

Making progress



By Nate Smelle

WHAT IS PROGRESS? I started thinking about this question again while putting together the progress report found in this week's edition. By the nature of the submissions and the discussions that arose from this process I came to realize how different everyone's interpretation of this concept truly is.

Depending on one's point of view progress can be seen in the establishment of new bylaws and regulations to protect the lakes that nurture our souls and the economy here in cottage country. It can be seen in the form of a new sewage pipe flowing northward to allow for development. No matter what one's impression of this hopeful concept is, it always has to do with looking and moving forward. Where forward is and how to get there are two very different questions leading to even more difficult questions.

For some, progress can be measured in dollars, however in my opinion this way of weighing how well we are doing as a community makes no sense. Of course this method adds a dimension to the overall cost benefit analysis one must partake in when individuals and communities decide what type of progress they want to buy into. While a community's bottom line paints a picture of its version of progress these numbers can be misleading if a few in the community are doing very well at the expense of the many. This same number can also reveal a false or at best limited impression of our well-being on the personal level as well. For instance, one can have all the money they would ever need to do anything but still not be happy. If such a person's bank account were to continue to grow while they were to remain unhappy should this person be considered as making progress?

Partially I guess, but to say their state of being is progressive would also mean that their unhappiness is sustainable. In this individual's case it would be fair to say that if asked most people in the same position would say that their unhappiness is not tolerable for the long-term. One's quality of life would therefore make a better marker of progress than just money.

Quality of life is a subject that comes up a lot in my writing. It is at the core of every conversation our community has about defining progress. This became clear to me even more than it already was when sitting in on the recent strategic planning meeting in Hastings Highlands. After walking through the SWOT analysis with consultant Penny Sharman participants came up with a ?wishlist? for the community. This list included: sustainable public transit, housing for seniors, economic development, better communication and an array of other desirable features that improve the quality of life for individuals in any community. For me, the only real marker of progress worth measuring is the quality of life of society's poorest individuals. This is the number from which we need to move forward.