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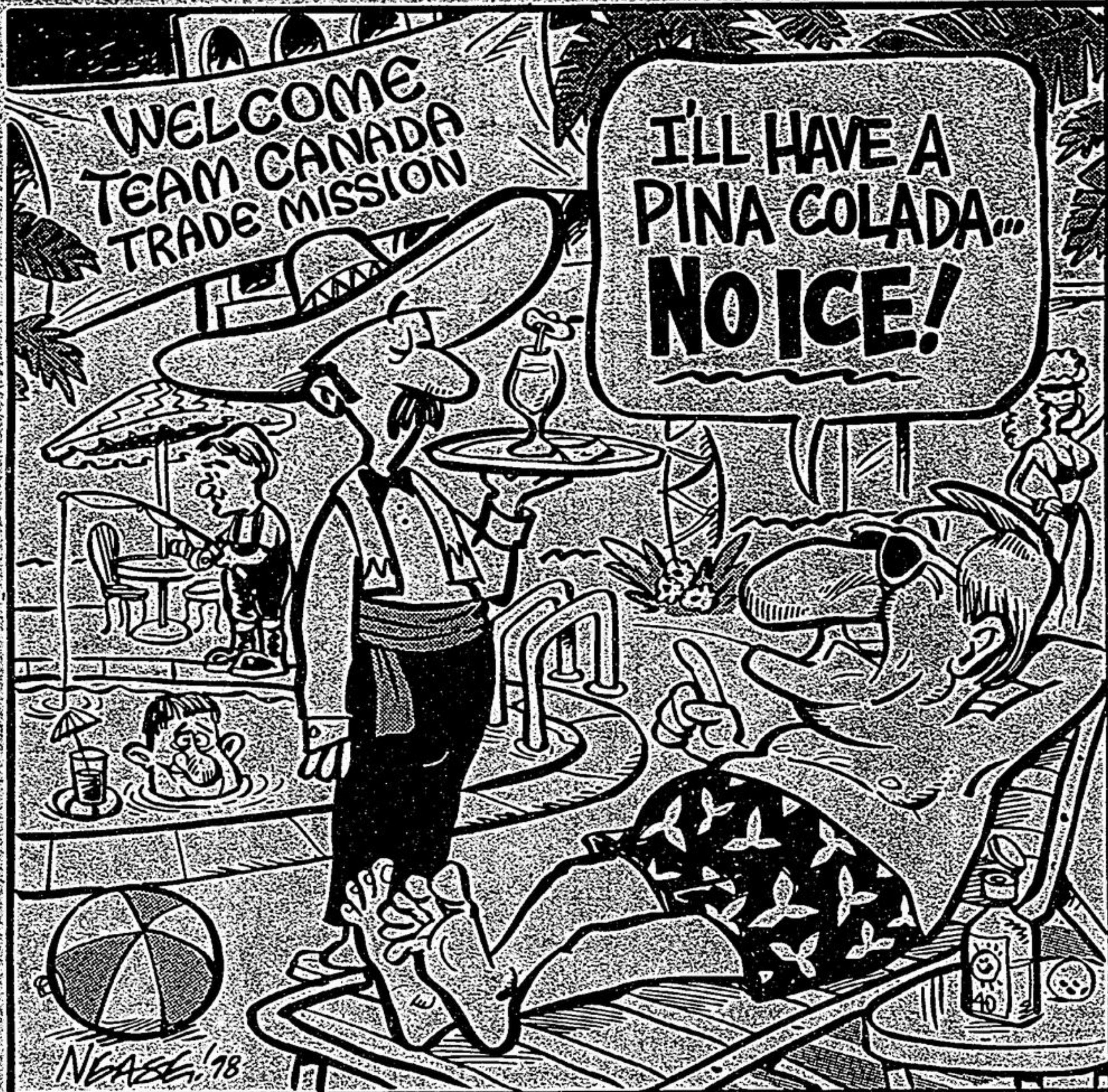
EDITORIAL

Buyer beware

We love to laugh. This is evident from the results of a survey conducted by the major cable companies which indicated the new Comedy network and Teletoon were the top picks of the new channels made available to television viewers late last fall. To generate interest, the channels were offered free of charge for a time. As you read this, the new channels are being switched off for anyone who hasn't bought into the cable package. Now it is the cable companies' turn to laugh. Many people will wind up paying very large cable bills in this province for services they neither want nor use. Certainly, some of the channels will be watched but most of the specialty stations are skipped over.

With the 500 channel universe looming on the horizon, and direct-to-home satellite technology advancing at a winged pace, you would suspect that the cable companies would stop the old tactic of selling many channel packages to justify huge rates. If we in the newspaper business told our readers that in order to read this paper, they had to subscribe to 10 others, we wouldn't be in business for too long.

It seems odd that the communications regulators allow cable companies to hijack our televisions in this manner. In B.C., a challenge to this authority was recently successful and companies there now offer a cable package you select yourself. Only the channels wanted are paid for — the simple principle of supply and demand at work. As consumers, we must take action. Don't pay for something you don't want. Change can only come about if consumers cease to accept what is being offered as simply not good enough. We would never accept any product that did not provide the service we demand of it, but when it comes to the hypnotic spell of the Squawk Box, we are completely under its power. And that's not funny.



Saving McCrae medals a patriotic lesson

The birth of a world-famous poem is an exceedingly rare event. Not many of us get to be in on such a thing, but Cyril E.C. Allinson did.

He was there on May 3, 1917 when one of the best known poems in the English language was written.

"I saw him (the poet) sitting on the ambulance step, a pad on his knee," Allinson later wrote. "He looked up as I approached but continued to write. He wrote on for five minutes more, then, as I handed him his mail, he handed me his pad. The poem was almost an exact description of the scene in front of us both."

The "he" was Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae of

Guelph, Ontario. The poem — the most famous war (I'd argue "anti-war") poem in the world — was In Flanders Fields.

If McCrae had been British he'd have been knighted for that poem. Had he been American, he'd have been transformed into a demi-god, the subject of books and Hollywood movies.

Alas, he was Canadian. And because of it, all but forgotten. There is a tiny museum in his old homestead in Guelph.

Occasionally, his name surfaces in a 30-second sound bite during Remembrance Day celebrations, but that's about it.

And last year the memory of John McCrae suffered the ulti-

mate indignity — his war



Basic Black

Arthur Black

medals were put up for public auction, for sale to the highest bidder.

"Did the federal government rush in to stop the travesty and save the medals?"

Nope. Nary a peep from the Feds. Did the public cry out "Foul?" Afraid not.

In the end, the medals were saved by the intervention of a single Canadian citizen.

By a man who hadn't even been born when McCrae wrote his poem.

By a man who wasn't even born in Canada.

Arthur Lee was born in Canton, China in 1955. His family came to Canada when he was 10 years old and settled in Sudbury, Ont.

Lee worked in the Inco Mines to get enough money to go to university.

After graduation he went into the manufacturing business and prospered.

And somewhere in that process, Arthur Lee became a Canadian with an intensity that few of us will ever be able to claim.

Canadian enough to enter the public bidding against professional foreign collectors bent on buying the McCrae medals

and spitting them out of the country.

Canadian enough to lay out \$400,000 of his own money buying the medals.

Did he do it for the glory? No. Arthur Lee is a shy Canadian.

"It's been a little bit too much," he said. "My wife and I, we're really not into this public life, and she is getting really rather upset."

Did he do it for profit? Hardly. Arthur Lee immediately donated the McCrae mementos back to Canada. No charge.

"It was more or less desperation, to make sure the medals stayed in Canada, rather than taking a chance at their being lost," explained Lee.

"I just felt I was doing my duty as a Canadian... nothing more than that, really."

A lot more than that, actually.

Arthur Lee's gesture calls to mind perhaps the most famous line of John McCrae's immortal poem. I'm referring to the line that goes,

*To you from sailing hands we throw
The torch, be yours to hold it high*

We Canadians have fumbled the torch a couple of times in the past few years. Once or twice it's almost gone out.

We can thank our lucky stars there are still Canadians like Arthur Lee around to show the rest of us how a torch ought to be held.

Christmas gifts restored 'faith in humanity'

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

To the "friends" that anonymously delivered the boxes of wonderful Christmas treats and beautiful and much needed and appreciated Christmas presents for the children and I to my home on Christmas Eve, this is the only way I know to say thank you.

Last year, 1997, was a tough year for our family. Your generosity has renewed my faith in humanity.

A great deal of time and thought obviously went into purchasing the gifts; it made Christmas for us.

Name Withheld

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