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MOTORCYCLE WASH: Hans Lingner has a different request to give his Harley a little spit and polish at the Camp Big Canoe car wash fundraiser held at the Rotary Centre for Youth in Bracebridge on Saturday, July 4. (Photo by Bev McMullen)

Celebrate the jolly old elf at summer SantaFest

BY MARY BETH HARTILL

For crying out loud, it's Christmas in July! Thoughts of mistletoe, gingerbread, visits with Santa, and a parade stocked with town criers are usually reserved for wintertime but this year we're getting a jump on the holidays with the first SantaFest on July 25 in Bracebridge.

Actually, the part about the town criers in the parade isn't typical but it is part of Bracebridge's charm with two town criers of our own and visiting town criers from all across Ontario holding a provincial competition in conjunction with Santa's big day.

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TOP STORIES:

Social media frenzy over allegations

BY KELLY KENNY

Local police say they can't comment on allegations of police brutality made on social media.

"I'm not in a position to comment on a Facebook post," said Bracebridge OPP detachment commander Insp. Ed Medved.



ALLEGED VICTIM

■ Continued on page 21

Town holds ceremony for youth headed to Norway

BY BRENT COOPER

Ten young Bracebridge men and women are going to Europe with a "Go!" in mind.

A formal ceremony was held on June 30 at the Muskoka Airport to officially announce that the town is sending a delegation of youth ambassadors and two adult leaders to celebrate the long-standing relationship between itself and Go!, Norway.

Bracebridge mayor Graydon Smith said

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Disappointing way to celebrate Canada Day

On July 2, I travelled to Muskoka to celebrate the Canada Day weekend only to discover that there is not much to celebrate, at least not in this part of the country.

I had occasion to attend a very hastily called Muskoka Lakes township council meeting on Friday, July 3. I stood by the door of the full-to-capacity council chamber to watch a travesty of democracy unfold. I understand that there is a lot of tension in the community over the proposed development of the hydro plant at Bala Falls; this is not the focus of my disappointment. What I and 50 or so others witnessed on Friday was an insult to democracy, a total failure of our Canadian system of government.

When asked to add a second item to the single item on the meeting agenda, the majority of the council rejected the motion. When addressed by constituents in attendance, Mayor Furniss

twice adjourned the meeting, once to call the OPP on constituents, simply asking to be heard. The mayor also found it necessary to hammer his gavel so loudly that it gave voice to his rage at being challenged by those present.

While some may not care about the Bala Falls issue or the inability of Canadian citizens to access the Crown land that is Margaret Burgess Park in Bala, the fundamental issue for all Canadians is: when will it be your turn to be silenced by the very people elected to represent your interests? Mayor

Furniss and his loyal followers need to be held accountable to all of their constituents not just those whose views align with theirs.

It seems to me that there was not much reason to celebrate Canada Day in Muskoka Lakes this year, as that worth celebrating in this country has been usurped by self-interest and a total lack of respect for our political process and our rights to be respectfully listened to by our elected officials.

Janice Millar
Toronto

Butterflies don't build cocoons

Just a short note re: *Seniors witness the cycle of life*, page 12, June 25, MuskokaRegion.com. The story about butterflies is a bit discouraging. Teaching about butterflies doesn't include the word "cocoon." Moths make cocoons. Butterfly caterpillars transform through metamorphosis into a chrysalis. They do not build cocoons.

Kathy Kay, Huntsville

Residents deprived of their right to free speech

It is shocking that on July 3, local residents wanting to celebrate Canada Day in a public park were deprived their right to free speech at the Township of Muskoka Lakes council meeting.

I was there with many other township residents to signal our disagreement with Swift River Energy Ltd.'s (SREL) decision to deny us our right to hold our annual Canada Day celebrations at our traditional location beside the Bala Falls in Margaret Burgess Park. Apparently the province has leased that parkland to SREL for its construction of the proposed hydro plant. There was no official notice that this transfer had taken place, so we were shocked last week to find out that SREL now claims the right to decide who can use the park and who can't.

Our Canada Day celebrations are open to all. They are not about politics or power plants but cake, ice cream and fireworks. Frustrated by SREL's threat to charge anyone they wanted with trespassing, some 60 concerned citizens converged on the township council meeting to express our concerns. This was a well-behaved group composed mainly of seniors. They had agreed among themselves that one person would speak on their behalf.

Imagine our surprise when council refused to hear any delegations from this group. As this meeting had only been announced the day before, there was no way to follow council protocol that people who wish to speak must request to delegate at least seven business days in advance.

Citizens were understandably upset. Mayor Don Furniss

and his probity team campaigned on a platform of openness, transparency and civility, but when they had a chance to demonstrate tolerance and civility, they chose to silence us. (Thanks to councillors Kruckel, Nishikawa and Currie for voting to hear us.)

In a group this size you'd expect a few complaints and shouts of "shame." But who would have expected that Mayor Furniss would feel so threatened that he would call in the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to keep pesky voters in check?

What prevented our mayor and council from listening to our concerns? Why would they presume that we had nothing to say worth hearing? And why would they bring in armed OPP officers when all we were requesting them to do was listen?

This is not the leadership we were promised. In his inaugural speech last December Mayor Furniss said: "I believe it is essential to listen to each of you, communicate effectively, and operate in a fair and balanced manner, to earn your respect as a leader. There will certainly be numerous opinions on every issue we consider as council — even dissenting views — if you can believe that! I am convinced, however, that through open, respectful discussion around the table, your council can move towards consensus on every issue."

Real leadership is about finding consensus. Calling the OPP doesn't earn you respect.

Cathy Malcolmson,
Bala

Facebook is an unfair fight

Well-meaning relatives jumped to a man's defence last week, publicly crying foul on Facebook when he suffered severe facial injuries after "an attack" while out walking his dog at night in Bracebridge (see story page 1).

That they are upset is understandable. No one deserves to be attacked. That he suffered injury is not in question. There are plenty of photos to prove it. What is unknown and will probably remain unknown is exactly how he sustained those injuries.

The Facebook posts pointed the finger at local OPP officers. Comments poured in from members of the public who saw the post, with some supporting the alleged victim with tales of their own and others questioning the story in the staunch belief that our local officers would never do such a thing.

But nothing but silence from the police. Did anyone actually expect them to defend themselves on a Facebook post? Maybe explain their side of the story? Have a back and forth with members of the public on who is more credible? Of course not.

Social media can get a message out to a lot of people quickly. But if you're looking for support, you're likely to get a mixed bag from the court of public opinion.

That's where we came in. By picking up the story, we gave the police a voice. No, they would not address the specific incident, but they did comment.

They are not in the habit of brutalizing people, but protecting them. We like to believe that is true of those we rely on to serve and protect, especially in our small communities in Muskoka. Has any member of our police force ever used unnecessary or excessive force when dealing with suspects? Probably. Is it a regular occurrence?

"People are going to think what they want," said the detachment commander. And he's right.

He also urged the person to file a formal complaint.

We second that. Whether you have a problem with the police or your next-door neighbour, there are proper channels to go through.

No one said it is easy to come forward with accusations of abuse to the very people you are accusing. But it's the only way to initiate change.

A Facebook post is not going to cut it.

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Disruption of township meeting leads to call for OPP

BY BRENT COOPER

Police were called to the Muskoka Lakes township offices Friday afternoon, after residents demanded councillors hear their concerns about a decision to bar them from property in Bala.

The group attended a special meeting of council to ask to be allowed to delegate to the councillors. The issue they wished to discuss was a decision by Swift River Energy Ltd. to refuse two groups entry to Margaret Burgess Park and Portage Landing for events planned for the next day, Saturday, July 4.

Mayor Don Furniss confirmed that township officials called police, "because of disruptions to council proceedings caused by certain members of the public."

"As mayor of the Township of Muskoka Lakes, I have a responsibility to ensure that all council and committee meetings are conducted with decorum and professionalism," he said in an email. "Public outbursts and disrespect for council procedures and

protocol will not be tolerated, and steps are being taken to eliminate any recurrence."

Swift River Energy Ltd. had sent two letters to Save the Bala Falls and the Moon River Property Owners' Association on June 30 telling the groups they and their guests were not welcome to hold their July 4 events at the two properties.

Save the Bala Falls was planning to hold a fundraiser from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. in and around Margaret Burgess Park, while the association had scheduled its fifth annual Canada Day celebration to start at 8:30 p.m. that same day.

In the letter sent to officials from the two associations, SREL stated that they had become aware of the events planned for "provincial Crown land currently leased by Swift River Energy Limited without permission."

"SREL has stated that as part of its approvals to build a hydroelectric plant at the Bala Falls, it now has the lease for the Crown property, which also includes the

right to the park and the landing properties," the letter read.

At Friday's council meeting, council defeated a motion to allow the delegation four votes to three, which according to some, led to an angry response, prompting township officials to call the OPP.

A video of parts of the meeting has since been uploaded to YouTube.

"So no free speech," one person is heard to remark on the video.

Deborah Ylanko, secretary for the property owners' association, said the group only wanted to let council know of how SREL was dealing with a community group over access to the park. On the YouTube video, Ylanko gave a speech to those assembled during a council break.

"The reason we went was because the mayor and many of his probity councillors, one of their platforms was saving Margaret Burgess Park for the access of the public ... so you can't save something you don't control," she said days after the meeting. "We

were letting them know what was happening in the community."

The Moon River Property Owners' Association cancelled its event, while the Save the Bala Falls event went ahead at the township parking lot across from Don's Bakery and other venues in Bala.

For more on this story and to view the YouTube video visit muskokaregion.com.

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Nine-minute Bala Falls documentary unveiled online

BY BRENT COOPER

The first part of a much-anticipated documentary about the controversial Bala Falls project has been released.

Directors Rob Stewart and Jonah Bryson presented the nine-minute clip, entitled *The Fight for Bala*, last week on various websites, including its own home page, fightforbala.com.

According to a press release, the documentary "examines this community's determination to stand together and fight against a development they say will irreparably ruin the natural landscape, destroy the tourism industry forever and wreck livelihoods — without providing any benefit to the community."

The documentary interviews locals who are opposed to the project, proposed by Swift River Energy Ltd. to be built at the Bala Falls.

Stewart is a renowned documentary filmmaker, and states he visited Bala many times as a child with his family.

In an article for the Huffington Post, he

said that everyone needs to amplify the voices of the people in Bala, "so the provincial and federal governments listen and get their act together."

"The project can be cancelled without a financial hit to the government and taxpayer, unlike similar projects in Ontario that cost us dearly, if we act now. It is not a done deal, but it may soon be if we don't act fast. This shouldn't just be important for residents of Bala, Muskoka or Ontario. This is important for all of us," he said.



The documentary interviews people such as Mitchell Shnier of Save the Bala Falls, then-mayor Alice Murphy, activist Peggy Peterson, present township councillor Sandy Currie, and others, all stating their reasons for opposing the project.

Bryson, who is only 15, said part one is a quick overview of what is happening in relation to the project over the past 10 years, with plans to unveil a second part of the documentary at a later date, perhaps at the end of the summer.

Bryson said he and Stewart hope part one

will entice people to go to their website and provide support in keeping the project from moving ahead.

"We are hoping by the end of the film that enough people get involved and go to the website ... and support us," he said.

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