

The Centre also houses the Northern Studies Stream, the Northern Outreach Program, and the Northern Educational Centre for Aging and Health — all dedicated to continuing education of health care professionals in the north. The Northern Health Human Resources Research Unit, a joint project with Laurentian University in Sudbury, will formally study the study factors affecting the recruitment and retention of health professionals in the north.

So the next time you pass the corner of Beverly and Balmoral Streets in Thunder Bay, take a longer look at the impressive black and white structure back in the trees. It's not the medical school northerners have dreamed about, but it is striving to find a unique role in northern Ontario health care education.

Jackfish Bay update

By Jon Ferguson
Remedial Action Plan Committee

Water quality in Jackfish Bay, which has been mentioned since 1969, has been degraded as a result of industrial discharge to Black Bird Creek.

Although pollution control measures have resulted in less pollution entering the creek, a serious pollution problem remains.

The Stage I report for the Jackfish Bay Public Advisory Committee (PAC) has now been completed and sent to the International Joint Commission (IJC). This report describes the environmental conditions in Jackfish Bay, along with the history of the pollution.

The report represents a considerable amount of commitment on the part of many individuals, including 14 local stake holders.

These PAC members have reviewed all parts of the document at various stages of its development.

The next step is Stage II, which is an action step of restoration. The PAC is involved at present with the problem of what to do with the toxic sediments that have been identified in Lake A and Lake C along Blackbird Creek, and in the bottom of Moberley Bay.

The formation of options to deal with the sediments will be formulated in the near future. Questions such as how much sediment is there in the various areas, what is the best way to treat the sediments and the ultimate costs of such actions must be dealt with.

Even the possibility of a new discharge route and/or system must be considered.

The public consultation stage following development of options will be an excellent opportunity for the public to provide suggestions for cleaning up these areas of toxic pollution sediments.

At the IJC meeting, the United States-Canadian press conference announcing the Binational program to restore and protect the Lake Superior Basin was the result of dedication by environmentalists throughout the Lake Superior watershed.

Different environmental policies and regulatory routes have led to this common cause: Lake Superior clean up and protection.

Letters to the editor

Schools have changed

Dear editor,

A few weeks ago I read this amusing little statement in the Toronto Star. A teacher resigned, and gave this explanation:

"Nowadays, teachers are afraid of the principal; the principal is afraid of the superintendent; the superintendent is afraid of the school board; the school board is afraid of the parents; and the parents are afraid of the kids — and the kids are afraid of **nobody!**"

How true! How times have changed!

Charlotte Kneipp,
Terrace Bay

Dog owners beware

Dear editor,

This is a friendly warning to dog owners who allow their dogs to run free. Besides the fact that I don't like cleaning up dog dirt off my lawn when I don't even own a dog, it's getting unsafe for the dogs. It doesn't matter that the dog is friendly and would not bite anyone — the fact is the dogs wander on to the roads and almost get hit.

Personally I will not place myself or my family in any harm to avoid hitting a dog. A person, yes, but a dog, no.

It's not that I don't like dogs, but my family's safety is more important to me than a dog's safety.

So if you allow your dog to run free and it gets hit by a car, remember, you only have yourself to blame.

Keep it safe, and keep it tied.

Tina Ball,
Terrace Bay

Letters to the Editor

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