

Opinion

Service clubs poised for millenium - with help

This week the nation was shocked and saddened to learn that Eaton's - the stalwart Canadian company woven into our history as snugly as a Hudson's Bay blanket - was filing for bankruptcy protection.

There's was the first Christmas catalogue, the first no-questions-asked money-back guarantee. Many firsts, now an ending.

Eaton's management says they'll be back with new restructuring, able to meet the challenges of the future.

They speculate they should have gone public way back in 1988. It's too late now.

Makes you take a look at our tried and true institu-



Viewpoint

Jo Ann Stevenson

tions. What other cornerstones of our society will not withstand the rest of the '90s, let alone enter the new millennium?

Service clubs? This week the first gay/lesbian Lions Club launched in Toronto.

Lions Clubs International greeted the club with grace, aware that the members are committed to citizenship and

service to community. Still, the unusual development reflects the change afoot within service organizations, many of which are struggling to attract new members.

Lions Clubs are thriving. Perhaps its because the work is so relevant.

In Durham, their Lions-Quest Canada program is a key reason Durham school boards ranked so well internationally.

Realizing that children are our future, Lions provide the major funding for the promotion of positive youth development.

The life skills teaching reaches three million children around the world each year and includes a conflict

management component and skills for adolescence. As well, Lions support young diabetics, and Journeys for Sight - part of their response to Helen Keller's challenge to them in 1925 to take up the cause of the visually impaired and become "knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness."

The average member of service groups such as the Lions is aging.

Unless younger people keep replenishing the ranks, these familiar foundations in our society are going to crumble. Their contribution to community is unequalled.

Unlike the Eaton's company which is not in the hands of the public - service clubs are.



Education's come a long way....

All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth.

Aristotle
Education makes people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave.

Henry Peter, Lord Brougham

Joanne Harris Burgess has been teaching Canadian Studies at York University in Toronto for the past fourteen years.

It's a job that's become more, not less challenging with the passage of time, because with each succeeding year, the students signing up

seemed to know less and less about their own country.

Or did they? Ms. Harris decided to find out. On the first day of classes last semester, she handed out a questionnaire to 100 Canadian Studies students. These kids were all graduates of Ontario high schools. They had all chosen to take a course with lots of Canadian content.

Sample questions on the test:

What is the date of Canada's founding?

Name three Canadian painters.

Name three Canadian novelists and the title of one of their books.

Shouldn't be much of a challenge for sharp, interested high school graduates, right?

Wrong. Sixty-two percent could not name any Canadian authors. Only nine of the 100 students could come up with three names.

And artists? Fifty-nine percent couldn't name a single Canadian painter. Only four per cent knew any artist beyond The Group of Seven and Emily Carr.

As for the date of Canada's founding, well, we celebrated Canada's Centennial just 30 years ago...you'd think that might be a clue.

More than half the students couldn't even hazard a close guess as to Canada's birthday.

What the hell is going on here? What have these kids been doing for the past four years? More to the point: what have their teachers been doing?

But perhaps that's unfair.



Basic Black

Arthur Black

Maybe the teachers have been slaving like Trojans and Canadian high school skulls are just too thick to absorb esoteric information like Margaret Atwood and Robert Bateman and — you know — birthdays and stuff.

Well, if Canadian students are dumb, it's a relatively recent development. Here are a few sample questions from another questionnaire given to Ontario students:

1: State the most important facts about any TWO of the following: Company of One Hundred Associates, Battle of Waterloo, The Normans, Battle of Queenston Heights, Coming of Christianity to England, Taking of Quebec.

2: Give the names of:
a) Governor-General of Canada
b) Lieutenant-Governor of your province.
c) Premier of Canada
d) Premier of your province.
e) Reeve of your township or town

That last question by the way, was considered such a 'gimme' that it was only worth five per cent of the total mark. Both questions were part of an exam students had to pass to get out of Grade 11 of Wellington High School back in 1927.

We've come a long way in 70 years. Question is: which direction?

Editor's mail

Foxfire full of filthy language

To the Editor,
I have read your "Opinion" (A. Mair) in the Weekender of February 8, 1997. I would like to give you my opinion.

Who "considers these titles to be among the finest literary works in the English language?"

Yes, the students today are "certainly aware of...the scatological words" in Foxfire. Perhaps a few of them "more than likely pepper their daily language with them." But not "these students" referring to all students in school. What an insult to the vast majority of students.

Is it not right to "protect these students from words they are certainly aware of?" It will be a sorry day when everyone with whom we deal in the future uses these words in daily conversation and business dealings - if this is the intent of teaching this book. This would be come of the result. What is the intent of teaching it then?

Certainly, the parents have a right to

direct what their children learn. From time to time everyone makes a mistake. They might admit they made a mistake putting this book in the curriculum.

What is your reason for saying "We are beginning to view schools as simple day-care centres and the only purpose served by our beleaguered educators is that of a glorified babysitter?"

It is amusing to me for you to say that "parents should be kept in a strictly supporting role." "Kept?"

Parents should stand on the sidelines and be forced to "support" (cheer) the activities to which their children are subjected? Yes, the "hockey parent" has gotten out of hand from time to time. But the parents of their children have a right to say something when things go awry as they did with the imposition of Foxfire full of filthy language and violence imaging.

D. Bruce McDowell