

Editorial

Sarnia and Lambton need each other

It is a challenging time for Enniskillen Mayor Kevin Marriott to take the helm of Lambton County.

He's the new warden, a largely ceremonial job which includes meeting with upper levels of government and representing the county at community events.

The warden is elected by the politicians who make up Lambton County Council. Getting elected is not an easy task considering the personalities of local politicians and the needs of the different communities.

It was striking then, that Marriott chose to ask politicians to strive for unity when he was making his pitch to be warden. 2020 has been full of struggles and even Marriott acknowledges there are greater economic struggles ahead which could lead to the provincial and federal governments taking the money out of Lambton County's pockets - as they have in the past. He talked about that of course, too, but Marriott made sure to ask local politicians to put aside their community's political agendas.

He was talking of the growing frustration by Sarnia's elected officials, who earlier this year voted on a request to stop paying its share to the county. There has always been concern on the city's behalf that it isn't getting as many services as it should considering the cash it puts in. Social media - particularly those on it uneducated about what the county level of government actually does - amplifies those concerns.

So Marriott reached across the growing divide, hoping to find people ready to work together, both from the county and the city.

He's right to make this a priority. These are tough times but a rift between the city and county that would lead to infighting or even separation would make things worse.

Sarnia and Lambton do function well together. The city, yes, pays a large share of the taxes, but it also uses much of the services. It's time for the county administrators to lay that out in black and white again. Hopefully, that will put the chatter to rest and others will see that we need each other and we really are better together.

Letters to the Editor

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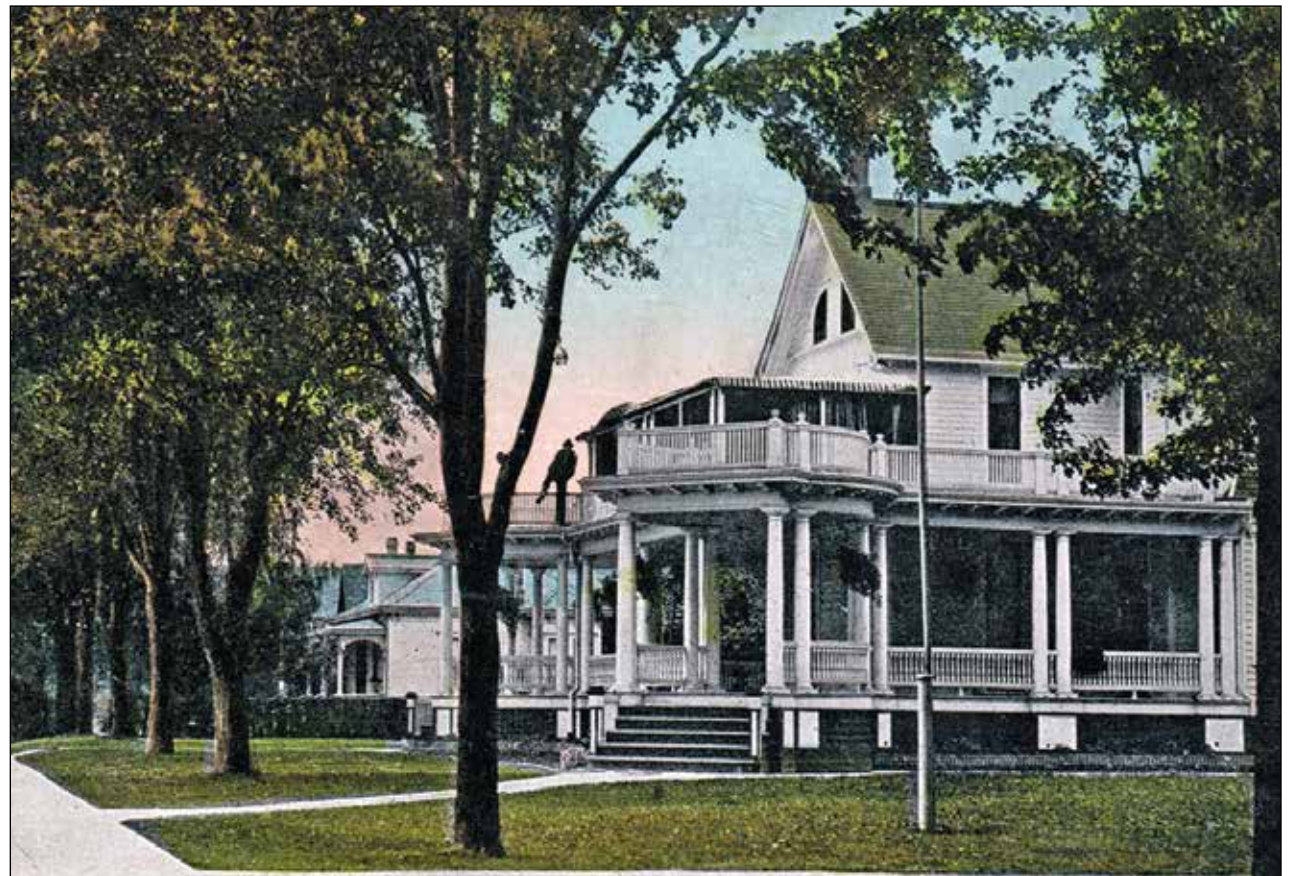
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Our Story



FROM THE DAVE BURWELL POSTCARD COLLECTION

An unusual picture of Main Street West on Petrolia Line. If you look closely, you'll note someone is trying to scale the upper balcony of the beautiful home.

The Twinkle; my dad's joy was sparkling in his eyes

My dad always had a little twinkle in his eye - a sparkle of mischief that greeted the people he loved.

That twinkle surfaced often - Dad was full of fun and joy - a bit of an imp really.

His much-loved brothers would likely see that twinkle as Eli was telling a joke or pulling a prank. I would have liked to be a bug on the wall as the Kok boys went fishing. Fuzzy family pictures show my dad, the joker, holding himself up on his brother's shoulders to appear taller than everyone else for once.

The twinkle would appear at family gatherings. During my cousin's wedding, guests were asked to find creative ways to demonstrate kissing for the bride and groom. Five-foot-six Eli, with a twinkle in his eye, came to the front, pulled up a chair, climbed up and kissed his six-foot-two Annie. People at the reception roared with laughter.

The twinkle would appear a lot at Christmas. We would play games as we waited for the neighbourhood firefighter who played Santa to appear at our home Christmas Eve. The favourite game was Mouse - nuts were strewn across the table and one was chosen as THE MOUSE when a child was out of the room. The kid would then go through the pile until finding The Mouse, and everyone would scream - MOUSE! If you watched closely, the twinkle was there in Dad's eyes as the hands reached closer to the Mouse.

But the twinkle wasn't reserved for Christmas; it could be found every day around our dinner table.

He would come home from work at night, as supper was being put on the table.

One memorable night, he had that twinkle in his eye as entered the house. He opened the folds of his coat to reveal a little dog and then smiled

broadly.

But the best time to see The Twinkle was when you came home. It was there each time you came to visit. Dad would either stand at the door, or be at the kitchen table reading a newspaper or his latest book when you arrived. He would spot you, grin and twinkle and then stand up to give you the biggest hug, growling in your ear at the same time.

I'll miss that hug and the twinkle in his eyes.

Dad passed away Thursday. His twinkle, I'm sure, is constant in heaven.



Heather Wright



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Editorial

Truth then reconciliation

In July, the federal government declared Sept. 30 Truth and Reconciliation Day.

It is, according to the government, a day to give “the public a chance to recognize and commemorate the intergenerational harm that residential schools have caused to Indigenous families and communities, and to honour those who have been affected by this injustice.

The establishment of a day of reflection was one of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC spent six years travelling to all parts of Canada and heard from more than 6,500 witnesses and hosted seven national events across Canada to engage the Canadian public, educate people about the history and legacy of the residential schools system, and share and honour the experiences of former students and their families.

And yet, in June, when the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc First Nation used ground penetrating radar to find 215 bodies in a graveyard on the grounds of a residential school near Kamloops, the nation was surprised and horrified.

It was, of course, only the beginning. The TRC in 2015 estimated there were 3,200 unmarked graves. It couldn't verify this, because when the commission asked the government to provide funding to dig deeper into the issue, it was refused. So far, nearly 7,000 undocumented graves have been found.

Canadians have a long history of avoiding this ugly truth. Governments from the beginning of confederation ignored staff sounding the alarms about the schools. Citizens didn't give a second thought to the schools in their neighbourhoods if they even knew of them. And then, in 2015, when the TRC laid the evidence bare for all to see - we turned away again.

Even now, after a period of shock and calls for action, the public desire to begin to reconcile - to make right what was done for so many years - has waned.

We cannot as a country turn away again from the injustices Indigenous people face even today. Take Sept. 30 to remember the children who died at Indian Residential Schools or survived them never to be the same again. And then begin Oct. 1 to do something to bring justice for Indigenous people.

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Our Story



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It will be a busy weekend in Alvinston as the Brooke-Alvinston-Watford Fall Fair hosts everything from a tractor pull to a demolition derby. We thought that deserved a look at downtown Alvinston at the turn of the century as we see it in this postcard from the Dave Burwell Collection.

Is the cart leading the horse to develop new parks?

Petrolia is applying for a \$900,000 grant to develop its “Backyard Plan” for the grounds around the YMCA-Oil Heritage Community Centre.

It's kind of a surprising move considering the municipal council didn't authorize the application nor have there been any public discussions, that we can find, on what exactly will be included in the Backyard Plan.

The plan, as I understand it, has been to use the land around the facility for a number of recreational facilities, everything from basketball courts, a tennis venue, a tennis academy, a splash pad and soccer pitches.

The term Backyard Plan has been used for a while now. In 2015, the \$1.7 million plan for the development of the property around the Y was floated during a budget session, surprising some members of the community and councillors.

Some questioned the costs, others questioned the location considering the building is beside an industry which sometimes emits odours.

After hearing the complaints, staff

recommended the idea be put on hold to be reviewed. The mayor of the day even said there would be a full public meeting.

So far that hasn't happened.

There has been a parks and recreation master plan since then which recommended buying more parkland. Council did that this past spring; it is next to the YMCA - 1.3 acres for \$111,000.

The Master Plan also called on the town to “update the conceptual park plan for Petrolia YMCA Open Space.”

One would have to assume that has happened, however it hasn't returned to council for approval or for direction.

Neither did the grant application, which one assumes would be based on an updated conceptual plan we haven't seen. Staff tells me council approval isn't necessary. As a taxpayer, I disagree.

The concept behind municipal government is politicians plot the direction and administrators work out the details. If council hasn't approved a Backyard Plan, how does administration know what direction to take? It

looks like the cart is leading the horse.

You might think - well it will be great if we're getting grant money! Grant money is great, but it isn't free; municipalities will have to pay a share of it. Right now we don't even know what that share is.

And if town staff secures a grant and councillors hear from the public that they don't like the plan or it doesn't meet the needs of the community, do you really think they're going to turn the money down? Just by applying, the decision to spend the money has been made and not by the politicians we elect. And if they did approve the plan without letting the public know what's going on or holding the promised full public meeting, that's unacceptable.



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Editorial

Ford Flounders

One year and one month later, we seem to be in the same place again; locked down and online.

Monday, a much deserved Spring Break was interrupted by the province with the news that school would resume online after the break. The announcement came just one day after the Minister of Education said schools will go back to in person learning after the break. At the news conference, reporters asked what changed in one day to convince the government that online learning was necessary in schools which they said for months were safe.

The premier said the variants of COVID-19 were moving swiftly, forcing the government to change its plans. He said the schools are safe, but the government just didn't want children who had been out in the community for the last week back in a classroom spreading around whatever virus they picked up.

The argument, kindly put, doesn't hold water.

Since February, the scientists Premier Ford says he's been listening to have said the variants could cause a huge problem. Those scientists were predicting exactly what is now playing out in February.

Ford knew Friday the level of COVID-19 variants was at the highest level we had ever seen. He also knew school kids would be out in their communities, because where else would they be during lockdown?

Ford's flimsy reasoning and decision making is the main reason the province is facing a crisis in its intensive care units. For all his bluster of listening to the experts, it was clear he didn't. His Solicitor General clearly said that the Conservative government didn't act earlier because it was waiting to see if the projections from the scientists would actually happen. By then it was too late.

Ford can rail on about the lack of vaccine - which is an issue - but the truth is it's a miracle there is even a vaccine a year and a half after the virus started taking its toll. Lord knows what kind of mess we'd be in now if the vaccine was not making a dent in the number of people sick and dying.

The real reason we're in lockdown and school will be online is the lack of sound decision making by the Ontario government. And that rests squarely with Premier Ford. Ford continues to flounder and we pay the price.

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LAMBTON ARCHIVES

This lovely photo is of the Petrolia Old Boys Baseball team. It was taken during a reunion, the photo says, in 1908.

Bailey says Lambton not left behind as vaccine clinics cancelled

If Lambton Public Health wants to convince the province it needs more vaccine, it will have to get the local MPP on board.

And from his comments in the last few days, it appears Sarnia-Lambton MPP Bob Bailey is not convinced.

In fact, he's telling anyone who will listen Lambton has some of the highest vaccination rates in Ontario.

Lambton was on the leading edge of the third wave of this seemingly unending pandemic.

The number of people who were ill from COVID-19 soared in January (wave two) and then again in March. Then, it filtered into the school system as families, tired of the restrictions, went back to normal life including socializing.

Through that, Lambton finally received enough vaccine to make sure the elderly in long term care were protected. But just barely. The premier was proclaiming all of the long term care and retirement home staff and residents vaccinated on Feb. 10. It took until Feb. 25 for Lambton to have enough vaccine to even open clinics for the workers of those homes.

By then, only the residents had one shot in the arm - 1,156 people.

And by then, Lambton had already been put into the red zone with more restrictions because COVID-19 cases were climbing.

Not two weeks later, on the anniversary of the declaration of the pandemic, public health sent Brooke Central School students home at noon. Variants of COVID had been found in the test of one of the students who had the virus.

North Lambton also had a big problem. On March 17, the school was closed for a week because there were so many teachers either sick or isolating there simply wasn't enough staff.

The next day, Lambton recorded its highest number of COVID cases in the classroom - 70, with two-thirds of the schools in the county affected.

Five days later, March 23, Lambton registered the second highest rate of COVID-19 cases per capita in the province, right behind Peel, which is now getting extra vaccines after being declared a hot spot.

Through all that, Bailey sent out one letter pleading for more vaccines, in January.

It appears the facts of the pandemic in Lambton haven't convinced Bailey of the need for more vaccines since he

sure doesn't seem to be supporting public health's call for more doses.

Friday he said there is a "lot of negative chatter" that Lambton has been left behind. "It's simply not true," he says pointing to the fact just over 19 per cent of the population of Lambton has one shot of the vaccine.

Bailey rose in the legislature Monday to say the same thing - the same day as Lambton Public Health had to cancel vaccine clinics which were booked solid because of lack of vaccine.

Without the active help of the local MPP, Lambton's bid for more vaccines will never even reach the ears of the decision makers.

It would be nice if Lambton residents didn't have to ask their MPP to advocate for vaccines for his own community, but it's 2021 and I guess that's where we are now.



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