

IN OTHER WORDS

Columns and Letters to the Editor

The Times

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A silver lining

WE ARE approaching a year since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Haliburton County, and in some respects, the pandemic is showing proverbial silver linings for the community.

An important qualifier up front here is that obviously it would be vastly, vastly superior if there were no pandemic at all. That would be much, much preferable to the current situation. Just want to make that perfectly clear.

However, we are of course living through a pandemic, one that, given the speed of vaccine rollouts in this country, doesn't seem likely to be over for Canadians any time soon.

For Haliburton County, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it some trends that also don't seem like they're going to end anytime soon. Since a state of emergency in Ontario was announced by the Ford government last March, it has been evident there are more people than usual in the county. The summer is of course always busy in the Haliburton Highlands, but that busyness didn't come to a pronounced end in 2020 the way it typically does once summer packs up its picnic.

Usually, the end of the Labour Day weekend brings a marked quiet, a very distinct, noticeable difference in the amount of traffic on the county's roads and people on its sidewalks. That was not the case last September. There was still a difference, but it was far less distinct. Usually, a second level of quiet falls over the county following Thanksgiving, when retired seasonal residents without children might head back to the GTA for the winter, or year-round residents who are snowbirds might start hopping planes for Florida or Arizona. That was also not the case last fall.

Amid the anxiety and uncertainty of the pandemic, many seasonal residents are choosing to make the cottage their home, which only makes sense. There are more people in the county for more of the year. And ultimately that's a good thing.

We are obviously still in the throes of the pandemic, and provincially mandated shutdowns have hurt some sectors more than others, and in some cases, businesses in the county have been forced to close. This is not the good part.

However, in the long run, more people in the community for more of the year will mean a greater demand for goods and services year-round, which will ultimately mean more money circulating through the county's still-largely-seasonal economy for more of the year. That's the good part.

The community was already beginning to change with more and more seasonal

residents retiring year-round to what had been cottages. The COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating that trend. A recent survey by the Township of Minden Hills on its waste disposal services found that 26 per cent of seasonal respondents intended to turn their seasonal residences into their year-round homes,

and that while currently the majority of the township's residents are seasonal, that position could flip within five years, the majority of residents becoming year-round residents. There are similar trends in all the county's townships, told through statistics such as landfill traffic counts and monthly construction values tracked by building departments. In Algonquin Highlands, use of the township's campsites and trails have been through the roof since their reopening following the initial stages of the pandemic.

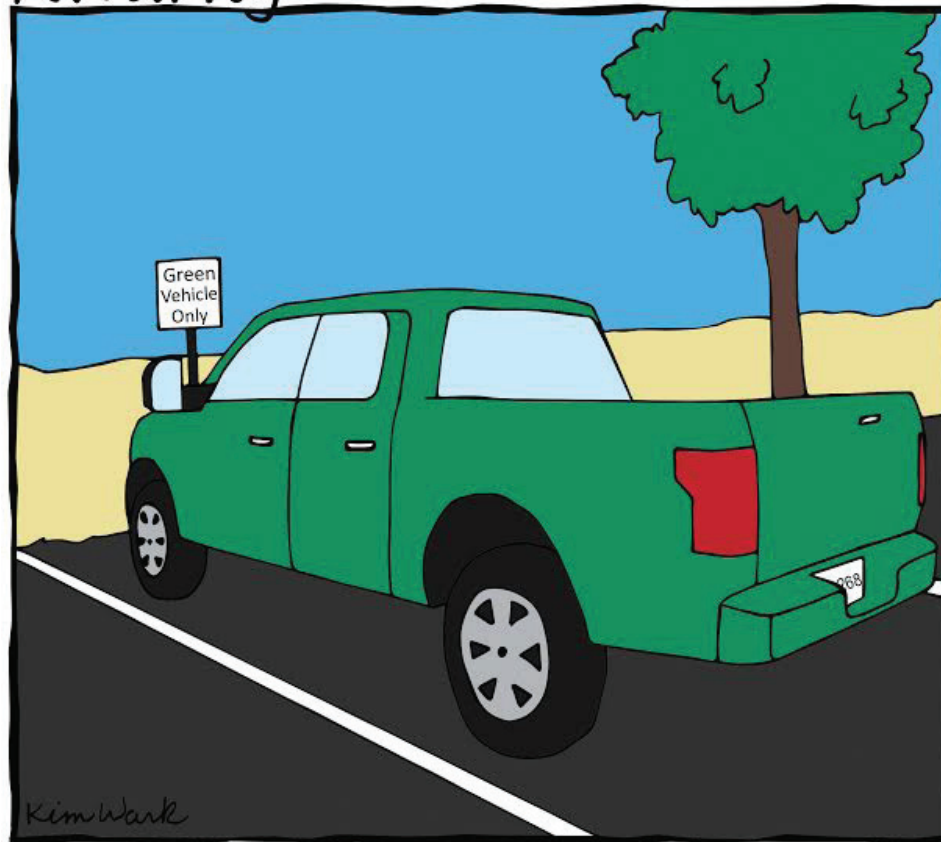
More people in the community will also mean local municipal governments will have to make considerations about the way they provide services. How long, for example, will it be before a growing year-round population demands garbage pickup?

For decades, municipal politicians in the county have grappled with how to expand its largely seasonal economy. In some capacity, the COVID-19 pandemic and its legacy are doing that.



CHAD INGRAM
Editor

Kwarky



Gravity and the canoe

THE OTHER day I told Jenn that I was seriously considering the purchase of a new and relatively expensive Kevlar canoe and, surprisingly enough, she did not object in the slightest. I believe this was due to the fact that she was wearing her headphones at the time.

But I also think she is beginning to understand that as old canoes age, gravity takes a greater hold on them. After all, she is not averse to science.

For instance, my old 17-foot, 36-inch beamed, Coleman canoe was not always the 500 pounds it is today. No, when I first bought it some 22-years ago, it weighed a mere 87 pounds and it was easy for me to pick up, throw over my shoulders and load atop of any vehicle I owned.

In the last four or five years, however, it has gained a lot of weight, I suspect due to increased gravitational pull on the material. And while I can still throw it over my shoulders and load it atop of any vehicle we own, I generally require a long nap after doing so. But this cuts into my fishing time, which is problematic.

I'm not sure why canoes are affected so much by gravity these days, but I know I am not the only one I know who thinks this is the case. In fact, it has got so bad that, my friends and I now consider the mere act of placing a canoe atop a car to be a team sport – which is why we now prefer just to watch from the sidelines.

On the flip side, I think Jenn also honestly believes – probably because I repeat it constantly as she sleeps – that Kevlar canoes are desirable, mostly because they

are lighter to begin with and, probably because they are made of space-aged material, not nearly as affected by gravity.

By my calculations, the average 45-pound Kevlar canoe would take another 20 years before it reached the weight of the Coleman canoe I have now.

As convincing as this argument is, it is not, by itself, enough to tip the scales, especially given the weight of a Kevlar canoe's price tag. That's why I have started a concerted public relations campaign designed to convince Jenn I need a Kevlar canoe more than we need the money for lesser things such as food.

Primarily, that campaign consists of me grunting, groaning, wincing and holding my back in public on the days following the loading and unloading of my canoe. There are other equally embarrassing noises utilized to good effect as well.

I believe all of these factors are starting to soften her stance on the potential purchase, which will happen in the spring before the lakes open up.

In the end, however, it will eventually devolve into a financial decision. She will have to weigh the price of a new canoe against the price of keeping the old one. If we were in the U.S., this would be a no-brainer, medical costs being what they are. But thanks to our free public health care system, the financial benefits are not nearly as obvious.

Regardless, I think that framing this as a financial decision is a huge mistake, for how can you put a price tag on my happiness? Plus, it is a whole lot less expensive than a new car with a lower roof.



STEVE GALEA
Beyond 35

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COVID summer: The sequel

WHILE THE OFFICIAL start to summer may be a month away, it unofficially commenced with the Victoria Day weekend.

The May long weekend is of course the traditional kickoff to cottaging season in the county, but the last year has been the furthest thing from typical. While many seasonal residents may just be getting back into the county, many have been here for weeks or months, and some have been here virtually from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thousands of extra people in the community has been an undeniable boon for some businesses – namely those largely unaffected by provincially mandated economic shutdowns. Ask the owner of a local grocery store, gas station or department store how the last year has been, and chances are they're going to tell you it's been record-setting.

Talk to a restaurateur or the owner of a retail operation that sells less essential items, and they're likely to have a very different story. Certainly whenever the current lockdown is eased – which, best case, is mid-June – we need to do our best to direct some cash toward these businesses.

For the second consecutive summer, most of the usual hallmarks of the season in the county will be absent. Most large events and festivals were cancelled

by organizers months ago with the understanding the virus would again prohibit us from gathering in groups. We'll once again be able to visit the county's farmers' markets and the County of Haliburton is planning a stripped-down version of the Hike Haliburton Festival for September, as long as provincial regulations allow it proceed.

To say it's been a long 14-and-a-half months is an understatement. We continue to run a proverbial marathon where the finish line is unclear. We've come a long way, but still have an unknown distance to travel. We've all experienced an enormous amount of emotional stress

since last March. We're tired, we're irritable, we're ready for it to be over. Townships are experiencing high levels of bylaw complaints, meaning neighbours are getting cranky with one another. But we are getting there.

The Victoria Day weekend marked a vaccination milestone, with more than half of Canadians now having received their first dose. Many of us should have our second doses by the time fall arrives. Hopefully next summer we can once again file into the Northern Lights Pavilion for the Highlands Summer Festival, go to the fair, or dance along Water Street at Music by the Gull.

While these may now seem like memories from another time, they are also visions of things to come.



CHAD INGRAM
Editor

Kwarky



"Good, you're up: turn on the jets."

False advertising

YESTERDAY AFTER dinner, I decided to do something outdoorsy, so I drove to a local lake and decided to use my fly rod to catch some crappie. Targeting a specific species is funny business for me because it generally means that I will encounter other species I had no intention of messing with.

Not to brag, but I am a master of this. For instance, last week while hunting wild turkey, I had two bull moose browse by me at seven yards and then walk right into and through my decoy set up. I have no doubt in my mind that those moose knew that I was hunting wild turkey and therefore decided to mess with me.

This came as no surprise to me, however. I believe that most fish and game know I am an easy mark. In fact, I fully expect to have two gobblers sit in the tree above me, next time I decide to go moose hunting.

Last evening's crappie expedition was just another version of that. When I got to a perfect crappie spot, I immediately started catching perch, sunfish and rock bass – because, of course, that's what happens when I announce I'm going to catch some crappie.

I eventually did catch about 10 crappie though. But only because I gave up on the idea of ever catching a crappie again.

Instead, I decided that since I was catching perch, sunfish and rock bass, it was time to forget about those stupid crappies and target the fish that wanted to play. This immediately caused the rock bass, sunfish and perch to make themselves scarce and the crappie, who were no longer my target species, to decide it was time to bite. This works every time – unless, of course, you tell yourself it works every time, in which case it never

works. This is key, so remember that.

The point is I caught a mess of small crappie which, though fun, did not exactly make for tonight's dinner, because I threw them back.

To make a dinner of crappie, you need what anglers call slabs – which are the bigger fish.

I should mention for those who don't know that crappie is a very good fish to eat.

Right now, those same people are probably thinking they don't sound like a good fish to eat. The word crappie just sounds like someone didn't try all that hard to make the word crappy a little more elegant. And that's not exactly appealing.

I have a theory about this, however. That being, they were named crappie because they didn't hire the same guy who worked for the Rocky Mountain Oyster marketing board. That guy was a marketing genius.

On the other hand, this could have been a deliberate attempt to throw people off the scent.

Maybe some taxonomist who had a soft spot for crappie decided that the best way to protect these beautiful little panfish from the hungry masses would be to call them an unappetising name. I imagine they considered even worse names like poop bass and turdfish first. In the end, however, they settled with crappie, which is just strange enough to make people like my Jenn wonder why we would even consider eating a fish so poorly named.

There is a lesson here. If, by chance, I ever find myself in some far-off impenetrable jungle surrounded by hungry cannibals, the first thing I'm going to keep calm and introduce myself.

"Hello," I'll say. "My friends call me Turdfish."



STEVE GALEA
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Sticky situation

RECENTLY ON a Saturday morning, I opened a door to a storage room in the basement and lo and behold, was welcomed by a milk snake stuck to the wall. You read that right.

Somehow – and it’s something I’m trying very hard not to think about – the snake found its way into our house, crawled along pipes on the ceiling that surely have some sort of purpose and became, somehow – again, avoiding much thought of it – quite drastically stuck in several different places to tuck tape at the top of the wall.

Needless to say, especially for those of you who shuddered just at the word snake, it was a situation filled with mild panic as we tried to carefully cut the aggressively-sticky tape around the snake. The snake, also panicking, then tightly coiled itself

around one of those pipes in a last ditch effort to not be put into a box intended for its safety.

But what brought some calm is knowing exactly who to turn to for help. Once freed, it was clear the tape was not going to come off the snake on its own, and that if we tried to remove it we might cause more damage. A quick call to Woodlands Wildlife Sanctuary made us exhale. “Bring it in,” the volunteer on the other end of the phone said. “That’s what we’re here for.”

Into the depths of the Blairhampton Triangle, on Duck Lake Road, Monika Melichar’s Woodlands Wildlife Sanctuary

might not necessarily be top of mind of everyone for its seclusion.

You’ve read about the incredible work they’ve done in this paper, seen success stories online, and you know how much they value taking care of wildlife that has so often been injured as a result of human activity – cars on the road, boats in the water, tuck tape on the wall and also habitat destruction and increasing effects of climate change – but you don’t necessarily know how busy they are and yet how quickly they spring into action to help until you feel helpless yourself.



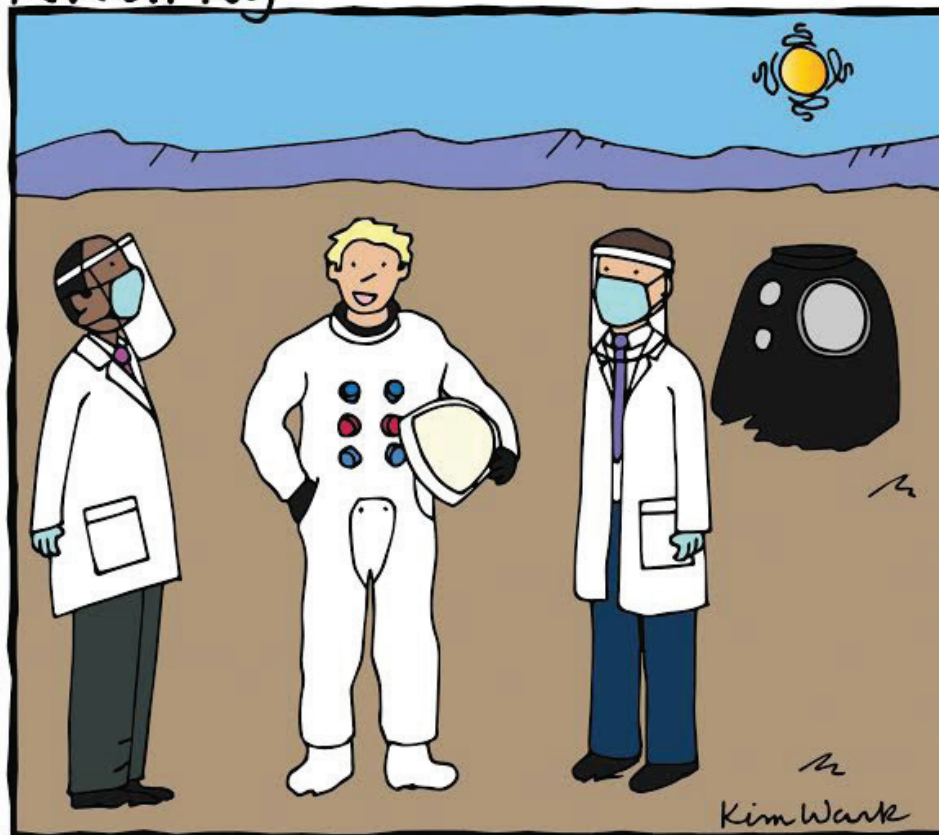
SUE TIFFIN
Reporter

Just this year alone, the sanctuary team has helped 350 animals and have more than 130 in their care as you read this: squirrels, opossums, skunks, fawns, barred owls, songbirds, ducklings, minks and lots of injured turtles.

As for Friar Tuck, as he became known, a video on the Woodlands Wildlife Sanctuary Facebook page shows you the attentive, knowledgeable care he required before being released to freedom where he hopefully won’t encounter any other sticky situations. How lucky is he, and how lucky are we all to have kind-hearted help locally from people with expertise who care about all creatures great and small.

To learn more about the work WWS does, or to donate so that essential work can continue in our community, visit <https://woodlandswildlifesanctuary.ca/donate/>.

Kwarky



“Anything interesting happen on Earth last year?”

Who is following who?

MUSKIE ANGLERS are an ingenious group of people. For, they invented the follow. Up until they did that, people used to call it seeing a fish. In fact, it still is called that when dealing with other sportfish species.

For instance, if you ask a skunked bass angler if they caught any fish – which is a cruel thing to ask, because if they caught fish you’d already know – they will probably pretend not to hear you or, if that’s impossible, tell you in no uncertain terms where to go.

They will certainly not tell you about the fish they saw, because that is an indication there were fish to be caught, which is the exact opposite of what they will eventually try to tell you.

Muskie anglers, God bless them, decided to challenge that cruel question head on, however. So, if you were to ask a skunked muskie angler if they had any luck, they would smile and tell you about the follows they saw.

For those unaware, a follow is a muskie, or the shadow of what could be a muskie, or a neutrally buoyant stick, that materializes out of nowhere within sight of the angler and then leaves quickly without showing any interest in the lure they were “following.”

The muskie angler is saying to you three things. I was in the right area and attracted a huge fish so I know what I’m doing. Also, the fish didn’t take my lure because muskie are very smart, so you should respect me for targeting a very challenging fish.

See how brilliant this is? That’s why I am hoping to introduce something similar to the bass fishing world this Saturday.

That’s right. This season I will be telling people (who ask if I had any luck when I have clearly been skunked) about how many

bass “follows” I had.

But lest you think I am ripping off the muskie anglers, let me tell you the major difference. In muskie fishing it is the muskie who follows the angler while, in my version, it is the angler who follows the bass.

So, if some wise-acre asks me if I got any bass, when I was obviously skunked, I will get my revenge by boring them to tears with a 30-minute story about all the bass I followed. That’ll teach them.

My fish finder is going to help, of course, since I will be able to follow bass without ever having seen them at all.

By doing this, the bass angler is saying to you three things. I was in the right area and was attracted by a huge fish so I know what I’m doing. Also, the fish swam away from my lure because bass are very smart, so you should respect the bass for targeting a challenged angler. Likewise you should respect the challenged angler for targeting such a smart fish.

See how brilliant this is?

In either case, whether for muskie or bass, “the follow” serves a much-needed purpose, which is to keep cruel people from asking if you managed to catch any fish which, if you did, they would already know about. Trust me.

Oh, sure it won’t stop them from asking the first time or maybe even the second. But eventually, they will tire of your lengthy and dramatic descriptions of how a mysterious shadow followed you or allowed you to follow it – perhaps all day.

And then, with any luck at all, whenever they see you at the boat launch, they will walk away without asking...

Which is great, unless you finally catch a good fish. In which case, you’ll have a bit more following to do.



STEVE GALEA
Beyond 35