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THE PAPER WITH THE NEWS

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2008

# Should Adams resign?

by **Jacqueline Lawrence**

A bitter war of words has ensued over the origins of the District of Muskoka's debt, the \$100-million liability that now has one councillor calling for Gord Adams, the municipality's chair, to resign.

Muskoka Lakes district councillor Stewart Martin says both Adams and Muskoka CAO Jim Green should step down from their positions for allowing Muskoka's debt to get so out of control, and misleading council and the public about the severity of the situation.

"This has been fostering for a long time,

but none of us knew it was this bad," Martin said. "We (council) didn't know we were getting into trouble."

Martin cited the district's decision to spend approximately \$22.5 million on a sewage treatment plant in MacTier as a particular example of poor leadership.

The plant services an estimated 100 homes.

"I think I would say it's Mr. Adams that got us here," said Martin, noting that several years ago, Adams pushed to undertake a multimillion-dollar plan to connect all unserved areas of Muskoka to municipal

water and sewers. The plan was eventually cancelled under the direction of district staff, who said it was too expensive.

With the exception of the above project, Martin said senior administration consistently recommended that Muskoka proceed with water and sewer projects it could not afford.

Its current debt load now has many water and sewer users paying monthly bills of approximately \$200, one of the highest rates in Ontario.

"(Adams) couldn't have got us here without the co-operation of the senior staff. . . I hold

the chairman and the CAO responsible," Martin said.

The public, he continued, is becoming increasingly upset over the lack of accountability at the district.

No one has taken responsibility for the current situation, he said.

"But that's what happens when an administration stays in there too long," Martin said. "Why would we want to wait another two years (for a municipal election)? We need to address this now, not two years from now."

(See 'Councillor' on page A10)



**AFFAIRS OF THE HEART.** Helena, played by Hilary Marges, attempts in vain to win the affection of Demetrius, played by Jeremy Swinarton, in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The play will be performed by an entire youth ensemble in Bracebridge at Annie Williams Memorial Park, August 19-22.

Photo by Darren Lum

# Family seeks inquest into drowning

by **Karen Longwell**

The family of Josue Sebastian Perez, the 16-year-old boy who drowned in Bracebridge July 26, claims that unanswered questions continue to surround the death of their loved one.

"Sabby" as Perez was known to friends and family, died near the Wilson's Falls generating station where he had been swimming with six friends July 26. Ontario Provincial Police found his body July 27.

Perez's family says they wonder why a strong, physically fit boy perished on the river. They also want to raise awareness about the dangers of the Muskoka River.

Some reports claimed Sebastian was not a strong swimmer.

Jorge Perez, Sebastian's father, said Sebastian had taken swimming lessons and was involved in sports, in particular skateboarding. He had been to swimming spots in the area this summer and last year, his father indicated.

"He's very sports minded," said Perez. "I would say (he was) a very strong swimmer."

Perez said it is not clear at this time how the accident happened.

"One of his friends said there was an eddy or a whirlpool," he said in a telephone interview from East York.

The friends believe something — either a natural occurrence or from the generating station — pulled Sebastian under the water, said longtime family friend Alan Preyra.

Preyra, who is also acting as the family's lawyer, is helping to set up a fund to support the family.

"We don't know why there would be an eddy there — the circumstances are very troubling."

Preyra said he would like to bring together all the stakeholders and find out how the drowning happened. He said they are now seeking a corner's inquest.

Bracebridge Generation Ltd., which operates the Wilson's Falls plant, could not be reached immediately for comment.

Preyra calls the death senseless.



**JOSUE SEBASTIAN PEREZ**

(See 'Inquest' on page A10)

# Pot-smoking Rev. busted

by **Karen Longwell**

Finding God could lead to an arrest if you belong to the Church of the Universe.

A reverend of the infamous church found himself in some hot water in Bracebridge Aug. 10, according to Ontario Provincial Police.

The church, which endorses the use marijuana, apparently has a following in Sturgeon Falls, west of North Bay.

"I am told there are followers (there)," said Insp. Ed Medved of Bracebridge OPP.

Michel Ethier, who claims to be a reverend of the church, was stopped for erratic driving on Hwy. 11 near Cedar Lane Sunday, said Medved.

Police report they found evidence the driver had been smoking marijuana.

A subsequent search of the vehicle produced one pound of the illegal substance.

According to Medved, in April, Church of the Universe founders Reverend Brother Walter Tucker

and Reverend Brother Michael Baldasaro were sentenced to "hefty" jail terms and an order was made for the seizure of the church's east-Hamilton headquarters.

The Church of the Universe calls marijuana the tree of life.

"The smoke (from the marijuana) is a holy sacrament," said Medved.

Ethier was charged with possession of marijuana over 30 grams and was released for a Bracebridge court appearance.

Medved said Ethier did not appear to have a medical reason for the drug.

According to the Church of the Universe website, marijuana is "a sacred herb."

Members are encouraged to grow and distribute the plant.

Walter Tucker started the church in 1969 in southern Ontario. The website lists an address in Hamilton, Ontario.

# Crash victim's father wants driving changes

by **Matt Driscoll**

Tim Mulcahy has been through more in the last month than many people will face in a lifetime. Now he's using his private pain to push a public agenda that he hopes will make Ontario's roads safer.

The Toronto man is the father of Tyler Mulcahy, one of three young men who died when Tyler's car plummeted into the Joseph River near Minett July 3.

Last Friday, Mulcahy told this newspaper he is seeking to change the laws that deal with young drivers in Ontario. Specifically, Mulcahy would like to see the revocation of a driver's licence for anyone under 21 caught speeding or with alcohol in their blood system.

The term of the revocation would be anywhere from three months to one year, based on the amount of alcohol or the severity of the speed.

Mulcahy sent a letter to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty last week with a picture of Tyler beside the caption, "Dear Mr. McGuinty, my son is dead."

The letter goes on to explain that while Mulcahy does not hold McGuinty responsible

for the accident, the government can take steps to reduce similar tragedies from happening in the future.

Mulcahy is also circulating a petition to help generate support for the law changes.

Bracebridge OPP has said speed and alcohol were factors in the Minett crash.

Jane Almeida, spokesperson for the premier's office, confirmed that the letter has been received but did not say whether any changes would be coming forward in the legislature.

"We're always looking for ways to improve the safety of Ontario roads," said Almeida. "Our hearts and prayers are with the families of those three young men."

Ministry of Transportation spokesperson Emna Dhahak echoed those sentiments.

Dhahak said the ministry has conducted

consultations and is examining the policies of other jurisdictions.

"No decisions have been made yet," said Dhahak. "We are currently reviewing all of this information to decide how we can make improvements. We expect to complete our review in fall 2008."

In the meantime, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) continues to investigate the Lake Joseph Club, where the young men allegedly had drinks prior to the accident.

Mulcahy said in an interview that he had seen a bar bill from the club, which stated the men had been served 31 drinks in three hours.

AGCO spokesperson Lisa Murray said details of the investigation won't be released until after the matter is concluded.

"That's part of the investigation and we

wouldn't release any part of that investigation," said Murray.

If the club is found to be at fault, the details of that investigation would only become public when one of two things happens, she said.

"They (the club) can either say, 'yes that happened, let's work something out' . . . or they can say, 'it completely didn't happen, we want a hearing,'" said Murray.

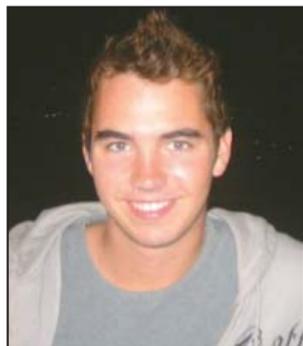
Hearings typically take place in the area of the establishment in question, said Murray. They are similar to a criminal court proceeding, wherein the details of the case are presented.

The punishment for over-serving alcohol ranges from a warning to a \$250,000 fine or the revocation of a liquor licence.

"It's not a case of one penalty fits all," said Murray.

"It depends on a lot of things. What the infraction was. Is this the first time this place has had an infraction? Is this the first time they've had this type of infraction?"

Murray said she is not aware of the AGCO having any problems with the Lake Joseph Club in the past.



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# Inquest sought into Wilson's Falls drowning

(Continued from front)

"It is devastating for the family," he said. Preyra has been a friend of the East York family for about 12 years.

The fund, started on July 31, aims to do two things: help Sebastian's parents, Jorge and Isabel Perez with funeral costs, and help them raise public awareness of the dangers of the area around Wilson's Falls.

Contributions to the fund had reached about \$2,000 as of Aug. 11.

Unfortunately, the Perez family does not have a lot of money and found it difficult to meet the funeral costs.

The family also wants to ensure other families do not have to go through a similar tragedy.

"We want to make sure it doesn't happen again," said Preyra.

Preyra said he and the family are aware there is a danger sign posted at the falls but wondered if something more could be done to make the area safer.

He suggested bigger signs and a fence around the area.

"Our main goal is that the area becomes safe," said Perez, adding he hopes to make the area safer for tourists who may not be as familiar with the dangers as residents.

Preyra has been in contact with the Red Cross and the Lifesaving Society for possible future collaboration with the fund.

He also hopes Jorge and Isabel Perez would be able to do a talk at Sebastian's school. Sebastian was a popular teen at East York Collegiate.

About 200 of his classmates attended his funeral, Preyra said.

Sebastian had just turned 16 years old in July. He has an identical twin brother and an 18-year-old brother.

Perez said the family is trying to return to regular life.

"We have to continue . . .," he said.

Perez said it is particularly difficult for Sebastian's twin, who had a special link with his brother.

In a website memorial to Sebastian, the teen is described as easygoing and fun-loving.

"He was possessed with an outgoing personality, a lively imagination and a mellowed enthusiasm for life that allowed him to be constantly on the go," said the memorial.

He took part in soccer, basketball, skateboarding and swimming, the website indicates.

"He was a really good boy," said Perez.

People interested in donating to the trust account for the Perez family and the public awareness campaign can do so through any TD Canada Trust bank. The account number is 63203771993.



**MEMORIAL.** A wreath lies on the ground near Wilson's Falls, the site where 16-year old Josue Sebastian Perez drowned last month. A trust fund has recently been established to help Perez's family deal with costs they have incurred since the accident.

Photo by Brett Thompson

# Councillor calls for Adams, CAO Green to resign

(Continued from front)

Martin said he believes council's current proposal to create a fund to pay down the debt is misleading, because once debentures are issued for water and sewer projects, the municipality enters into a binding contract. The contracts cannot be broken early.



**ADAMS**

He said he fears the debt fund will ultimately be used to finance new water and sewer projects.

"You can't spend your way out of debt," said Martin. "You have to stop spending — something this administration doesn't seem to understand."

Stephen Cairns, Muskoka's commissioner of finance and corporate services, confirmed that the district is locked into its water and sewer debentures.

Cairns, however, said more than \$9 million in debentures are maturing in 2009, 2010 and 2011, meaning the district can either refinance or pay them off.

"That's what I'm recommending we do with the debt fund," Cairns said about the latter option.

Adams, meanwhile, called Martin's comments "ridiculous."



**GREEN**

Council, he said, has always been aware of Muskoka's expenditures. Councillors, including Martin himself, recommended the spending, he noted.

"Maybe Mr. Martin should resign for having been asleep at the wheel of council," said Adams.

"If you go back and look at the minutes, I'll bet (his) hand went up for every one of those votes (on spending). For him to come back now and say he didn't know . . . maybe he should resign."

Adams said despite the debt, Muskoka continues to have a good credit rating. It is still nowhere near its established credit limit, he noted.

"We are making wise investments into Muskoka's future," he said about water and sewer infrastructure. Martin, he continued, is "just trying to grab headlines."



**MARTIN**

When contacted, Green declined to comment on Martin's accusations.

District council is scheduled to discuss Muskoka's debt during a special meeting Friday at Bracebridge Sportsplex.

The meeting will include debate on a debt repayment plan, which recommends dramatically increasing development charges, local improvement charges and overall contributions to Muskoka's environmental reserve, which funds water, sewer and lagoon-related projects.

Adams said he is endorsing these measures, and hopes Muskoka will take an "aggressive approach" to paying off its debt.

He continued to express support for having all taxpayers share in part of the financial burden for water and sewer.

"Muskoka should take responsibility for Muskoka's decisions," he said.

"And if decisions are made on behalf of Muskoka, then all of Muskoka should be carrying the burden of those decisions."

"Right now, we're making decisions on behalf of all of Muskoka and asking a small percentage of the population to pay the cost of those decisions. And that's not totally fair to them."

Friday's meeting will begin at 9 a.m.

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