

What's behind your street name? Plenty

Atikokan, Ont. is a pretty little place as mining towns go. It sits way off the Trans-Canada Highway, a stone's throw from the Minnesota border.

The Canoeing Capital of Canada, as it's now known, has been re-inventing itself since the iron ore mines closed down 30 years ago.

I recall the orange dust that clung to every vehicle in Atikokan. I also remember the streets those pickup trucks — this was Northern Ontario — rode on. Because many of them were named for trees native to the area.

Spruce, Pine, Balsam, Fir, Cedar, Birch, Maple and two Poplars. You get the picture.

In the world of street-naming, Atikokan would rank just slightly higher than the numbered avenues of Manhattan for originality.

Which leads us 1,700 kilometres southeast ("down east," as they would say up there) of Atikokan to Stouffville, where street-naming creativity and colour is also being threatened.

In a report to town council last week, staff said some of the street



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

names recommended by a committee of volunteers were "unconventional" and "unusual" and "would prove inconvenient to the future homeowners on those streets".

Fair enough, in the cases of Johnabe, Arbutus and Babylonica, which were simply brought to the committee by a former councillor about 20 years ago because they were running out of names.

(The last two actually might fly in Atikokan — they're Latin tree names.)

The Stouffville street namers should never run out, even if this

town-doubles in population again.

They've done a wonderful job of immortalizing local landowners and politicians, taking names that would otherwise be buried in old municipal records and putting them on street signs for residents and visitors to talk about.

It would be far easier to allow a developer to put his kids' names on streets in a neighbourhood he was building. Or someone could just go bizarre. (Have you driven through that section of Markham with the streets named for "sirs", including Galahad, Lancelot, Bodwin.....?)

The York Region District School Board could have named its newest schools in town Happy Valley, Orchard View or something else as innocuous and weak.

Instead, it went with Harry Bowes and Wendat Village, which honour our past beautifully.

We can homogenize the process and adopt street names that would work in any new subdivision across the GTA.

Or we can recognize our pioneers and show a little individuality and flavour.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune

Howie keeps battling

He challenged adversity with the same intensity he played hockey and fastball — grit and determination.

Following deep brain surgery at Toronto's Western Hospital, Stouffville's Howie Burkholder is again assisting sons Chris and Richard in a seasonal corn-planting tradition that encompasses nearly 3,000 acres.

Purpose of the surgery, still unique in the field of medical science, was to relieve the effects of Parkinson's disease, an illness Howie has valiantly endured for the past 12 years.

He sees signs of success.

Severe cramps have disappeared; stiffness has departed; balance has returned and a daily intake of pills has significantly decreased.

It was back in 2001 that Howie experienced a circular movement problem related to his left hand. Through a test elimination process, neurosurgeons linked the difficulty to early-stage Parkinson's.

While Howie agreed to undergo deep brain stimulation, approval wasn't imminent. He first had to undertake a series of tests. After viewing results, surgeons agreed to proceed.

"As a farmer, I'm a risk-taker," he said, "but with this I had no doubts. I knew God was on my side."

Throughout the six-hour ordeal, Howie remained conscious. He described the double brain insertion as "very rough and very loud".

"It didn't really hurt that much," he said.

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During surgery, one physician maintained continuous voice contact, even to the point of saying: "Howie, pay attention!"

"For a moment, I thought I was back in Box Grove public school," he joked.

The insertions were bilateral, with entries to the brain from both left and right sides. Later, a remote controlled battery was inserted in his chest.

Since the Dec. 17 operation, Howie's returned to hospital several times, with his next check-up set for June 13.

The cost? "All covered by OHIP," he says. "But not the parking," he adds with a smile.

In true Howie Burkholder hon-



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

esty, he describes the procedure as not a cure but a treatment.

"I'm no hero," he claims. He vividly remembers one night, when cramps were severe, praying to God, "heal me". "There's no doubt, (God), was part of the process."

Howie refuses to minimize support received from his church (Wideman Mennonite), the community, friends and family members, including wife Merna.

"Outpouring of help has been fantastic," he says.

Despite the gravity of the surgery, Howie says he felt good when it was over. He remained in hospital two days, then returned home.

He's been on skates a couple of times since but later chose not to take further risks.

"The skating can wait till next season," he says. As for operating the farm tractor, he calls it "good therapy".

Born on the Ninth concession of Markham, south of Hwy. 7, Howie is one of four in the family of Lorne and Violet Burkholder. He has three sisters, Esther Reesor, Island Lake; Irene Steiner, New Hamburg and Sylvia Gallian, Atwood.

In addition to Chris and Richard of Stouffville, a third son, Ryan, resides at Elmira.

Howie attended Markham District High School and Indiana's Goshen College. He holds a degree in sociology and psychology from Richmond College.

While a student attending Markham High, he excelled at football and basketball.

Later, his sporting interests turned to hockey and fastball, serving as both player and manager of the Stouffville Mennos. He also coached youth teams that played out of Memorial Park.

In 1987, he received The Sun-Tribune's Sports Person of the year Award, a plaque that hangs in his Elgin Mills Road office.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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