

What's Up MUSKOKA

OPERA DREAMS

Tenor Daveyd Pepper is set to perform in Mozart opera *Così fan tutte* in Italy.

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April 15, 2015

District budget nears ratification

The District of Muskoka anticipated budget increase jumped recently to 3.66 per cent. The budget could be set at the April 20 council meeting.

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Ice cross phenom

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Memorial to honour women at Nipissing

A pair of students plan to build an Ignite Canada Memorial to honour all women who have been impacted by violence in their lifetime and place it at the Nipissing University Campus in Bracebridge.

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Photograph: Matt Drosell



CARRYING THE FLAME
TWO NAMED AS TORCHBEARERS

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SPRING FUN

By WHAT'S UP STAFF

Robins singing, kids splashing and other spring signs in Muskoka.

Photos - Page 4

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WHAT'S UP MUSKOKA EDITORIAL

Municipalities need to cut costs

It is budget time and it is no surprise that once again taxes are increasing in all six municipalities and at the District of Muskoka.

Every year, they go up and up and up. Each increase compounds on the last one.

And some of that cost is salary increases, because most municipal employees are guaranteed a cost of living increase. How do you keep a zero budget when you've promised increases to staff?

Many Muskokans working in the private sector do not see annual income increase – yet they still need to pay the rising municipal taxes. In fact some Muskokans are making less than they were years ago. Others have private sector jobs and have not seen a pay increase in years.

This year's taxes are up across the District with the high of a staggering 10.09 per cent increase in Gravenhurst. Add to that the District portion's estimated increase of 3.66 per cent and it is truly worrisome.

Staffing is a huge cost in any budget and paying for two tiers of government makes the issue even more pronounced.

When are the municipal and the District representatives going to take these costs seriously? Muskoka has a much lower than average family income and to go along with that, the District of Muskoka has a growing social services caseload.

The last way to solve that is to increase costs. For some, that increased cost of taxes is the last straw and can destroy one's ability to take care of themselves.

While many people are cutting costs and living frugally, their hard earned dollars are supporting a behemoth of a government monster.

Someone has to stop the madness. The path we are currently on is unsustainable.

Bala hospital

Dear Editor:

In the future, should Muskoka Algonquin Health Care (MAHC) decide that only one hospital serve all of Muskoka, it would not be fair to favour either Bracebridge or Huntsville. Instead, a neutral site should be chosen.

May I suggest that a perfect site is located in Bala, right beside the new Swift Energy hydro plant.

**Glenn Clarke
Gravenhurst**

More Letters on page 12



Engineer offers Bala Falls update

Dear Editor:

The project continues to move ahead at the Bala Falls and we're encouraged by the most recent Bala Working Committee discussions.

This committee is made up of Swift River and Township of Muskoka Lakes representatives, with an impartial chair. The focus of these meetings is to discuss options to reduce construction impacts.

The first recommendation to go to Township council was with respect to having Swift River widen a small section of the Gravenhurst bound shoulder of Highway 169 between the two falls to allow construction vehicles to pull off the road for off-loading, thereby eliminating extended lane closures.

Our latest discussions have focused on construction staging and access. We are hopeful that we will soon have another mutually acceptable recommendation for council to consider. These meetings have provided a forum for thoughtful, in-depth discussions.

As an update, SREL has now ordered the turbine and generator equipment for the facility that accounts for about 25 per cent of

the construction costs. The Phase 2 engineering should be completed shortly, followed by the final architectural design.

We have received several permits over the last few months including our Crown Land Use Permit, providing us control over the project lands. We are, however, awaiting a permit from the province before we start construction.

It's important to note there have been no changes to the project since we issued our 2012 Addendum to our Environmental Assessment. Our architect has, however, been able to move the architecture along somewhat with input from our community based design committee. The latest layout shows a shorter building with a peaked roof and terraced lookouts over the Moon River.

We look forward to sharing the updated design with the public. Updates are always posted on the project website, so we encourage people curious about the project and its project to visit us at www.balafalls.ca.

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