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# The Highlander

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**INSIDE: VALENTINE'S DAY PAGE 13**

**FREE**



Driver Lamech Kamuza with the last TOK Coachlines bus Jan. 31. *Photo by Lisa Gervais.*

## One line ends, another begins

**By Lisa Gervais**

Lamech Kamuza is driving his TOK Coachlines bus down Country Road 21 about 8:30 a.m. when he sees a deer at the side of the road and slows down. "I've seen them so much," he comments. He began driving the Haliburton to Toronto route more than a

year ago. He was at the wheel for the last time with TOK Jan. 31, as the Concord, ON-based company has discontinued the route it had operated for 34 years.

However, Kamuza broke some good news to passengers last Wednesday, telling them Entertainment Tour Travel Inc., of Markham, was beginning a new

service effective Feb. 2. [see related story on page 3].

When TOK announced Nov. 6 it was ceasing the run, Kamuza said he was saddened.

"I was getting a lot of seniors that go into the city to see doctors, and stuff like that. I knew there was no other way for

Continued 'I'm' on page 3

## Warm weather causing havoc

**By Mike Baker**

A warm weather snap is running roughshod over the Highlands' tourism sector, with some businesses scaling back operations and cancelling events.

Tegan Legge, general manager of tourism and operations at Haliburton Forest and Wild Life Reserve, confirmed Feb. 5 that the 33rd annual Poker Run snowmobile fundraiser, slated for this coming weekend, has been cancelled.

With temperatures rising as high as eight degrees Celsius Feb. 8 and 9, Legge said she couldn't guarantee the Forest's trail network would be in good enough condition to host the 400 to 600 riders that usually participate.

The event is a fundraiser for the Dysart et al Fire Department, bringing in \$20,000 last year. Legge said past donations have gone towards purchasing equipment such as jaws of life, a 'snowbalance' and rescue boat.

"It's a massive disappointment, but given the weather, we didn't have any other choice. We could have looked at pushing the event back and doing something in March, but it's very unlikely, given the way things are looking, that we'd be able to host it then," Legge said.

She noted some of the Forest's other activities – trail hiking, ice climbing and the wolf centre, are going strong.

"It's been a nailbiter of a season so far... we could be doing better, but we're in a good position compared to a lot of other places in Ontario. The trails aren't pristine, they're a little bumpy, but people are just happy to get out there," she said.

Meghan Orr, owner of Buttermilk Falls Resort, said the winter ice fishing season has been a disaster so far. The rural retreat, which overlooks Boshkung Lake, boasts eight winterized cottages, which Orr said are usually full now.

She noted the resort had 29 weekend bookings in

Continued 'Not' on page 2

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# 'I'm really glad I've had an opportunity to do it'

Continued from page 1

them to get into the city."

The resident of Ingoldsby said when his car broke down awhile back, he could not find transport to Toronto. "That experience was very discomfoting. I moved from the city up here and I'm used to the convenience of the city. To realize that there's not a public transit system... a way for people to get around... that was very discomfoting."

He said he took the TOK driving job thinking it would be just a way to make some money.

"I quickly realized it was more than a job," he said. He understood the importance of providing a ride to and from Toronto for those who needed it.

"I've met some awesome people. There's a few elderly that take the bus from Haliburton... can I say names? There's Stella, Nancy, oh gosh, there's just so many. Quite a few in Minden, too. I meet elderly seniors, children, males, females, even pets that come through the door."

## Lovely people always

Kamuza pulls into the Shell Station in Minden and greets one of his regulars as she boards the bus.

Vanessa Blackie takes her seat and says she takes the bus about twice a month from the city to visit her parents, who have retired

outside of Minden.

She said it is "convenient, awesome driver, awesome service, lovely people always." When she first heard the news in November that TOK was discontinuing, she was "concerned" and looked at alternatives. It would have involved her parents picking her up from somewhere other than Minden, such as Peterborough.

However, she said they would have worked something out. She feared others would not have.

"There really isn't anything else that's close, that provides a service like this." She added Kamuza "is so good with the seniors, and so attentive to them, and goes the extra mile for them.

"How many people count on this to come down to the city for appointments from Minden? They already have issues with access in Minden. Cabs are expensive."

Alana Gordon boards the bus in Norland. She took it up from the city Jan. 12 and was returning from visiting her best friend. "It's great, brings me here, cheap..." She said the threat of the discontinued service "sucked... because this is my best friend I've known forever." She welcomed news of another operator. "Just as long as I can come back."

Steven Bergeron sits at the front of the bus, chatting with Kamuza as the highway lines whiz by and snow gives way to green en route south. A transit aficionado, he came from Orillia to take the last run.

"I wanted to come today because I know this route is important. My dad cottaged up here for 30 years at Haliburton Lake by Fort Irwin. He knows how it is up here; how hard it is for people to live up here. So do I."

Bergeron said he wanted to ride the TOK bus one last time as "it is a little bit of history. It's also good that there's another company coming."

## Driver 'nostalgic'

As we drive through Coboconk, into Fenelon and Lindsay, Kamuza said he wasn't overly worried when he found out about the line ceasing, believing everything was going to be okay. He will be driving for the new company. He had an opportunity to continue with TOK but it would have meant being in the city more. His family, including his three-year-old baby girl, are in the Highlands and he likes to come home at night.

The bus continues to Hwy. 35 and 115 then into Bowmanville, Courtice and Oshawa before heading out on the 411 towards Scarborough and Vaughn. Kamuza will then work from the city for several hours before the bus that left Haliburton about 8 a.m., heads back north around 5 p.m.

Stephen and Mieke Foster are some of the last customers as the bus pulls back into Haliburton about 9:30 p.m.

The retirees own a home in Toronto but use the coach to come back and forth to a second

home in Haliburton village. They do not own a car. They boarded with backpacks and carts at Vaughn.

"Not everybody has a car," Mieke said, and Stephen added as they get older, they dislike driving in the busy city. "So, this gets us away from that. The worst we have to do is haul ourselves. It's not fighting my way through snow."

Mieke adds, "having the bus up to Haliburton just makes it that much easier because we would otherwise have to rent a car, pick it up, return it on time, fill it with gas. On the bus, you can sit down, do what you want to do."

As if on cue, she sits down on the floor and does some stretching. The two said they are "relieved" someone else is taking over the route and hope it succeeds.

Kamuza, meanwhile, is "nostalgic." He tells the story of an elderly gentleman, a regular, who likes to ride up front but tends to cringe as Kamuza makes his way through heavy city traffic, saying, "I don't know how you do it!"

With the last stop, the Shamrock gas station, in sight, Kamuza adds, "driving for a living... you cannot play around. This isn't like working somewhere where you can sit down, and take your eyes off the road. You are constantly on the ball, but I really enjoy driving. I'm really glad I've had an opportunity to do it."

## New company offers Haliburton to Toronto bus

By Lisa Gervais

While TOK Coachlines will no longer be operating a Haliburton to Toronto bus route, *The Highlander* has learned that Entertainment Tour Travel Inc., based out of Markham, is taking over the service.

Company spokesman, Mark Williams, was planning to run a coach Feb. 2 and continue Monday, Wednesday and Friday, as TOK previously did.

Williams said he owns property in Minden Hills and was moved when he heard that TOK was discontinuing service effective Jan. 31, 2024.

"Hard to close it down just like that," he told the paper. "I'm willing to take it on, and put one of my buses on the route, and see where we go from here."

He said the only big change for now is the last stop will be Yorkdale, otherwise it will be status quo.

He said people can purchase tickets from agencies. Here in the County, they can go to the Minden Shell gas station. In addition, they can purchase tickets on the bus. The company is working on a website for ticket orders in future. He said he will consult with riders about future changes to schedule times etc.

"I think it's going to be great. I really do believe it's going to be awesome," he said.

Williams said he purchased his property in the County in 2021.

He said his company, which started in 2016, runs coach tours out of Toronto and across the GTA, to Gravenhurst for the steamship trip and farmers market, Ottawa for the Tulip Festival, to Quebec, overnight to Niagara Falls and Windsor, even to New Orleans.

Stephen and Mieke Foster take the first Entertainment Tour Travel Inc. bus to Toronto Feb. 2. *Submitted.*



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