

Opinion/Letters

Wataway Station way to go for natives, companies



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



It was a warm, breezy Tuesday afternoon—enough breeze to keep the mosquitos away, enough sun to take away any chill. The raised wooden grey platform was decked out with the official flags of Canada and Ontario—brought hours ahead of time by the Premier's anxious aide. School buses unloaded residents of the Pic heron Bay First Nation—at first only one or two at a time, then by the dozens. Two Grey Goose charter buses from Thunder Bay brought Conwest shareholders and board members, officials from every conceivable federal and provincial department, Chamber of Commerce representatives, and a handful of local reporters.

The occasion was the official commissioning of the Wawatay Generating Station Tuesday, June 23, near the mouth of the Black River, just south of Marathon. The name Wawatay means giver of light in Ojibway. You may also recognize the name from the Wawatay Communications Society in Sioux Lookout, where I was told once that Wawatay means northern light.

The Wawatay Generating Station is a unique joint venture between the Begetekong Power Corporation, owned by the Pic Heron Bay First Nation, and the hydropower division of Conwest Exploration, a Toronto-based mining and petroleum company. Years ago, the band was officially offered a seat on the site development committee by the Ministry of Natural Resources. MNR had decided a hydro project could be developed at the site because no dam or flooding was necessary.

Man-made tunnel

Diverting the Black River through a man-made tunnel through the Canadian Shield and down a drop of 140 feet generates 13.5 megawatts of electricity—enough to look after all the electrical needs of the town of Marathon and then some.

Ron Running, the district manager of MNR, gives the band credit for taking advantage of an opportunity and refusing his offer of a seat on the committee that would pick the site's developer. "To their credit they said, no, we see this as a positive development, we see some economic benefits. We actually want to compete. We want to get in the competition to see if we can win this. We said, that's great, go ahead."

The band formed an alliance with private hydro entrepreneur David Carter from Sundridge Power Corporation of Dryden and won the MNR competition. Sundridge had experience operating three small hydro plants in the Dryden area—all over 50 years old and still going strong. But Carter, Sundridge and the band couldn't raise the 20 to 30 million dollars needed to build the Black River plant. After two years of delay and negotiations, Conwest agreed to buy control of Sundridge, giving Carter and the band access to the capital they needed to build the Wawatay Generating Station. Construction started early last year and was completed in record time—under budget and on schedule.

Rae obviously glad

Bob Rae was obviously glad to be part of the opening ceremonies, starved as he is for good news. "I have been at a number of openings since becoming Premier, but not as many as I would like. I want to congratulate the company not only because it's provided a service to the province in terms of providing new power, but also because of the way in which they've gone about doing this project. The company has been a model employer, an employment equity employer. They have been a model negotiator with the native community here, and with the First Nations people here along the river."

The Pic Heron Bay First Nation not only gained short-term construction jobs, but also gets 10 per cent of the net profits from the plant once the construction debts are paid. After helping Premier Rae and Conwest President John Lamacraft push the button to officially turn on the bright blue turbines, Chief Roy Michano said, "We'll make money now, as long as the river runs . . ."

Beyond making money, the band has learned an important lesson about economic development in the 1990s. The Chief told the opening ceremonies "Today we have sound financial accountability and credibility. And that is important, because today we function as a business. Today it has to be business. We clearly are taught that, through our discussions with Conwest. You have to have sound business mind."

He said if there is going to be another hydro development near his community, "Total ownership will be the plan for our next project."

Michano says the band will still be looking for a development partner, which could even be Conwest, given the Chief's praise for the company's enlightened attitude towards First Nations. Conwest President John Lamacraft says "Most

continued on page 12

NDP passes rent control legislation that restricts reasons for rent increases

The NDP government in Ontario has passed new rent control legislation designed to protect tenants from high increases and ensure the repair and maintenance of rental housing.

The Rent Control Act will take effect by the end of August.

The new law ensures that a tenant in Ontario will never face an increase in maximum rent which is more than the rent control guideline plus three per cent.

"With this legislation, the days of high rent increases for tenants in Ontario are at an end," said Housing Minister Evelyn Gigantes.

The Rent Control Act is the result of public consultation during the past 18 months.

Approximately one million tenant households were contacted during the consultation, and a range of public meetings were held across the province and several sets of public hearings were conducted at Queen's Park.

Under the new law, the Ministry of Housing will calculate a rent control guideline once each year to cover increases in the operating costs of a rental building due to inflation.

These include increases in the cost of items such as heat, hydro, water and municipal taxes.

The guidelines will also include a two per cent component to cover the cost of ongoing repairs to the building.

"This enables every landlord on Ontario to receive one rent increase each year to cover the cost of inflation and the cost of regular repairs," said Gigantes.

If a landlord experiences a high cost for repair, the landlord can apply to the Ministry of Housing for an additional three per cent rent increase.

However, a landlord can only apply to increase the rent for legitimate repairs, such as those which maintain the structure of the building, health or safety standards, access for disabled persons or increased energy and water conservation.

A tenant no longer has to pay for luxury renovations, and a tenant's rent will be reduced when a repair has been paid for.

As well, the landlord must prove the additional costs are legitimate at a rent control hearing where tenants have an opportunity to dispute the costs.

The Rent Control act also contains much stronger maintenance provisions, which prevent a landlord from obtaining any rent increase at all if there is an outstanding work order against the building.

"Tenants should not be paying even guideline rent increases if their building is poorly maintained," said Gigantes.

"If there is poor maintenance, this legislation gives tenants a method to obtain a rent deduction."

Ms. Gigantes said that the current rent review system will remain in place during the summer transition period which is required to reorganize ministry offices and procedures.

Letter to the editor

Wake up Ontario

I wish to lodge a strong protest against the laying off of 30 part-time and full-time nurses in Thunder Bay. Thirty-five beds are closing for approximately one year.

Ontario, wake up to the plight of our R.N.'s. One day we may wake up to realize that the lifeblood of Ontario's health plan has packed up and gone off to Florida or Texas or California . . .

Then what? Herbalists? Witches? Wizards?

Has our MP raised his voice? Wake up Ontario!

Katie Verdone,
Schreiber

Make your voice heard

The Terrace Bay Schreiber News welcomes letters to the editor on any subject.

Letters must be signed and have the phone number and address of the author for verification. We will not knowingly print false libelous or anonymous comments. Letters to the editor are important to community newspapers. They serve to reflect opinions of members of the community we serve. However, we must insist on these rules to ensure that this very important forum is used responsibly. Letters can be mailed to the News, Box 579, Terrace Bay, P0T 2W0, or dropped off at the News Office, Highway 17 at the Mill Road.