

Embrace social media, expert tells council

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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Just because Whitchurch-Stouffville's mayor and councillors are not on social media, it does not mean people aren't Facebook chatting and tweeting about them.

But it looks like once the town's re-designed website is launched in October, so too will its Facebook and Twitter accounts.

"You should go where the people are," Brian Lambie, president of Redbrick Communications told councillors during a social media educational workshop Tuesday afternoon.

"I think it changes the culture for the better," he said.

Susanne Hilton is the only councillor on Facebook but it's a personal account. However, she has contemplated a professional one.

"It almost scares me," Ms Hilton said, noting having another venue for residents to ask questions, along with phone and e-mail, could be overwhelmingly time consuming.

On the other hand, Mayor Wayne Emmerson wants nothing to do with social media.

"You want to speak with me,

come see me," he said.

None of the councillors is on Twitter.

In next year's municipal election campaign, Mr. Lambie estimated about 90 per cent of candidates will have a social media presence.

"If I don't know it, then it doesn't hit you in the heart."

"It's not going away and you do have to get your heads around it," he said.

Mr. Emmerson won't be running for re-election in Whitchurch-Stouffville. However, he will be vying for the regional chairperson's position.

The current chairperson, Bill Fisch, does not have a Twitter account.

Along with not bragging about his accomplishments on Facebook or Tweeting his thoughts in 140 characters or less, Mr. Emmerson does not even look at social media sites to see what is being written about him or the municipality.

"If I don't know it, then it

doesn't hit you in the heart," he said.

Some of the tweets regarding the mayor include congratulations from Geranium Homes on receiving a cyber safety award and CivicAction thanked him for pledging to get the region moving.

Of Ontario's 444 municipalities, 240 utilize social media. Three years ago, only 25 municipalities used the communication tools, according to Mr. Lambie.

"It is the way. I don't disagree," Mr. Emmerson said.

Of the towns and cities that use social media, 94 per cent are on Facebook, while 70 per cent use Twitter.

If Whitchurch-Stouffville does take the social media plunge, there are some things to consider. Does the municipality have a single Twitter account or one for each department? Mr. Lambie prefers one account as it reaches more people faster, especially in an emergency.

"People can be fired for what they do on social media," he cautioned.

"If you can manage yourself at a cocktail party, you can manage yourself on social media," Mr. Lambie said.

Teachers' last-minute 'sick' days appalling acts of fraud

Thank goodness my daughter only has one more year to go before leaving Ontario's public education system, I caught myself thinking this week.

I'll be glad to see her graduate from a troubled system that I think is only going to get worse before it gets better.

It has been a school year marred by cancelled sports, clubs, field trips, graduation parties and proms and now my daughter tells me an increasing number of her classes are "a waste of time" as her teachers are calling in "sick".

News the province had reached a deal, in principle, with the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario — the lone holdout of all the province's teachers to make nice — was almost inconsequential.

A contract is already in place, granted it was forced upon 76,000 elementary public school teachers when they refused to broker a deal prior to the province's deadline last fall.

But now they can have the deal the Catholic and French-speaking teacher unions accepted, including a 2-per-cent raise, 11 sick days at 100-per-cent pay, with an additional 120 days at 90-per-cent pay and 100-per-cent pay for eight weeks of maternity leave, up from six.

Sure, it's tough to lose a benefit, but many private sector employees, too, have seen perks and benefits disappear in a tough economy.

It's a sweet deal, particularly given this is the deficit-ridden province's tough-love effort to reduce its swollen tab for public sector compensation.

Teachers have, however, lost the benefit of banking sick days — which is why many school boards are experiencing record number of teachers calling in sick, leaving them scrambling to cover the absences.

As my teacher friend told me, many teachers remain bitter over the loss of the benefit and without incentive not to take a sick day, they're taking them — sick or not.

Sure, it's tough to lose a benefit, but many private sector employees, too, have seen perks and benefits disappear in a tough economy.

As a parent, it's disheartening to hear your child's studies are being postponed due to a teacher's "last-



Debora Kelly

minute" absence.

As a taxpayer, I consider it an appalling act of fraud.

In March, when a newly installed Premier Kathleen Wynne vowed to resolve the labour action, many teachers resumed volunteering for extracurriculars with their union's approval.

I still think it's ludicrous an organization purporting to wave the banner for democracy has the gall to mandate to its members what they can and can't do during their own free time ... that said, I'll just give a huge shout out to the teachers who truly put students first by continuing to volunteer.

Sadly — distressingly so — some teachers continued to withhold volunteering at everything from track and field competitions to Grade 8 graduations.

So, in a public education system already struggling with its core tenet to offer equality of opportunity, some students were playing sports and going on trips and others were not.

It's an unacceptable situation that won't be put to bed even if this deal is ratified by June 23.

Extracurriculars are part of a well-rounded education, reinforcing lessons learned in the classroom.

Research shows participation in extracurricular activities can increase a student's sense of engagement and attachment to their school, resulting in less failures and dropouts.

It's an essential issue that the province ensure extracurriculars are available in all public schools — and, as this labour dispute has reinforced, they're too important to be left to the whim of teacher volunteers. Whether it's teachers or community members doing it, the value of this work should be recognized and compensated.

Resolving the labour issues with teachers can't simply be about knuckling under to their demands; it will require a fortitude and political will that was vastly lacking during the McGuinty years of government.

Debora Kelly is editor in chief of the York Region Media Group.

Transport Canada

PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSIONS PICKERING LANDS

On June 11, 2013, the Government of Canada announced its plan for the responsible use and management of the Pickering Lands. The plan includes:

- transferring nearly 5,000 acres of the western portion to Parks Canada, towards creating the Rouge National Urban Park in the Rouge Valley;
- reserving a smaller portion in the southeast quadrant for a future airport, and
- engaging stakeholders, businesses and local communities on the future of the remaining lands.

Transport Canada will hold public information sessions to answer your questions about these decisions and explain upcoming activities.

Dates: Monday, June 24, 2013
Thursday, June 27, 2013

Time: 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Location: Glen Cedars Golf Club
230, 7th Concession
Pickering, ON

Additional information can be found on Transport Canada's website
www.tc.gc.ca/eng/ontario/pickering-menu-1362.htm

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BESTCO	MICHAELS
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CAMCO SPORTS	NO FRILLS
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HOME OUTFITTERS	TARGET
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REALTY	THE SOURCE
IDA	TOYS R US
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