



A growing sport in Muskoka

The beginning of the 2014/2015 winter season in Muskoka got off to a rocky start. November saw significant snowfall which threatened a premature winter only to thaw days after it fell. Early December again showed a promise of winter, but the accumulation from heavy snow and squalls that resulted in school and business closures again melted and we had a green Christmas. However, at the writing of this article, we are digging out from at least four days of incessant snowfall and it is minus 28 degrees Celsius. Thoughts can finally turn to the joys of winter in Muskoka.

Muskoka is a four season playground that can be equally as enjoyable in the winter as it is in the summer. In addition to the 1200 km of groomed snowmobile trails, Muskoka offers cross country skiing, snow shoeing, ice fishing and skating.

But a new sport is emerging on a large scale in Muskoka; that act of skijoring.

Skijoring is a blend of cross country (Nordic) skiing and mushing, where skier and animal work together. The skier and dog are harnessed together using a specially designed belt and tug line, safely allowing the dog to pull comfortably. The skier wears a belt with a wide band which is clipped around the waist and may include leg loops to keep it in position. The dog harness can be any type typically used for dogsled racing.

The skijoring line is usually at least 1.5 metres (8 feet) long. A longer line is used for a three-dog team. A section of bungee cord is often incorporated into the line to absorb the impact of the dog's forward motion or a quick stop by the skier. Special quick-release hitches or hooks are available, used so that the skijorer may unhook the dog's lead rapidly. There are no reins or other signalling devices; the dog must have an innate desire to run and respond to its owner's voice for direction.



A dog of 35 or more pounds can easily pull a skier down a trail or across a lake. Many dog breeds are suited to skijoring, particularly athletic dogs such as Pointers and Setters, and northern breeds like Alaskan Huskies, Malmutes and Samoyeds. However, any large, energetic dog can enjoy this sport including Golden Retrievers, Labs, Bull Terriers and American Bull Dogs.

The skill set required is minimal for both skier and dog. The skier uses either a classic diagonal stride cross-country technique, or the faster skate skiing technique and should be competent enough so falling and stopping do not frustrate both skier and dog. The average family pet may require some short outings that will allow it to build stamina and learn to accept directional commands. Professional skijoring dogs are taught commands that are specific to the sport; hike – run, gee – turn right, haw – turn left, whoa – stop, and on by to pass distractions. As with any new sport, training for both the skier and the dog can help to improve the skijoring relationship. Practice should initially be done on foot until the dog responds consistently to commands.

The sport is practiced recreationally and competitively, both for long distance travel and for short (sprint) distances. To participate in races, skijoring dogs must be taught to pass, or be passed by other teams without interfering with them. A top skijor racing team can pass other teams head-on, without even turning to look at them.

According to **Scott Dahlquist**, one of the top competitive skijorers in the U.S., dogs and skis are a natural. Athletic dogs are healthier and live longer and the mushing community is one of the most encouraging and supportive there is. If you have skis and a dog, you're almost there. It's just a few more steps to the greatest winter pastime since the snowball fight!

Marilyn Vogel

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Winter in Muskoka can be majestic and this one is no exception, albeit a little more unstable than previous years.

Most of you whom I have spoken with recently, enjoyed some down time with family and friends over the holiday period. For those of us that like snow sports, the Christmas rains were not very satisfying. I suspect as we approach the end of February, the holidays are just a pleasant memory. Muskoka is now

well covered in about 3 feet of snow, so for those who have not been up or seen our NewsBites advisory about potential snow loads on cottage roofs, now is a good time to take some action.

Personally, this winter has brought new surprises to me and my family, with this being our first winter living in Muskoka, versus the weekend warrior lifestyle. From having to clear 15-20+ centimetres of snow 11 days in a row in early January, to our first NO water day, when the mercury dropped close to -30 Celsius a few weeks ago and the new heat line froze! We expect the usual power loss cycles, but the fear of no heat for a day or two creates new worries for our member residents as opposed to the cottagers who tend to leave the power turned off and water drained when they are absent, in case of power outages. But, I'm not complaining. I know how lucky I am to now live in this paradise and am even more committed through the MLA to protecting its charm.

However, to do so we need many more members. I have shared this need in the past; there are approximately 11,000 waterfront property owners in the Muskoka District who don't belong to the MLA. Our recent marketing and awareness membership campaign through the summer of 2014 clearly showed us that people are better influenced by in-person discussions about the MLA and its mission. Very few new members joined in reaction to our many signs, press articles, etc. Therefore, we ask you to support our ongoing marketing efforts by speaking to a couple of your neighbours and friends; tell them why you joined the MLA and that our members need more resources to retain programs like Water Quality testing/monitoring, research, safe boating and regular involvement in the District of Muskoka and the Townships activities, keeping a watchful eye for waterfront property owners and supporters. Look for more on this in the spring from our Communication and Marketing team.

From our member's survey, we know what you, our valued members,

want us to concentrate on in our efforts. We will survey our membership again this year, to continue to stay focused on the topics and issues important to you.

Your MLA Board and its five Committees started the year off strong. By the end of January we had already held six committee meetings, plus numerous subcommittee discussions working on our agenda of actions on your behalf for 2015. In our spring edition of Shorelines I will share the new programs being launched for the busy summer period.

IN THIS ISSUE:

As always our biggest investment on behalf of members is water quality monitoring and addressing areas of concern with action plans. In this issue, you will see a summary of the key messages from the work done in this area. The detailed report is available on our website at www.mla.on.ca.

We have also included our photo contest winners. Congratulations! We received a great level of support again this year which made for some challenging decisions for the selection committee. Enjoy the great pictures!

Winter outdoor activities continue to grow in our area. In addition to traditional cross country skiing, Muskoka has witnessed the recent re-birth of snowshoeing (with the lighter more efficient snowshoe choices), organized snowmobiling (visit the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs at www.ofsc.on.ca and the Muskoka Snowmobile Region Snowmobile Trails at www.msrsnowtrails.com) and now Skijoring (see the included article on this new sport).

The fall election municipal coverage is always certain to stir up some questions, discussions and emotions. The recent election was no different. We have written a note on our thoughts and position that we hope you enjoy reading.

After my first six months as your President, I can tell you it's an all encompassing and exhaustive job. With the huge quantity of meetings on our operational plan, emails and information to digest and make decisions or recommendations about, there is no end to ideas and issues that we could become engaged in. I am very lucky to be a part of such a great organization and it is a pleasure to focus on the preservation of the unique Muskoka environment that brings us all here. Please be sure to get some Muskoka time in the next month, to see and enjoy its winter beauty, tranquility and uniqueness. Safe travels and keep warm!

Michael Hart - President

Congratulations to the Early Bird Prize Winners!

The following names were drawn from those who renewed their membership by January 2, 2015:

Marion Stendon will relax and enjoy a tasty dinner on board a Muskoka steamship this summer.

Mark & Sandy Brosch will wake up each morning to the wonderful aroma of Muskoka Roastery Coffee.

Anne Lindsay will enjoy a fine dining experience at Loondocks in Port Carling.

The Honourable Douglas Bean will cool off with a gift basket from the Muskoka Brewery.

On behalf of the MLA, your commitment and continued support is appreciated.

Your contribution matters. Help to preserve the Muskoka you cherish for future generations. If you haven't already done so, please renew your membership at www.mla.on.ca or by calling our office at 705-765-5723.

2014 Water Quality Report is now available on our website

The 2014 MLA water quality monitoring program was a success. In all, over 100 volunteers collected 1235 samples. The report detailing the results of the program is now available on our website at www.mla.on.ca. Key messages from the results report are as follows:

- Monitored lakes have consistently good water quality that is suitable for recreational use.
- Most *E. Coli* values recorded are well within the expected range of values that would occur naturally; most were also below the MLA guideline.
- This year's 'Focus Areas' have been identified with yellow or red traffic lights. The specific rationale for the traffic light classifications is underlined within each area summary sheet. Eighteen areas are classified yellow, meaning further investigation is recommended to maintain water quality. One area has been classified with a red light meaning immediate remedial action is necessary to address water quality problems. In this case, *E. Coli* is the concern, which the Water Quality & Environment and Political & Land Use Committees have been hard at work addressing with local residents and the municipal government.

Monitored lakes have consistently good water quality that is suitable for recreational use.

Planning is well underway for the 2015 water quality initiative. If you're interested in assisting, here are some of the ways you can participate:

- Help to prepare equipment for the 2015 monitoring season in late April/early May
- Collect samples
- Coordinate a group of volunteers as a "Team Leader"
- Contribute to coordinated and strategic efforts within the 'Focus Areas' to maintain or improve water quality

- Become part of the program organizing committee, helping with volunteer outreach, communications and other environmental issues
- Make a tax-deductible donation to the program to support our efforts to monitor water quality in Muskoka

Please contact the MLA office at 705-765-5723 or lisa@mla.on.ca if you are interested in volunteering in the program, if you would like to get involved in any of these additional ways, or if you have any questions or concerns.

Andrew Watson - Vice-chair - Water Quality and Environment Committee

Seedling Day Reminder

The annual MLA Seedling Day will be held on Saturday, May 16 at the Port Carling Community Centre from 9 am until noon. The emphasis this year is on trees and shrubs native to Muskoka, including shoreline species.

Seedling order forms are included with this ShoreLines and are also available for download at www.mla.on.ca.

Please submit your order to the MLA office early to ensure the best possible selection. The final order deadline is May 1, 2015.

If you have any questions about the seedlings, or if you would like to place your order by phone, please call the office at 705-765-5723. Please note that payment must be made at the time of order.

If you are interested in volunteering on Seedling Day, please contact our office. Your help would be appreciated.

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WINTER IN MUSKOKA

MLA 2015 PHOTO CONTEST

Entries may be submitted by MLA members and their families in the categories of:

- Winter in Muskoka**
Share your love of winter in Muskoka.
- Action at the Cottage**
Share your adventurous side.
- Photos by Kids 14 & under**
Let your kids capture the moment.

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PHOTOS BY KIDS 14 & UNDER

PHOTOS BY ADULTS

VISIT www.mla.on.ca for complete contest rules

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Safety First!

Mother Nature surprised us in November with a record snowfall that melted almost as quickly as it came. We have experienced extreme daily weather shifts – from balmy two digit above freezing temperatures to minus 20 degrees Celsius. Consequently, both road and ice conditions have been precarious and officials are reminding us to stay safe on both our roads and waterways.

The Ontario Provincial Police offer a few winter safe driving tips:

- **SLOW DOWN!** Speed too fast for conditions is the #1 cause of winter crashes.
- **LEAVE MORE SPACE BETWEEN VEHICLES!** Stopping distances are at least double on snowy roads, and even longer in icy conditions.
- **BE READY FOR RAPIDLY CHANGING CONDITIONS!** Blowing snow may suddenly reduce visibility, and gusting winds can cause ice to form quickly, especially on roadways with bridges and overpasses such as Highways 400 & 11.
- **GET YOUR VEHICLE READY!** Install winter tires. Have an ice scraper/snow-brush in your vehicle to keep your windows, signals, and lights clear before driving. Top up your windshield washer with winter-grade fluid. Keep your vehicle fuel tank at least ½ full so you don't run out if you get stranded and to prevent condensation in your gas tank.
- **KEEP A SAFETY KIT!** Keep a kit that includes blankets, candles, matches, food and water in case you get stranded.
- **KNOW WHERE YOU ARE!** Keep track of intersections as you pass them in case you need to call for help in an emergency. Remember to charge your cell phone prior to departure in case you need it for an emergency.
- **MONITOR ROAD/WEATHER CONDITIONS!** Check local media and road authority websites for conditions/closures before you leave, and listen to local radio stations during your journey. Visit the Ministry of Transportation Website at: www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/traveller/conditions prior to setting out on any trip during the winter. Please do not call 911 or the OPP for "road reports".
- If road conditions are poor and you don't need to travel, **STAY HOME!**

Firefighters also advise caution around local waterways as unstable weather conditions through December and early January has negatively impacted ice formation on our lakes and rivers. Despite its appearance, a frozen lake may only have a thin layer of ice that will not support a lot of weight. In addition, despite the freezing temperatures experienced during the second week of January, heavy snow has insulated the existing ice, impeding the creation of strong, black ice.

Following are tips if you find yourself or someone else in jeopardy on the ice:

If you are alone:

- Stay calm. Hypothermia will typically take 2 - 3 minutes to impact movement. Slow, easy breathing will help to preserve your strength.
- Call for help.
- Resist the immediate urge to climb back out where you fell in. The ice is weak in this area.
- Use the air trapped in your clothing to get into a floating position on your stomach. Keep your head out of the water.
- Reach forward to the broken ice without pushing it down. Kick your legs to push your torso onto the ice.
- If you absolutely cannot get your body out of the ice, press as much of your hands and arms flat on the ice. They may freeze which will help to keep you from slipping back in to the hole.

- When you are back on the ice, crawl on your stomach or roll away from the open area with your arms and legs spread out as far as possible to evenly distribute your body weight. Do not stand up. Follow the path you came from back to shore.

If you witness someone falling through the ice:

- Do not run out onto the ice. First, try to talk the person through their own rescue by directing them to stay calm, and walking them through the steps above.
- Call for help. Consider whether you can quickly get help from trained professionals (police, fire fighters or ambulance) or bystanders.
- Determine whether you can reach the person using a long pole or branch from shore; if so, lie down and extend the pole to the person.
- If you have to venture onto the ice, wear a PFD and carry a long pole or branch to test the ice in front of you. Bring something to reach or throw to the person (e.g. a pole, weighted rope, line or tree branch).
- When near the break, lie down to distribute your weight and slowly crawl toward the hole.
- Remaining low, extend or throw your emergency rescue device to the person.
- Have the person kick while you pull them out.

In general, the rules for ice thickness measurements are:

- 3" (7 cm) (new ice) - KEEP OFF!
- 4" (10 cm) - suitable for ice fishing, cross-country skiing and walking (approximately 200 lbs.)
- 5" (12 cm) - suitable for a single snowmobile or ATV (approximately 800 lbs.)
- 8 to 12" (20 to 30 cm) - suitable for one car or group of people (approximately 1500 - 2000 lbs.)
- 12 to 15" (30 to 38 cm) - suitable for a light pickup truck or van.

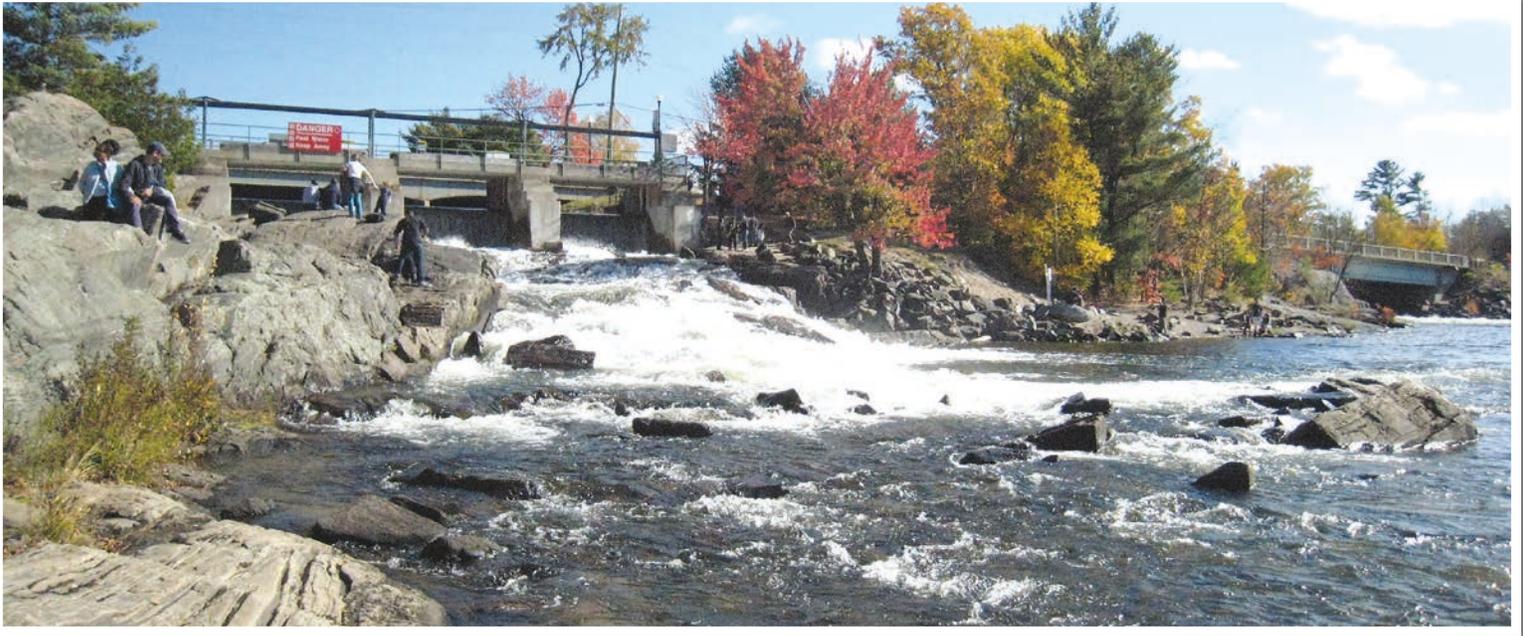


Successful Food Drive

Thank you to all of our members who donated their non-perishable food left-overs from the summer rather than carting it all back home. The Manna Food Bank was thrilled with our collective contribution and is inspired by the MLA to approach other cottage associations to develop their own food drive initiative.



MLA Confirms its Opposition to the Proposed Bala Falls Hydro Plant



In 2011, the Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) passed a resolution to support then Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML) Council and their position on the construction of a new hydro plant at the Bala Falls. With the establishment of a new council in TML, and in consideration of the recent Risk Management presentation to the District of Muskoka Engineering and Public Works Committee, the MLA felt it important to make its opposition clear before the Township Council goes much further in its deliberations.

At a special meeting on February 5, the MLA board confirmed its opposition by passing a resolution that included the following:

The Muskoka Lakes Association confirms its position that the Swift River Energy Limited (SREL) proposal to construct a hydroelectric facility at Bala Falls is an inappropriate and disruptive use for the businesses, residents, tourists and cottagers of Bala and the larger cottage area of Muskoka; and

Further that the Muskoka Lakes Association notes the power potentially generated from this facility is not needed.

Therefore be it resolved that the Muskoka Lakes Association hereby confirms its opposition to the construction of the proposed Swift River hydroelectric facility at Bala and further that the Association's opposition to this project be communicated to its membership, interested stakeholders, such as the Wahta Mohawk community, Williams Treaty Nations, local cottager associations, local municipal governments, local media and the Ontario Minister of Energy and the Premier of the Province.

In passing the motion, the MLA considered the need for the electrical power to be generated by SREL, the cost of that power to taxpayers, the disruption and uncertainty involved in the project's construction, and the long-term degradation of a popular Muskoka scenic area and recreational site.

The MLA is communicating its opposition to the project to the Township of Muskoka Lakes, The District of Muskoka, SREL, local First Nations groups, Muskoka media and cottage associations, the Ontario

Minister of Energy, and the Premier's Office.

The MLA regrets the emotional political schisms that have developed in the township, and particularly Bala, over this issue. Whatever happens to the North Falls, we hope all residents, politicians and community leaders will pull together to ensure the best outcome for the community. The MLA looks forward to assisting in that process.

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Photo Contest Winners

Congratulations to this year's Photo Contest Winners! We received over 100 entries and were impressed by the quality of the submissions. The selection wasn't easy but a panel of three judges agreed that the following pictures best reflected their respective categories. The first prize winners of each category will receive an 18"x 24" plaque mounted print of their photo, courtesy of Aben Graphics, which will be presented at the AGM in July.

FLORA & FAUNA

1
PLACE

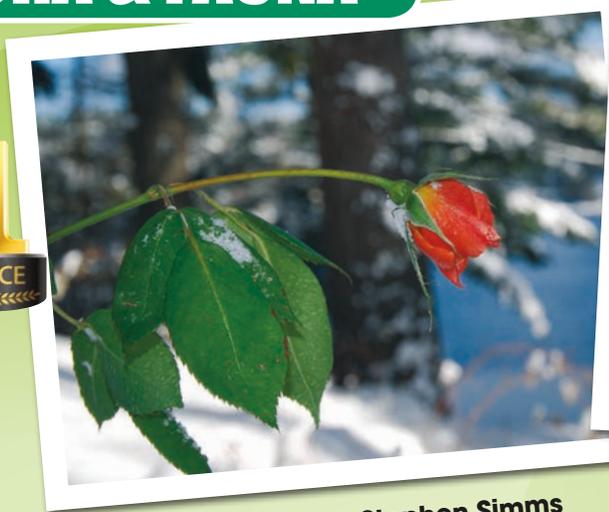


Photo taken by Stephen Simms

2
PLACE



Photo taken by Francie Hannigan

3
PLACE

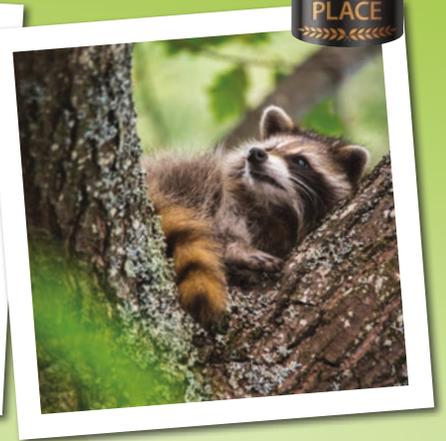


Photo taken by Kimberly Nicholson

R&R

1
PLACE



Photo taken by Lynn Collins

2
PLACE



Photo taken by Martin Kates

3
PLACE

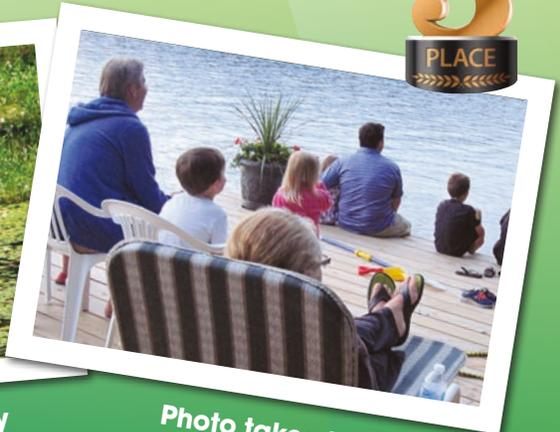


Photo taken by Anne Selby

MUSKOKA VISTAS

1
PLACE

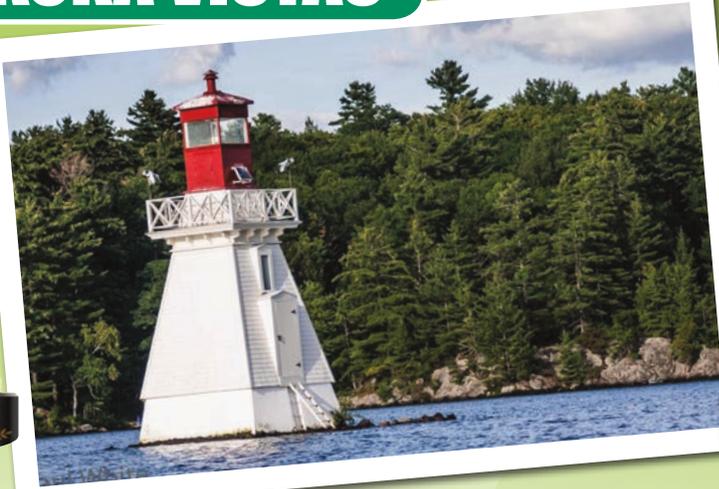
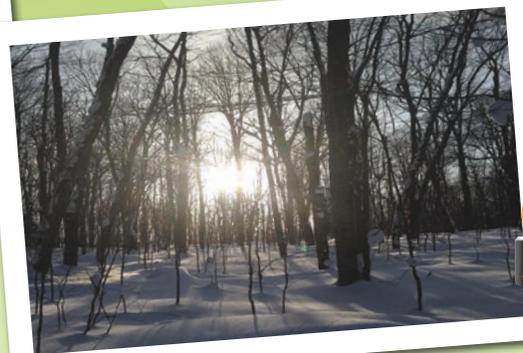


Photo taken by Paul White



2
PLACE

Photo taken by Kimberley Nicholson



3
PLACE

Photo taken by Susi Patterson

MLA 2015 PHOTO CONTEST

Entries may be submitted by MLA members and their families in the categories of:

Winter in Muskoka

Share your love of winter in Muskoka.

Action at the Cottage

Share your adventurous side.

Photos by Kids 14 & under

Let your kids capture the moment.

Start snapping your pictures now for the 2015 photo contest. Visit our website at www.mla.on.ca for more information.

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In Our Opinion:

The MLA has a responsibility to its members when it comes to elections

As always happens in politics, there will be those who will not be happy with the result, and perhaps will even challenge the process. It is to be expected. Last year's municipal elections in Muskoka held no exception. But this time, particularly in the Township of Muskoka Lakes, emotions ran high between candidates and voters alike. There are serious issues to be addressed in the coming months and years, and all parties were very passionate and vocal about their views, and they differed greatly.

Whether you enter the political arena as a candidate or a voter, you are equally invested in the outcome. And when that outcome is not the one you hoped for, it is normal to look for a reason.

Since 1980, the MLA has taken an active role in the assessment of municipal candidates against the MLA mandate – to preserve and protect the unique Muskoka environment. We do so at the behest of our membership; 92% of members who responded to our 2013 survey indicated that they counted on the MLA assessments to aid in their decision making. For this year's election we made no exception. Early in the election process our Political and Land Use committee established an Election committee and teams were assigned to each of the four municipalities in our catchment area; Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Seguin and the Township of Muskoka Lakes. We established criteria and asked candidates to respond to a standard set of questions developed to assess their alignment with those criteria. We awarded a rating out of 5 stars to rank the candidates, published our results on our website, and mailed them to our membership.

Our evaluations also considered how candidates positioned themselves with respect to environmental and development concerns. Our Public Affairs Manager attended the majority of municipal and district council meetings over the past two years so we are well informed of on-going issues.

There are some who have expressed the opinion that the MLA attempted to unduly influence this year's elections. While we respect their right to this opinion, we maintain that we provided information and an unbiased assessment, as input to your vote.

Our assessments were intended only to supplement information available to voters, particularly for those who could not attend candidate presentations or access local media. We also encouraged our

members to reach out to the candidates, visit their websites and query them on their stand on the issues. And since not all our highly rated candidates were successful, it is evident our members made up their own minds.

We welcome and appreciate constructive criticism, and give thoughtful consideration to all opinions. All feedback will be taken in to account when we determine our level of involvement in the next election. As we have done in the past, we also conducted debriefings with our election teams to identify practices that went well, and areas in which we could improve. Observations made in the 2010 elections helped to guide the teams' approach in 2014 and we will continue to adopt new ideas for upcoming elections. We want to thank the dedicated volunteers who invested a tremendous amount of time establishing the assessment criteria, developing questions, administering the contact and interview process and tabulating the results.

Voting is not only a right, it is a privilege, and the MLA will continue to keep our members informed of relevant decisions and actions of our elected governments over the next four years. In our opinion, this is a responsibility we hold and to do anything less would be an injustice to our membership. We hope that our efforts helped with your voting decisions.

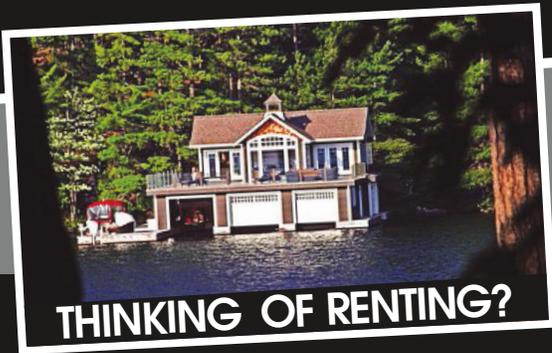
Don't Throw Away Your Advantage Card!



Last year we introduced a new Advantage Card and key fobs for the 2014 season. We will be issuing new stickers for your card with the yearbook, but your card remains valid until then.

There are several shops and restaurants that continue to provide discounts to members throughout the winter season so keep your Advantage Card with you when you are in Muskoka!

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