



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

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War of words at lake extends to council meetings

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Musselman's Lake, two organizations created to improve life for the approximately 2,000 residents living around the Ninth Line lake north of Stouffville.

The result has been a war of words, and events, between the organizations. Cheap shots and trash talk have been volleyed.

These are not, however, the first resident groups to form. When people started to settle permanently in the area, street associations formed, many of which are still intact today.

The Residents Association and Friends of Musselman's Lake, are two organizations that also lay claim to a common cause, the environment. Yet, for whatever reason, both groups are unable to come together for something as basic as a clean-up day. Each group holds separate area clean-up days throughout the year, sometimes on the same weekend.

More than 20 years ago, a group of like-minded environmentally-oriented friends got together and decided they wanted to improve things around the lake. They called themselves the Friends of Musselman's Lake.

Their mandate was to do by example and show that, in fact, small things can make a difference.

"I enjoy what we do," said long-time Friends member Michael Buffery. "We don't try to be the be-all and end-all."

Despite its longevity, the group has remained small, with around 10 members.

But "everyone is welcome," according to Mr. Buffery.

Throughout the years, the group, which remains informal by design, has helped clean up the lake and local roads and has painted frogs on storm drains to get people thinking about what goes down there.

"What we try to do is just look at the environmental issues (and) leave the business, leave the dances and other social things" to other people, Mr. Buffery said.

But for some of lake's residents, who also want to keep the lake clean, Friends of Musselman's Lake is just a little too informal and narrow in scope.

So three years ago, another organization formed — the Musselman's Lake Residents Association.

"Our group isn't into small little projects. We're looking at the big picture," said former association president Christine Laing.

This is not the first time Mrs. Laing has spearheaded a resident's group at the Whitchurch-Stouffville lake.

About 20 years ago, shortly after Mrs. Laing and her husband, Brian, moved to the lake, the two decided to form a residents association called the Musselman's Lake Environmental Advisory Corporation.

But according to Mrs. Laing, the organization was dismantled a few years later after a group of residents opposed some of its initiatives, including improving the residents' septic systems.

"Everything we did was always the wrong move," Mrs. Laing said.

Dissatisfied with the way things were

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Wayne Emmerson,
Whitchurch-Stouffville mayor

playing out in the organization, the couple abandoned the group and focused on raising their family.

So when the Laings were asked to join the Musselman's Lake Residents Association three years ago, they hesitated. But after some convincing, the pair joined.

"This is a really good group, really an informative group," she said.

The residents association is the brainchild of Whitchurch-Stouffville Councillor Phil Bannon, who, according to president Rick Wigmore, "challenged us to get involved with the community. He needed some people he could work with to get things done in the community."

Along with conducting an annual lake clean-up, which this year netted an old boat, the association holds an annual Halloween

dance and winter carnival.

"Basically, what we're trying to do is create a better community," Mr. Wigmore said.

However, it appears trying to create a better community is actually fostering a community divided, which has resulted in both groups hurling insults at each other, publicly and privately.

Mr. Wigmore called the Friends of Musselman's Lake a "secret society" that uses confrontational and bullying tactics.

On the other hand, Mr. Buffery has been known to refer the residents association as the "boaters association".

"The beauty of our country is everyone is entitled to their opinion," Mr. Buffery said.

There are political undertones to the rift.

Mark Carroll, who lost his seat as councillor for the area to Mr. Bannon in 2003, is chairperson of the friends organization, member Bob James said.

Mr. James, a regular at town council meetings, has been known to verbally spar with Mr. Bannon during meetings and in letters to the editor of The Sun-Tribune.

However, those differences may be costly to the lake.

"We can't develop much of the lake because when we go to public meetings one (group) says one thing, the other (group) says another thing and council just has to choose what's best," said Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Wayne Emmerson.

"We've tried to do what we can for Musselman's Lake, but they might feel we haven't."