

Almaguin News.

CONNECTED TO YOUR COMMUNITY NORTH BAY/NIPISSING.COM

Locked-out CAS staff upset over cancelled meeting

Andrew Mendler
amendler@metrolandnorthmedia.com

NORTH BAY – Workers locked out of their jobs by the Nipissing and Parry Sound Children's Aid Society are outraged over the cancellation of an agency board meeting.

Staff expressed their "shock and dismay" on Jan. 23 after the board announced the last-minute cancellation of the Jan. 24 board meeting.

The board posted the announcement on their website late the week before, citing "the ongoing labour disruption" as the reason for the cancellation.

"This is a very troubling decision on the part of Nipissing and Parry Sound CAS," said Fran Bélanger, national representative of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which is representing the locked-out CAS administrative and support staff.

"Not satisfied with locking out its workers, the CAS now seems to be locking out the region's residents — members of the public who are demanding answers about the safety of the children and youth in our communities; and individuals who want to know the real story behind the lockout of CAS employees."

"The CAS board is in constant communication with CAS executives and, through them, with the provincial government and members of the public. The board is kept apprised immediately of any new developments during the labour dispute," reads a statement released by the CAS Board of Directors.

The regular scheduled meeting of Jan. 24 has not been cancelled, according to the board, but rather was just postponed.

Staff in Parry Sound, North Bay and Burk's Falls have been locked out of their jobs since Dec. 23. These employees have been quite vocal since this lockout, picketing in Parry Sound on Christmas Day and in Burk's Falls on January 6.

"Respecting the difficult decision to lock out workers, this action was based on strong evidence that had we not done so, we would face a serious risk of disruption to the services we provide to children and families. To avoid this risk, it became necessary to implement a contingency plan that involved the lockout," continued the statement.

While both sides have expressed an interest in resuming negotiations, no meeting has been set.



ANDREW MENDLER/METROLAND
Hayes' Service Centre in Burk's Falls has noticed a significant decrease in the number of snowmobiles it is fueling. Gas station attendant Alan Barlow says the business has been fueling only local snowmobile traffic, which is nowhere close to the 20 to 30 sleds per day it usually serves this time of year.

Lack of snowmobile traffic crippling economy

Andrew Mendler
amendler@metrolandnorthmedia.com

BURK'S FALLS – Business owners are calling for action after snowmobile trail closures have eliminated the majority of their winter business in and around Burk's Falls.

"The Almaguin District Snowmobile Club announced last week that trails ADSC 306 (formerly D123) through Burk's Falls and ADSC 305 (near Three Mile Lake) will both not be reopening this year "due to impossible terrain."

The closure of these two main trails has Angela and Les Eliot, owners of Day-spring Cottages in Katrine, extremely concerned for the local economy.

"My concern is for my business, my future and my investment. But there are a lot of other people here who are going to suffer greatly," said Les.

The Eliots have started a petition to try and garner support to save the trails. While driving around Katrine, Kearney and Burk's Falls earlier this week passing out petitions, the Eliots were shocked to find out just how much of an impact trail closures have had.

"Businesses really are

hurting. I didn't realize how much they are hurting until we started dropping off these petitions," said Angela. "I don't think people knew what to do. When we went in and gave them the petition, they were just so pleased."

Unseasonably warm weather and a lack of funding has forced the Almaguin club to shut down the snowmobile trails. With some of the rough, rocky patches exposed and not enough money to properly fix them, the club couldn't make the trails safe to ride.

The closure of trail 306, which runs from Emsdale north to Pickeral Lake, has resulted in Katrine and Burk's Falls becoming completely inaccessible by snowmobile. Businesses in these rural communities are now struggling, as the thousands of dollars worth of business usually generated by snowmobile traffic is blocked from accessing the community.

The Hayes gas station off Ontario Street in Burk's Falls, which usually fuels around 20-30 snowmobiles per day in January has only fuelled a handful local of sleds this year.

Dee's Family Dining, a restaurant just down the street from the gas station, is facing the same drought.

"Usually in the winter I have a good snowmobile crowd. This year you don't see them in town," said owner Devvie Leis.

"It has been dead. I have been here for four years and this is the quietest I have ever seen it."

The lack of customers has already forced Leis to dramatically reduce her winter hours, closing Dee's

down on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and only opening for a three-and-a-half hour dinner shift on Mondays.

"I am thinking about closing. I have already closed three days a week because it is quiet. It is just not worth it to pay hydro, gas and utilities ... pay staff, be open and not have any customers," said Leis.

"We depend on the sledders. It is extremely important to Burk's Falls. We have nothing else here in the winter," said Leis.

Many of the businesses in Burk's Falls are in the same position, finding it difficult to operate with the majority of their winter customers not around.

Continued on Page 5

Trails to Burk's Falls, Katrine closed

Andrew Mendler
amendler@metrolandnorthmedia.com

ALMAGUIN – Burk's Falls and Katrine are now inaccessible by snowmobile. Unseasonably warm weather and a lack of funding has forced the Almaguin District Snowmobile Club to shut down multiple snowmobile trails throughout the region.

In past years, a thick base of snow has helped cover up rough, rocky patches along the local trails. A lack of snow and warmer temperatures over the past few weeks has exposed many of these rocky spots and made trails unsafe to travel.

"We don't have the money to put thousands of dollars into grooming these trails," said club vice president Rob Rickward.

"There is no funding from the Ontario Government, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs has given us zero dollars and investing club money into a trail that crosses private property, which landowners could close down, is not really

feasible." Trail ADSC 306 through Burk's Falls and ADSC 305 (near Three Mile Lake) will both not be reopening this year "due to impossible terrain," according to a statement posted on the club's website.

"The 306 trail will not be opened from Emsdale right through to Pickeral Lake because there are spots in it that we just can't do anything with at the present time," said Rickward. "But we are trying to get some of the trails reopened again. We are attempting to get around some of the bad spots."

A one-kilometre stretch between Pickeral Lake and Lake Lake has rocks and needs work. Another stretch of trail west of Woods Road is also rocky and troublesome, as is a portion near Ferguson Road.

"We understand that this will be a huge burden on business and sledders in these areas but we have absolutely no choice other than to close them. Safety and liability is a huge factor," continued the statement on the website.

Continued on Page 5

Snowmobiler dead after hitting a tree

PERRY – A 57-year-old man has died after crashing his snowmobile into a tree along Cherry Hill Road on Monday afternoon.

On Jan. 30, at roughly 1 p.m., the Almaguin Highlands OPP, along with Kearney Fire Department and Parry Sound EMS investigated a snowmobile collision on trail D-123 approximately two kilometers down Cherry Hill Road.

Jean Paul Goulet, 57, of Welland, Ont., was travelling on the snowmobile trail when he failed to negotiate a curve and fell the trail, striking a tree.

Goulet was pronounced dead at the scene. A post mortem was scheduled for Jan. 31.



Powassan farmer dies after tractor crashes through ice

Andrew Mendler
amendler@metrolandnorthmedia.com

POWASSAN – Eugene John Kunkel, 82, died after the tractor he was driving crashed through the ice into freezing cold waters on Jan. 25.

Shortly after 3:30 p.m. on Jan. 25 members of the North Bay OPP and the North Bay EMS received a call for service at the Hydro Pond in Powassan. Reports indicated that a tractor being operated on the ice broke through and became submerged with the operator still inside.

Family members, police and paramedics performed life-saving measures on Kunkel, but were unable to save him. He was pronounced dead after being transported to hospital.

Many of the comments left in the Paul

Funeral Home online guest book portray Kunkel as a kind, wonderful man who always had a smile on his face and sparkle in his eye.

"He had a way of making everyone feel special, like you were his favourite. And indeed he was everyone's favourite Uncle. He will be greatly missed by all, but especially by his family," read a post written by a group of relatives and friends: Shirley, Marc and Ava; Chris and Jennifer.

Kunkel, a lifelong dairy farmer and avid outdoorsman, will be remembered by family and friends during a funeral service on Feb. 1.

"Uncle Eugene will be so very missed. The loss of his light and laughter will leave an immeasurable void," wrote Josh and Carry Aultman.



Eugene Kunkel

Parry Sound council supports waterfront casino

Sarah Bissonette
sbissonette@metrolandnorthmedia.com

PARRY SOUND – Parry Sound council has supported a proposed casino on the town's waterfront.

Council passed a resolution at its Jan. 17 meeting supporting, in principle, Shawanaga First Nation's idea to build a hotel, casino and conference centre on the Georgian Bay waterfront on Great North Road, just north of the Bowes Street intersection. The resolution includes the promise of

a public meeting at an unspecified date once details of the plan come together.

Shawanaga Chief Wayne Pama-jewon sent a letter to the town last month asking for its support.

"As you all know, our community is a short drive north of us and we see this as an opportunity to solidify a relationship between our community and yours," wrote Pama-jewon. "We believe that being neighbours and partners in this project will only increase the success of it. We understand

that unrolling this project involves great risk. But with the research and information we have accumulated, we strongly believe the reward will be worth it."

"Not only will this project increase the flow of traffic volume coming through Parry Sound, it will also create jobs and economic growth ... we hope that in the new year we can sit down to discuss this matter further. Parry Sound is growing and we, the people of Shawanaga, would like to be part of that growth."

Parry Sound Mayor Jamie McGarvey has supported the project publicly since the fall, noting the potential for jobs and economic growth for the town.

"Nothing with the project has been solidified," said McGarvey, and the property hasn't been purchased yet.

The project does fit into Parry Sound's strategic plan for waterfront development, and staff recommended in its report that council

Continued on Page 2

Since 1932 - The History of "Sells For Less"

In 1932 Willard Lang opened Sundridge Garage and began selling Dodge Brothers trucks. Willard's son "Mac" began working at the dealership in the early 40's and the name of the dealership was changed to Mac Lang in the early 60's. For 85 years the dealership has sold Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep vehicles and Mac Lang has become known as the dealership that Sells for Less. That tradition holds true today as we celebrate 85 years in Sunny Sundridge.



Safe Rail Communities' Helen Vassilakos stands on the southern approach to the Howland Avenue rail bridge on Saturday, Dec. 31, near the site of an August derailment. Staff/Metroland

Advocates demand better protocol for train derailments

HILARY CATON
hcaton@insidetoronto.com

Advocates and municipal politicians are calling for more to be done to protect the public from hazardous materials transported through communities across the province.

According to the Transportation Safety Board of Canada, there were 144 accidents involving dangerous goods across Canada in 2015, and 33 incidents where a tanker leaked at least 200 litres of the dangerous material it was transporting.

For years, municipalities have been asking for more information about what hazardous materials are travelling by train. And a recent train derailment in Toronto's midtown neighbourhood of the Annex in August was a stark reminder that residents aren't prepared for a derailment.

Safe Rail Communities (SRC), a national, community-based initiative based in Toronto, released a survey after the derailment asking residents how prepared they felt for a derailment. More than 80 per cent indicated they were not prepared.

"There seems to be gaps between what is being done with respect to emergency planning at city hall, and knowledge getting to residents at the neighbourhood level, and that's because there isn't enough outreach to communities," said Helen Vassilakos, co-founder of SRC.

At the Office of Emergency Management at the City of Toronto, a spokesperson emphasized they "don't want residents to have a specific plan for a derailment, but an emergency plan for any eventuality, all hazards." Although Vassilakos agrees to the holistic approach, there is still a lack of information about derailment emergencies.

"We feel that residents need to clearly understand what

"People need to know about the risks and hazards in regards to where they live. The more they know, the better they can prepare themselves and make short- and long-term decisions based on that."

Ali Asgary/York University

the risks of living near a rail line ... in the same way that residents need to understand what the risks are when living in a low-lying area; risk of flooding or insurance implications," Vassilakos explained.

She'd like to see a section dedicated to rail emergencies and a more detailed shelter-in-place resource for residents, similar to the one created by the City of Brampton, which informs residents, in detail, of notification protocols, how to prepare a shelter-in-place kit and a list of do's and don'ts in the event of a derailment.

Vassilakos has been working with Professor Ali Asgary, of the Disaster and Emergency Management department at York University, to develop the MySafeRailApp.

The app uses yearly historical information rail companies are required to give to municipalities about the nature and volume of dangerous goods moving through cities. The app gives users the ability to determine if they live in an immediate impact zone for a large train derailment.

"People need to know about the risks and hazards in regards to where they live. The more they know, the better they can prepare themselves and make short- and long-

term decisions based on that," Asgary said.

"People really need to know what they're up against." Users can input their address into the beta website and see a list of hazardous materials that have passed through the area.

"Once that's identified, it tells you what steps can be taken if it does happen: whether to shelter in place, or evacuate. It's very basic information based on Transport Canada's safety guide."

At the municipal level, mayors and councillors have for years been requesting the federal government step in and promote better communication between the rail industry and local communities.

The August derailment in Toronto prompted Coun. Joe Cressy to bring forward a motion, which was adopted by city council, that asks the deputy city manager to look at what a proper communications protocol should be because the city doesn't have one. It's something communities "desperately need," he said.

"Although the derailment this past summer was contained, it exposed some real issues, one of which was the complete absence of formal communication from any level of government with residents ... They were left in the dark," said Cressy.

"We recognize rail is a federal issue, but as a city, if we can improve communications in the absence of a proper federal protocol, then we will. The city will have to create its own."

Cressy adds there are things that can be done now with regards to rail safety, such as overhauling the railway management system and looking at alternative rail routes that don't pass through densely populated areas.

"If there is the potential for harm, no matter how small, we need to reduce that potential," said Cressy.

Businesses feeling impact of Almaguin snowmobile trail closures —

Continued from front

The resorts outside the village are also worried and concerned about the impending consequences this season can have on their businesses. The Eliots won't see any impact from the snowmobile drought this year, as all of their cottages were booked and paid for in advance. But they are dealing with customers frustrated over the current trail situation.

"I don't know if they are going to come back next year unless we have the trails. I don't see them coming back. Why would they?" said Les.

"It has taken us 17 years to develop the clients that we have and this can wipe it out in one year."

The same thought is on the mind of Doug Pincoe, owner of Pickering Lake Cottages just northeast of Burk's Falls.

"We start closing trails down and it is going to affect us," said Pincoe. "People don't have to come here. They can go to Haliburton. There

are other places to go snowmobiling. They can go north or south of us."

Pincoe, just like the Eliots, won't see the impact of the closures this year due to advanced bookings. He is still fielding all kinds of questions from concerned customers regarding the trail closures around his cottages.

These current and impending economic impacts are what spurred Les to spread a petition. He hopes that with enough signatures he will be able to generate some attention.

"I am hoping that some government agency with some funding can see the plight of tourism in this area and that maybe they can find some funding."

Les also plans on taking his concerns and the signed petition to local MPP Norm Miller to push the issue further into the spotlight.

"We all have to fight to save our businesses," added Angela.



ANDREW MENDELER/METROLAND

Les and Angela Eliot, owners of Dayspring Cottages in Katrine, are worried about the impact trail closures could have on the area economy. The two have started a petition to save the trails.



Trails ADSC 306 (formerly D-123), which runs through Burk's Falls, is closed. The entrance to the trail off of Ferguson Road has a closed sign posted, warning riders to stay off.

Burk's Falls has Katrine trails closed —

Continued from front

"It's gut-wrenching," said Rickward. "This area depends on these trails."

Armour councillor Pay Hayes, who also owns the gas bar in downtown Burk's Falls, brought the issue up at council on Jan. 24, wondering if the municipality could do anything to help.

"We are not going to give the club money but is there anything we can do as a municipality to help the club out?" Asked Hayes.

"While I didn't own (the gas station) last year, the guys who work there have said it wasn't uncommon to fuel over 200 sleds, and we are fuelling none right now."

After a brief discussion, council decided to have staff take a look to see if there are any road allowances which could possibly serve as an alternative route for sections of the trail.

The municipality will also be researching to see if there are any grants available to help fund the grooming work that needs to be done.

"This does affect the businesses and it does affect tourism," said Hayes.

"Very rarely do (snowmobilers) just come in for gas. Normally you'd see them at Dee's Restaurant, you'd see them at Al's Diner and in the field at Tim Hortons. It is giant what is not here this year."

DONATION STORE

249.700.4225

NOW OPEN

201 Ontario Street, Burk's Falls

Join us

Saturday, February 4, 2017

Grand Opening

12 noon to 2 p.m.

FREE PIZZA & rootBEER

(compliments of Spicolli's Pizza & Pasta, Emsdale)

Almaguin Donation Store is giving back to the community.

You DONATE your unwanted items and we donate back to a LOCAL charity.

We accept donations of clothing, household items, small appliances, toys and more.

STORE HOURS: Tuesday to Friday - 9:30-6 and Saturday 10-4