

# For elderly couple, 'reunification' an empty promise

CATHY DOBSON  
THE JOURNAL

**T**oni Conroy, 93, keeps a wedding photo proudly displayed in her room, a fond reminder of her husband.

Though she and Gordon Conroy have been married 73 years, bureaucracy and provincial rules have prevented the Sarnia couple from living together for the past 15 months.

And now, with Sarnia's Twin Lakes Terrace Long Term Care Community in COVID-19 lockdown, they can't even see each other, said daughter Diane Herron.

"The bottom line is that my dad is almost 95 and needs to be with his wife," she said.

"They miss one another incredibly. They've been together for so long. It's so unfair that they are being kept apart."

Herron blames the Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network

(LHIN), which co-ordinates long-term care placements.

The Conroys lived in their own home, and in June 2018 their health took a turn. Both were assessed by the LHIN for long-term care, and both qualified based on cognitive tests.

"They signed all the papers to be accepted for long-term care placement," said Herron. "I was there, and I know my father didn't hesitate because he understood they'd be able to live together."

"They were told that (a provincial policy called) spousal reunification meant that would take top priority."

Toni was hospitalized in January 2019 and then admitted into nursing care at Twin Lakes Terrace. Two weeks later, her husband fell ill. But when Gordon was released from hospital he was assigned a room in Twin Lakes retirement home, an adjacent but different



TONI CONROY, 93, and her husband Gordon, 94.

Submitted Photo

facility.

"We understood that eventually they would be

in the same room in long-

term care," said Herron. But it never happened.

Gordon was reassessed and told he no longer qualified for long-term

care, despite his advanced years.

Continued on 3

# City man fighting ticket laid under emergency orders

TROY SHANTZ  
THE JOURNAL

**A** Sarnia man charged with violating emergency orders is at war with Sarnia Police.

Pat McHenry, a 72-year-old retired carpenter, says he's going to court to fight the ticket, which carries a fine of \$1,255.

"I'll go to jail before I pay a

dime to these people, I'll tell ya that right now," McHenry told the Rebel News network.

McHenry was the first person charged after Sarnia launched its COVID-19 hotline to report emergency order offenders.

Sarnia Police say he failed to self-isolate at his apartment for 14 days after returning from a trip abroad. Bylaw enforcement officers issued a warning on

March 31.

On April 6, officers were waiting for McHenry when he returned from walking his dog and issued a ticket.

"It's important to note that our attention to him came from neighbours," said Sarnia Police Inspector Jeff Hodgson.

"This wasn't some sort of random drive-by by the police, it was the result of complaints

by the neighbours."

McHenry said he returned from a Mexican vacation on March 25, the same day Ottawa ordered Canadians to self-isolate for 14 days following international travel.

McHenry told Rebel News he used his apartment building stairwell and not the elevator to avoid other people when venturing out to walk his little dog,

Molly, and didn't go beyond the back of the property.

Police used provincial legislation to issue a ticket for \$880. Later, officers returned, cancelled the first ticket, and charged McHenry with a violation of the Quarantine Act, a federal offence carrying a \$1,255 fine.

Continued on 3

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# Local

## Conroys:

*Continued from 1*

“They told me his condition improved and he couldn’t move in with Mom,” said Herron. “I went ballistic.”

Prior to the pandemic, Gordon, the healthier of the two, was able to visit his wife’s room daily. But with the quarantine in place even that’s no longer possible.

Herron said her mother has “a shrine” of photos and dried flowers to her father, and she asks constantly about Gordon, who takes anxiety medication.

“They have a wonderful relationship,” she said.

Though attempts have been made for them to talk by phone the calls are difficult to co-ordinate.

For the past 15 months Gordon Conroy has paid \$5,000 per month for private rooms for himself and his wife. They should be sharing a room, or at least on the same floor, Herron said.

“But they still can’t be together.”

She has appealed repeatedly to the LHIN without success. When her father was reassessed recently, it was done over the phone with the questions directed to Twin Lakes’ employees, Herron said.

“(The assessor) didn’t even speak to my father, and just said he still doesn’t qualify.”

The Journal contacted the Erie/St. Clair LHIN to ask why Ontario’s spousal reunification policy hasn’t worked for the Conroys.

“It sounds like a very unfortunate situation,”

said LHIN spokesperson Shannon Sasseville. “I’ll get back to you.”

Sasseville later sent an email saying the LHIN can’t comment on a specific case, and any questions about spousal reunification rules should be directed to the provincial government.

Sarnia-Lambton MPP Bob Bailey has been asked to help.

“These aren’t the first people who have talked to me about their parents or grandparents wanting to live together in a home,” Bailey told The Journal. “I’d like to see them all reunited.”

“I certainly understand the issue, and it’s a tough one. If my parents were alive I’d want it for them.”

Provincial legislation requires homes to designate a “specified number of long stay program beds

for reunification priority.” But both spouses must be eligible for long-term care and Gordon no longer qualifies, according to the LHIN.

Ontario NDP MPP Catherine Fife has introduced Bill 153, the Long Term Care Homes (Till Death Do Us Part) Act. It aims to give residents the right not to be separated from spouses, even if their care needs are different.

Bill 153 was in line for committee review before third and final reading, but it’s unclear what will happen to it now with Queen’s Park focused on the pandemic.

Herron just hopes something can be done, and soon.

“I wonder, with COVID-19, if my parents are going to see each other again,” she said.



TONI AND GORDON Conroy, on their 72nd wedding anniversary.

Submitted Photo

## Ticket:

*Continued from 1*

Under the Quarantine Act, even asymptomatic residents must “stay in a private place like your yard or balcony if you go outside for fresh air,” according to a federal government website.

Const. John Sottosanti said police have been in contact with the Crown regarding definitions and enforcement.

“We don’t want to do

it any more than (people) want to be infringed upon, but there’s laws to be followed,” he said.

The Rebel News Network, a conservative media outlet, is working with Toronto criminal defence lawyer Sam Goldstein to assist on cases like McHenry’s, and is raising money to fight what it calls heavy-handed enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions by all levels of government.

Sottosanti said McHenry has every right to contest the charge.

“We’re just saying

there’s a law to be enforced... now it’s up to the courts to decide.”

Sarnia’s COVID-19 received almost 800 tips its first month of operation.

City police and bylaw enforcement had laid three other charges as of May 1: two for birthday parties with more than five people not from the same household, and a non-essential business that remained open.

One of the individuals charged has told The Journal they, like McHenry, intend to challenge it.

## Helicopter to spray for gypsy moths

Sarnia has hired a company with a twin-engine helicopter to begin spraying gypsy moths with a biological insecticide.

If wind and weather conditions permit, the first aerial spray could be applied in targeted areas May 20, with a second application five to seven days later, the city’s forestry department says.

The process should take about 15 minutes

and begin before sunrise.

Homeowners within the prescribed spray area will get a notice letter seven days before the first application, with updates provided on social media 48 hours in advance.

Gypsy moths, an invasive species whose caterpillars can quickly defoliate trees, attacked pockets of the urban forest last summer.

The target area is 64

hectares (157 acres), which includes Canatara Park and Lake Chipican Drive, Oak Acres Park, Lakeshore Road east of Modeland, and Colborne Road north of Michigan, south of Cathcart, and east to Errol Road and Ridgewood Drive.

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# Local

## Elderly couple reunited after 15 months of living apart

CATHY DOBSON  
THE JOURNAL

A Sarnia woman's plea for her elderly parents to be reunited at their long-term care home has been answered.

After 15 months of living apart, Gord Conroy, 94, has moved to the same floor at Twin Lakes Terrace as his wife Toni, 93.

"He was excited, and my mom cried," said daughter Diane Herron, who couldn't attend the reunion because of ongoing pandemic restrictions.

The Conroys, married for 73 years, had been separated by COVID-19 and a bureaucratic decision to place them in different levels of care.

Toni was assigned to a long-term care unit at the Murphy

Road facility. Though the couple was initially told they could live together, Gord was later placed in an adjacent but separate retirement facility after undergoing an assessment.

The couple desperately wanted to live together again, but even visiting was prohibited after the pandemic arrived in mid-March.

Herron blamed bureaucratic red tape for their plight, and was concerned they'd be unable to spend their remaining time together.

The Erie St. Clair Local Integrated Health Network (LHIN), which co-ordinates long-term care placements, told Herron Ontario's policy of spousal reunification did not apply to her parents because their needs differed.

But Herron persisted, repeatedly contacting the LHIN and

Sarnia-Lambton MPP Bob Bailey. When nothing happened, she told the story to The Journal.

Two weeks later, on May 19, she received a call from the administrator of Twin Lakes, and from a vice-president at Steeves & Rozema, which owns the facility.

They said a bed was available for her father. Not in the same room, but at least on the same floor.

"I was stunned," Herron said. "I could hardly believe it. I asked, but no one would say what changed and why my dad was finally moved."

"I'm very, very relieved that my parents are together."

Shortly after The Journal ran a LHIN representative retested Gord Conroy for two hours, with Herron listening in on speakerphone.

Several days passed, nothing happened, and Herron was deflated



TONI CONROY, 93, and husband Gord, 94, have been married 73 years.

Submitted Photo

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"I did intervene when the family called me," said Alexander. "I asked the LHIN to look into it. They are the gatekeeper and hold the waiting list."

"Now, we have a very happy outcome."

Herron said she's satisfied both Twin Lakes and Steeves & Rozema did their best.

"But I have nothing good to say about the LHIN," she said. "My last conversation with the LHIN was that dad was not a priority and he wouldn't be moved."

Her parents, she added, will not easily get over their 15-month separation.

"It was unnecessary. Why do they put these poor people through this? It shouldn't be this hard getting old."

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