

Community Profile

Farming, law natural fit for local lawyer

BY SARAH FISHER

Meet Joe Byrne —Joe Byrne 'general practice' lawyer, Joe Byrne farmer, Joe Byrne husband and father of five children. If you didn't know him and hadn't heard what a nice guy he is, you might be a bit envious.

Byrne, whose law office is located on Centre Street in Essex, is the mild mannered member of a local farming family who counts his brothers Jim, Kieran, Anthony and Brendan as his best friends. When a Windsor lawyer suggested in 1992 that he consider law school, Byrne applied largely because his wife completed the paperwork. But even on his first day of class in 1993 he wasn't sure he would stay.

"I remember walking into law school on the first day thinking 'I'll stay until it gets busy on the farm and then I'll leave,'" said Byrne who was 40 at the time. I just felt, 'I don't have time for this.'"

Time management, it

turns out, wasn't really a concern. Byrne fit law school around his farming demands primarily because of his ability to "sleep quickly", he jokes. Some nights Byrne would start his reading for class at 2 a.m. after combining the fields. He didn't feel especially pressured. Law school was not a life-long ambition.

Byrne grew up knowing what he wanted. The family's 100-acre farm in Lakeshore was the work and social centre for him and his brothers. His parents — Jim, who also worked as a teacher at Sacred Heart School No. 2, and Marcella, a Lithuanian immigrant — assigned chores to each of their children. Byrne never minded. He didn't know it was work, he said.

That life was his plan even after obtaining a degree in Geography in 1974, a Masters degree in 1976 and getting married two years later. He didn't need the degrees to work on the farm, but said he took classes at the University of

Windsor because he wanted to. Years after obtaining his Masters degree he continued to take classes, including several French classes. Byrne is also fluent in French.

"There was really no purpose other than I enjoyed school," Byrne said.

Byrne's most recent accolade is also an accomplishment for his family. On Aug. 5 he traveled to Tokyo and Nagano, Japan with his nephew, Jim Byrne, to accept an award from the Matsui Corporation for the family's "identity preserved" soybeans.

Byrne continues to farm in Lakeshore with his brothers, Jim and Brendan, and his nephew. He said the Japanese government is interested in high quality crops that are not mixed with any other identities or varieties. The trip gave him the opportunity to be an ambassador for Canadian soybean farmers. He took the responsibility seriously.

"The two companies we met with are in the global market and have the oppor-



Joe Byrne stands beside a cornfield farmed by his family on the Seventh Concession in Lakeshore. Byrne recently traveled to Japan to accept an award for the family's "identity preserved" soybeans.

tunity to buy cheaper soybeans than they can get in Canada," Byrne said. "We explained why it's in their best interest to pay premium prices to buy our soybeans. ... It takes a lot of extra work to produce the highest possible quality soybeans that are pure in terms of variety and are uncontaminated."

Brendan Byrne sees his brother as someone who can make difficult tasks look easy. He said the family has photos of Joe studying for law exams in the cab of a combine. Dual tasking

never stressed him out.

"He did it the hard way, but he makes it look easy," said Brendan Byrne, a program management consultant who works in Michigan aside from farming with his brother and nephew. "He's just a terrific guy."

Byrne has no plans to retire from farming or law. He likes meeting people and loves working in Essex. His free time is all about family. He recently invited his daughter Lianne who is also a lawyer into his practice. His son Joe Jr. works filming music videos,

Stephanie, 23 is attending law school in Ottawa, Jocelyne, 24, has a biology degree, and the youngest, Marija, is a recent university graduate.

Three of the children are currently living at home again. Byrne is far from irritated by their return. The farm, he said, is part of what draws them back.

"You grow up with it and it seems to be what you are," he said. "You consider yourself a farmer wherever you go. There's an honesty to it."

Calling all family historians and custodians of photographic heirlooms ...

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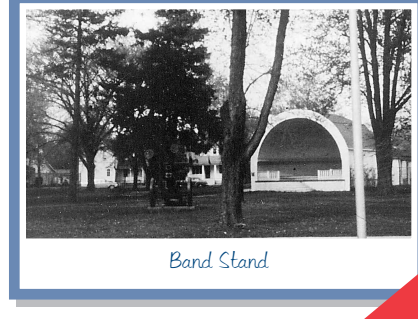
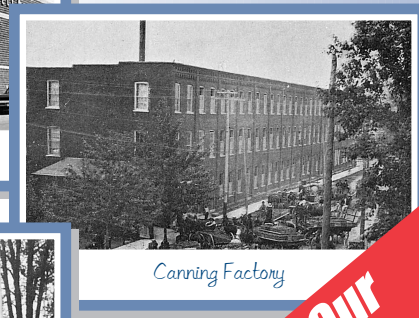
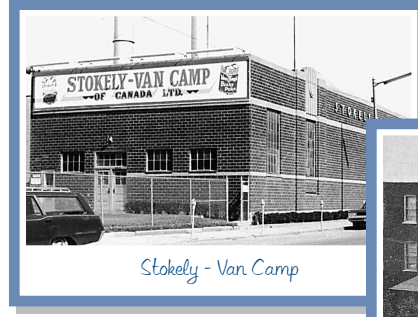
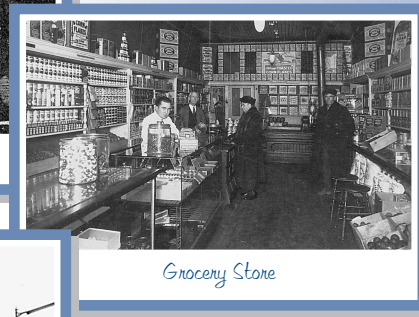
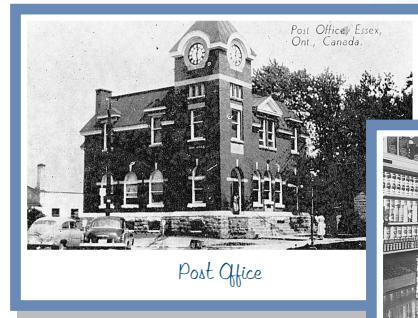
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