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Out with the old?

The more things change, the more they stay the same. It's only in looking back over the past year's events that we can evaluate our progress and achievements. As 2006 draws to a close in Essex, some familiar issues appear to be coming back on the public agenda, leaving us to wonder just how much progress we've made.

free press
editorial
laurie brett

Roughly one year ago, the Essex Free Press reported that council was investigating the cost of changing the town's name. Based on unofficial

polls randomly conducted by individual councillors, the group reached the conclusion that the issue of the town's name should be re-opened. Once the price tag was disclosed, the issue was dropped like a hot potato with virtually no public discussion.

One year later we report in this edition of the Free Press that the name change issue has resurfaced and council is looking into the cost of implementing a change. Unless the cost of changing a municipality's name is being offered at Boxing Day sale prices, council is likely to learn that it still costs over \$50,000 to legally change the name and all of the sundry items branded by that name. They're also likely to learn that coming up with a new name is not nearly as easy as it sounds. Over 7,000 voters exercised their democratic right to choose a name in 1998 and Essex was the result.

It's always disconcerting to taxpayers when the same issues keep being resurrected. Take Stephen Harper's Conservative government's fixation with the same-sex marriage issue. As if the issue wasn't already sufficiently dealt with by the courts, the Harper government had to raise it far too many times in the House of Commons before they decided to call it quits (for now).

As we look forward to the year ahead, people naturally hope for new challenges and exciting adventures. So what can we expect on the horizon for Essex this year? Far too much talk (that is both stale and unrealistic) about changing the name and bringing the municipality together as one happy family. More speculation about the arena project, whether it will proceed and what the impact will be from the Tecumseh Ice Track project. More grumbling about the continued existence of the Essex Business Improvement Area, the lack of a local economic development plan, and the proliferation of empty storefronts in Ward 1. And increasing concern that the Mady Development seems to be going nowhere fast.

It would be refreshing in December of next year to report that 2007 was the year of new initiatives and bold moves for Essex.



The end of a year is always a good time to re-evaluate the past with a look to the future.

The Casino Windsor announcement of the Caesar's branding is certainly good news. For instance, it would mean that a show featuring Céline Dion or Elton John at Caesar's in Atlantic City or Las Vegas would probably mean a Windsor stop written into the same contract. Four hundred jobs could be added to the Windsor operation.

But concerns about our two basic industries in Essex County should not be papered over by gains in the gaming sector.

Foreign intrusion into the North American auto market is a number one priority for any Canadian government. Prime Minister Stephen Harper had the courage to tell the Chinese that Canada would not condone human rights violations in China as part of the package in developing trade. Now his government must listen to the Big Three and to the CAW and insist on markets like

Korea being open to Canadian built vehicles. The same applies to Big Three operations in Mexico, where environmental considera-



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bill gay

tions are virtually non-existent and are a threat to the local workers and population. Mexican infrastructure must be modernized.

Our agricultural sector is, in many ways, Canada's basic industry. Everyone must eat. Remember when Canada was called the "world's bread basket"? The markets for cash crop farmers are being crushed by subsidies from the Americans and Europeans. These people are our friends! I wonder how they

deal with their enemies? Essex and Chatham-Kent are known around the globe for productivity, yet farmers are going broke. Surely the relationship that solved softwood lumber and acid rain problems can be a conduit to broker a fair deal for Canadian farmers. How about an agricultural summit of the Americas as a first step in keeping Canada's agricultural production second to none?

Finally, the Canadian government and the provinces must deal with child poverty that continues to grow. Previous efforts have been, at best, half-hearted. Surely rich countries like the U.S. and Canada can do better.

Similarly, it used to be that rich parents were not necessary to access higher education for their children. Yet with budget cuts, students are leaving school with huge debts and in times of slow economic growth like today, face reduced job opportunities. This must be addressed.

As 2006 concludes, Best Wishes for a Happy New Year!

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