

Bread and butter



Dec. 31, 2019

By Nate Smelle

Time Magazine recently helped further progress made by the global environmental movement in 2019 when it named Greta Thunberg its Person of the Year. In just the past year, the 16-year-old environmental activist from Stockholm's campaign to protect the planet has inspired millions of people around the world to become engaged in environmental protection. By putting pressure on world leaders and big business to start taking meaningful action to address the climate crisis, this global movement has made the future of our home planet an unavoidable issue in every serious political discussion. With the Amazon in Brazil, parts of Greece, California and Australia burning at a record rate; deadly flooding in India, Pakistan and elsewhere around the world; historic heat waves in Europe and Japan; as well as a whole slew of other devastating weather events directly connected to the climate crisis, the environment had no trouble breaking into the top news slot in the mainstream media throughout the year. Scanning through the headlines of our newspapers in Bancroft over the past year the environment was also the driving force behind many of this year's biggest stories locally. In January of 2019 we started the year with stories about how Algonquin wolf researchers Hannah Barron and her assistant Adrienne Chalaturnyk from Earthroots were working with resident citizen scientists to collect evidence to prove this species-at-risk's territory includes North Hastings. A month later we heard a powerful assessment of our provincial government's dangerous lack of interest in protecting water, biodiversity and addressing the climate crisis from Ontario's Environmental Commissioner Dianne Saxe. Next we saw the No Place for a Quarry coalition of local residents and business owners ramp up its efforts opposing the proposed Freymond/Fowler quarry in Faraday. Then in March the local environmental movement got a boost from Bancroft's own 10-year-old climate striker Brynn Kilpatrick who joined Thunberg and millions of youth from more than 150 countries, by leading the ongoing #FridaysForFuture school strike for climate action right here in North Hastings. While catching up with president of the Steenburg Lake Community Association, Pat Stallaert, and director of the Limerick Waterways Ratepayers Association, Ed Offshack recently, I was reminded of the successes of their own ongoing campaign to protect the natural landscape that defines North Hastings a premier cottaging and tourist destination from the negative ecological and economic impacts of mining. Recalling how it was the mobilization of permanent and seasonal residents that led Pancontinental Resources to abandon the McBride mining project in Limerick Township last March, I read on through the rest of the year's papers and began thinking of the many others who stepped up for the environment in 2019. Noticing the names of local environmentalists like Monica Nikopolous, Kelly Wallace, Chuck Potter, Catherine van der Oye, Dianne Eastman, Mary Mackie, Terry Bradt and Madeleine Marentette popping up time and time again, it dawned on me how effective each of these individuals have been in raising awareness about the essential role nature plays in fostering a healthy future for us as individuals and communities. Pointed out to me on several occasions throughout the year by each of these individuals was how the economy in North Hastings is now primarily based on tourism and recreation, and not resource extraction as it was 50 to 60 years ago. The more I read through the year's news, it occurred to me that

the overwhelming majority of our elected officials in Hastings County for some reason have chosen to remain silent regarding the value of nature in allowing our local economy to thrive. Offshack drew attention to this fact during our interview asking those responsible to carefully weigh the balance of benefits already provided by existing, growing, and well-known economic development engines such as tourism, cottagers and recreation against the irreversible economic, social and environmental costs of installing industrial developments such as a heavy metals extraction mine. Upon weighing these options and performing such a cost benefit analysis, it doesn't take long to arrive at the conclusion that allowing ecologically destructive resource extraction in an area like North Hastings is not compatible with its local economy ? an economy where almost all local residents and businesses depend on nature-based tourism for their bread and butter. Whether fighting to protect the water, save turtles, encourage the flourishing of biodiversity, take action on the climate crisis, or prevent the development of metals extraction mine or quarry operation in the heart of cottage country, each of these individuals and groups are fighting for the same thing: a healthy future. The sooner they realize this and start finding common ground on which they can work together and build on, the healthier that future will be.