

FEEDER FASCISTS IN WELLAND TRY TO LIMIT FREEDOM

CITY GOES CUCKOO WITH UNFAIR BIRD FEEDER BYLAW, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC
Column

it's meant to fix, and will only make things worse. Someone over there had the genius idea that the city should be regulating how many bird feeders its citizens can own. They arrived at the seemingly arbitrary limit of three; any more than three bird feeders per residence and the local government will come knocking.

Failure to abide by the Bird Gestapo rules will net you a \$200 fine. The city's fine for parking in a fire route is only \$100 so apparently having one extra bird feeder is worse than obstructing a fire truck trying to get to an emergency.

Setting aside the absurdity of the bird feeder fine, the real kicker with this nonsense is that this whole situation is a solution in

The Germans have a word for everything. The ruthless efficiency of the German language allows it to convey complicated sentiments, emotions or situations with a single (albeit lengthy) word.

Take the word 'verschlimmbesserung' which when translated means an action which was intended to make something better but ended up making it worse instead.

Over at city hall in Welland, they went fully verschlimmbesserung with a completely birdbrained by-law that does nothing to solve the stated problem



Torstar File Photo

Welland city hall is infringing on its citizens' rights to enjoy the wonders of nature.

search of a problem, only it's even worse because this time, they're trying to fix a completely different problem that has nothing to do with what they're doing.

The city claims limiting bird feeders will help solve Welland's rat problem, which is a crazy way to go about tackling your rat

problem. That's like if you were having problems with your car's engine, and your solution was to buy new tires for your bicycle.

Seriously, stick to the problem at hand. If you've got a rat problem, deal with the rat problem. Instead of trying to fix your rat problem by sending jackbooted

thugs to take away some old lady's bird feeder, maybe just work on the rat problem and leave Dorothy and her finch feeder alone.

According to the Einsteins over at Welland city hall, people with bird feeders are inadvertently feeding rats, who I guess are living large off the tiny crumbs of seeds which fall off the feeder. Seems like a stretch to me, but hey, this one councillor said it, so it must be true.

Let's take this councillor at his word and say, sure, bird feeders are actually feeding the rats. So we take away a handful of bird feeders, and what, problem solved?

Now we've just got hungry, desperate rats running around people's backyards. They're gonna weasel their way into people's sheds and garages now instead. Thanks, guys, job well done.

Beyond the fact that this cockamamie plan won't actually help, it also strikes

me as a severe overreach of municipal authority. Who is Welland city hall to tell me how many bird feeders I can have? How dare they try and limit my ability to enjoy the wonders of nature.

It's anti-ornithology, and it's downright un-Canadian. And I won't stand for it. After all, you can't spell 'bird feeder' without 'freedom' and yes, that's not exactly right but neither is this silly bird feeder bylaw.

If the city of Welland is so keen to start putting strict limits on the number of things that can exist within the city, it should start by doing so with things that it actually has in abundance, like abandoned factories, scummy bars, or dudes named Tony.

James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist, and he has four bird feeders. You can email him at jculic@niagarathisweek.com or holler on Twitter @jamesculic

LETTERS

STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM SMALLER CLASS SIZES

Re. Class size demands self-serving, Letter, Sept. 12:

I am writing in response to a letter to the editor which suggested that we should go back to the days of the one-room school houses where teachers taught children of all different grades.

It suggested that smaller class sizes benefited teachers, not students.

This method may have sufficed in the distant past, but we are living in a different world today. This is the 21st century with technological advances and changes happening at an unprecedented rate. Students need to be prepared for this new challenging world we live in. They deserve the best education

and attention from their teachers that is possible.

We must also remember that many students are dealing with special needs such as ADHD, autism and things such as social and emotional difficulties. Having smaller class sizes allows these students to get the help they need.

Our children deserve

better than this "sink or swim" educational philosophy, and our teachers deserve respect and support to help them give their students the best possible education.

BRIGITTE BONNER
RIDGEWAY

MORE ENFORCEMENT NEEDED AGAINST SPEEDERS

I also live on Effingham Street - between Pancake

Lane and Welland Road.

There are no speed limit road signs in this stretch, which has a limit of 50 km/h, resulting in an approximate vehicle speed of 80 km/h all day long.

I too gave up on walking my dog as most drivers cannot even bother to move over slightly or slow down.

Road shoulders are narrow, and line of sight is poor at the 'S' curve. There are

joggers and bicycles present on this stretch daily.

Add water delivery trucks to the list of offenders.

I'm assuming 90 per cent of the traffic is relatively local drivers.

The 37 speeding tickets issued in two hours on Aug. 23 doesn't come close to what I'm seeing on a daily basis.

KEVIN TODERICK
RIDGEVILLE



Don't Leave Your Most Important Contract To Chance

The purchase or sale of your property is likely the most important and expensive contract you will ever sign.

Leaving the review of those contract details to chance, could be a very costly and time-consuming mistake.

The legal real estate team at LBW, can review those details to ensure your best interests are protected.



A NO GO ON THE SNOWBLOW

SNOWBLOWERS ARE A WASTE OF TIME AND MONEY, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC
Column

My shoulder hurts. And I'm pretty sure it's from all this shovelling.

And yet, despite the nagging creak in my shoulder over the past two weeks, I'm still not down with buying a snowblower. Using a snowblower is bad for the environment and there's no need to blast all that carbon into the air when a little elbow grease will get the job done. My shovel is a 100 per cent green-friendly snow removing system.

Heh, nah, I don't care about the environment, but I do think snowblowers are kinda lame. They're clunky and loud and that giant spinning blade scares me, but most of all, I think they are just really bad value. A decent blower costs around \$1,000 but you only use the thing a couple times each winter. I've been living in Fort Erie for just over two years now, and I can think of only four or five times I would have ever used the snowblower. At

that rate, if I have this snowblower for the next two decades, then it's costing me \$25 every time I use it to clear the driveway, and that doesn't even include the cost of gas (or the moral cost of carbon pollution because save the whales) and that seems like a lot.

Do you know how many Xboxes I could buy for the price of one snowblower? Two and a half. When you put it that way it seems pretty obvious. Having 2.5 Xboxes would be awesome, because I could play two and a half games of Final Fantasy at once and that sounds pretty rad. The only game you can play with a snowblower is Clear The Driveway and that game sucks.

Beyond the cost of the snowblower, I think the moral obligation to help out my neighbour is what really makes me weary about owning one.

I don't want to talk to my neighbour. Nobody does. Like Robert Frost said, "Good fences make good neighbours."

There's an inverse correlation between the number of interactions I have to have with my neighbour, and how much I like my neighbour. A good neighbour is like a good ninja: he should be neither seen nor heard.

Now having said all that, I greatly appreciate

that my neighbour came over and used his snowblower to dig out my driveway last week, and if my neighbour happens to be reading this: I wasn't talking about you earlier, I was talking about that other neighbour; you're one of the good ones.

But that's just it - I don't want to be one of the "good ones" on the block. If I had a snowblower, I feel like I would be pressured by societal forces and neighbourly expectations to also go clear out other people's driveway. I am loath to clear snow from my own driveway, so I sure as heck don't wanna be snowblowing for a buncha other random people whose only connection to me is that they happen to live near my house.

My wife thinks I'm crazy. She also thinks I'm wrong about the snowblower thing. She keeps saying we should just buy the dang snowblower, but I just don't see the need. My wife is usually right about most things, but I decided to see what some of the dudes from my gym think about the snowblower debate, and much to my dismay, they all agreed with my wife. The guys then insisted that the snowblower debate was a literal matter of life and death.

"Do you know how many people die of heart



Metroland File Photo

Should I buy a snowblower? They look like more trouble than they're worth.

attacks from shovelling snow?" asked Frenchy incredulously.

I didn't know. But I looked it up. And now I want a snowblower. According to research published by the Harvard Medical School, which correlated data of hospital admissions in Canada with major snowfalls, about 68,000 people were admitted to a hospital with a heart attack while shovelling between 1981 and 2014. That's like 2,000 every year.

The data even suggested there is a tipping point at around the eight-inch marker. On days with more than eight inches of snow fall, there is a 34 per cent in-

crease in heart attacks over an average day.

One other piece that grabbed my attention from the Harvard study is that there was "no observable link" between snowfall and heart attacks among women. Interesting.

So women are either not doing the driveway shovelling, or are somehow immune to the negative effects of shovelling snow.

To be on the safe side, I

think even if we do get a snowblower, from now on clearing the driveway should probably be my wife's responsibility.

James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist and he would never actually make his lovely wife shovel the driveway. Email him at jculic@niagarathisweek.com or holler on Twitter @jamesculic.

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BIKING TO WORK ACROSS NIAGARA: BEAUTIFUL BUT IMPRACTICAL

IT'S POSSIBLE TO BIKE TO WORK ACROSS NIAGARA, BUT IT'S A ROUGH GO, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC
Column

When I first told people in the newsroom a few years ago that I had bought a bike and was going to start cycling, my colleague Alex Heck turned to me with a smirk and said just two words:

"Bum shorts."

Alex is one of those annoyingly fit and active people. She's up on this stuff, but having no idea what she was talking about, I asked for an explanation. She responded unhelpfully by just saying "bum shorts," several more times with an increasingly mocking laugh.

Eventually she told me that "bum shorts" are a thing that avid cyclists use. They're basically nylon shorts you wear under your regular shorts, but these ones have a built-in layer of extra thick padding on the bum that acts as a cushion between yourself and the bicycle seat. It's like having a second bum.

I very distinctly remember telling Alex that so-called "bum shorts" are super weird, and that I would never be one of those self-important cycling dudebros who wears nylon bum shorts and talks about how many clicks they logged on the bike this weekend.



James Culic/Torstar

Biking across Niagara to get to work was fun and beautiful for the most part, though a few small stretches are still in rough shape.

And so, it is with great shame that I must now admit to owning not just a single pair, but multiple sets of bum shorts. I also regularly blab to anyone who will listen about how many kilometres I rode on whatever given weekend. Since we're on the subject, I clocked about 75 kilometres over the Victoria Day weekend (despite an unrelated trip to the hospital emergency room on Sunday - more on that in a future column) and my goal for this summer is to average 200 kilometres a week.

Because I'm now an unbearably annoying cyclist, I also do

dumb cyclist stuff, like participating in National Bike to Work Day, which was last Friday.

As a general rule, I hate all those "National Whatever Day" things. They mostly create opportunities for people to humble-brag about some stupid thing. Oh it's "National Juggling Day" that's great, I can't wait to get to the office and watch Gerry stumble through his insufferable juggling routine in the lunchroom.

Having said all that, National Bike to Work Day set me up perfectly to flex my newfound cycling fitness skills to my co-work-

ers, so obviously I jumped on the opportunity. The newspaper office where I work is located in the north end of Thorold, and if you were to look at a map of Niagara and find the geographically furthest possible point away from that, you'd hit my house, way out in the east end of Fort Erie near the Niagara River. It's about a 50-kilometre ride, and between getting over the QEW, a handful of train tracks, and the Welland Canal, there's also a total of a 63-metre elevation climb, which doesn't sound like a lot and it's something you don't even notice in a car, but trust me, you notice it on a bike.

Another thing you notice a lot more while biking on streets with heavy vehicular traffic: the roadkill. Driving past roadkill in a car is something that barely even draws our attention, perhaps because it's usually at the side of the road. The side of the road also happens to be where you bike. Getting an up close look (and smell) at roadkill on a bike is super nasty, and I had to ride past a lot of dead squirrels and one dead (and very smelly) skunk on Friday morning.

The only thing worse than the roadkill is the people in the cars who don't give you an inch, even when there's tons of room to move over. Some people are nice; they slow down and move over to the other lane when going past me at 90 km/h on Montrose Road. Many, do not. They whiz past without a care in the world, comfortable in their steel boxes knowing that I'll barely dent their side panel if they smash into me.

It didn't help that my Spotify playlist spent the entire ride giv-

ing me advertisements for cars. One commercial was literally about how great it is to drive to work in the new Toyota Corolla. It's a wonderfully inspiring ad to listen to as a Toyota Corolla zips past while I have a stroke trying to pedal up a QEW overpass.

Grumbles aside, I made it to work, though that only further cemented just how impractical it is for people to actually bike to work. The most obvious problem being that I was dripping wet with stank sweat and nobody wanted to sit near me.

It also took more than three hours to get to the office, and probably would have taken even longer to get home, since I was so dang tired. Which is why I cheated. Sorta. I guess you could argue I got by on a technicality.

The night before National Bike to Work Day, I left my car at the office, so the next day I could just throw my bike in the trunk and drive home. Sounds like cheating, but remember, it's called National Bike to Work Day, not National Bike to and from Work Day.

James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist, and he was delirious with exhaustion when he wrote this. Email him at jculic@niagarathisweek.com or holler on Twitter @jamesculic

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