

OPINION

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Editorial

Gouged patrons should have wine option

York Region restaurateurs want nothing to do with the province's proposal to ease restrictive liquor licensing laws.

It's not often a business favours heavy-handed government restrictions on its operations. But it's not often regulations lead to fat profits.

But if the Consumer Ministry were to allow patrons to bring their own wine when dining out, the restaurant industry could say goodbye to mark-ups of more than 100 per cent.

Apparently, there's more money to be made gouging diners on the price of a bottle of wine than could be had by increasing the number of diners with a more affordable experience.

Some people shy away from dining out altogether because the price of wine with a meal can double the tab; many consumers just can't afford the luxury.

So having the option of bringing your favourite selection to dinner is being welcomed by many consumers.

The plan, floated by Consumer Minister Jim Bradley in a speech to the Ontario Wine Council, isn't anything new. Bring-your-own-bottle options are mainstream in other provinces, such as Quebec, Alberta and New Brunswick.

That said, however, restaurant owners — there are 15,000 licensed to serve liquor in Ontario — insist BYOB laws will cripple their sales and cost jobs in the serving industry.

One Toronto restaurateur said the plan would cost him the 20 per cent profit he earns on liquor markup.

Others note they invest a lot of money in their wine cellars.

Some express concern about no longer being able to monitor the amount of alcohol diners are drinking, despite it being their legal responsibility to do so. However, if restaurateurs had not greedily inflated wine prices over the years, this plan likely wouldn't be in the works.

A few options could work harmoniously, however.

- Restaurants could charge fairer prices for wine, as well as offer a BYOB option, with a nominal corking fee.

- The government, in turn, could ease taxes on wine sold to licensed establishments and write strict guidelines into its laws with emphasis on enforcing shared liability with consumers and restaurants and, perhaps, limiting the number of bottles per person allowed into an establishment.



PAT WHEELER FOR SUN-TRIBUNE



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

Gas pains, rushed numbers and crashed hockey coaches

They rattle my brain into a pinball machine and shake up my pocketbook.

Non-stop questions. Why do we care so much about the NHL trade deadline and the plight of Martha Stewart and so little about the homeless and hungry in our back yard?

Why reality television? For the love of assistant coach Keith Acton, why would someone pay \$200 to watch a hockey game, even if our beloved Maple Leafs are in it?

And other larger issues:

- Why did regular gasoline cost 13 cents more a litre on Stouffville's Main Street than 15 minutes south on Markham's Hwy. 7 Monday afternoon? That's \$13.72 more to fill the tank in my mini van. And if we were on the cusp of a price hike, why was the difference 14 cents the next morning, industry experts?

- Why do people leave a rambling, three-minute phone message, then rush the most important part? The phone number is rattled off in mind-numbing speed, leaving all but the best stenographers scratching their heads and painfully replaying all 180 seconds.

- Why do hockey coaches insist on walking across arena ice in street shoes? As if we don't have enough data on armour-plated hockey players wearing blades and still suffering concussions.

Minor hockey coaches in this province must wear helmets at practices but there are no rules eliminating the stupidity of gingerly crossing the ice surface during the pre-game in Florsheims while helmetless. And it's such a long and safe route to walk the concrete around the circumference of the rink.

During warm-up at a rep tourney final in Stouffville Sunday, a player low-bridged a coach crossing the ice, sending him and his collection of water bottles flying like well-hit pins at the Stouffville Bowl.

- Why, readers ask, are more restaurants under construction on Main Street in west-end Stouffville?

Because the franchise owners know this place will boom like nobody's business.

Like the hungry birds waiting on hydro lines, they know something positive will happen.

And it's all about a meal.

Jim Mason is editor of the Sun-Tribune.

Letters to the Editor

Students could twin school with needy in northern Ontario

Re: Sharing the word, photograph, Feb. 28.
 We were thrilled to see the picture of Summitview Public School students Cassie and Matthew with books donated by their school.

Through the efforts of Lt. Gov. James Bartleman, thousands of donated books are going to First Nations reserves in Northern Ontario.

This picture raises the awareness of the tragic situation that exists for thousands of people in our province.

Imagine:

- going to a school without many books or a library;

- living in a community where a bag of milk costs more than \$15;

- living in a community where mold and holes in the walls in your pre-fab bungalow are common;

- sharing a three-bedroom bungalow with 10 people of all ages;

- living in a community where the drinking water is brown and smelly;

- living in a community with one store that closes at noon and where fruits and vegetables are almost non-existent;

- living in a community with no doctor, dentist or pharmacist;

- living in a community where having a baby means flying to another place without your family;

The Stouffville Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters.

All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Stouffville Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

Write: Letters to the Editor, 34 Civic Ave., P.O. Box 154, Stouffville, L4A 7Z5, e-mail jmason@yrng.com

- living in a community with an annual dog shooting day and your family witnesses its dog shot and;

- living in a community with very few jobs and not much else to do.

These are just a few of the daily circumstances some of our fellow Ontarians endure with little hope for change.

A profile of one reserve, Attawapiskat, was documented in the Toronto Star Feb. 28. This is the reserve where our daughter and her family have roots.

What can be done? Allowing this situation to continue is disgraceful. Cassie and Matthew are aware of this disgrace. How about twinning with a school from the north?

Let's keep the focus on this tragedy until it is corrected. James Bartleman has again made us aware. We must not turn our backs again.

Please let the politicians know that you want proper housing, reasonably priced food and local jobs for Northern Ontarians.

LOVANNA AND JIM SANDERS
 STOUFFVILLE

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