

Ginowaydaganuc and the greater good



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By Nate Smelle

Since taking part in the National Indigenous Peoples Day and summer solstice celebration at Birds Creek Park last Friday, I have been contemplating the implications of the Algonquin word ?Ginowaydaganuc.? During the celebration Chief Stephen Hunter of the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation explained to the group how ?Ginowaydaganuc,? means that all living things are interconnected.

The reason this word is so important, Hunter said, is because Algonquin values are so ?deeply entrenched in the Earth,? and therefore Algonquin people consider it their ?responsibility to be good stewards? of the land, water, air, plants and animals that give us life. As human animals this of course also means that we need to take care of one another. Implied by the all-encompassing nature of this interconnectedness is that when we take care of the land, water, air, plants and animals that sustain us, we are also taking care of one another.

Writing on the proposed Freymond/Fowler quarry in Faraday now for the past four years, there is not much more to be said about the operation that hasn't already been published. Anyone who has read a newspaper in Bancroft during the last six months knows the community's concerns regarding the project. For that reason I will not go on about Dr. Sharon Cowling's research regarding the dangers of blasting below the water table adjacent to four spring-fed lakes. Doing so would be as futile as rambling on about the risk to the public's health and safety due to fly-rock ejected from the blasting site.

Likewise, those concerned about the economic and environmental impact of the proposed quarry on the community don't need to hear about the noise and traffic issues arising from the presence of 20 more heavy trucks on the road heading to and from the site every hour.

To make their case, both sides in this battle for peaceful coexistence have hired teams of experts to conduct research and produce data which essentially proves the other side wrong. Now it is up to Hastings County councillors to decide which data is most convincing.

Sitting on the patio of the Bancroft Brew Pub, sipping locally-brewed suds with a friend last week, we found ourselves having to pause our conversation every few minutes when a heavy truck would pass through the intersection of Bridge Street and Hastings Street North. As we sat there shouting at one another in as friendly a manner possible considering the noise the topic of our discussion shifted from the Toronto Raptors to the quarry. Science aside, the empirical evidence gathered during this attempted discussion spoke for itself. Swayed by my own ears, I cannot see how adding another 20 heavy trucks to these roads would improve the outdoor dining experience in downtown Bancroft.

Learning last week that both the Freymonds and Grail Springs invited Hastings County councillors to attend special presentations regarding the proposed quarry and its impact on the environment, local economy and community, I cannot help but wonder which of the 14 elected officials made the effort to educate themselves before voting.

No matter what one's political persuasion may be, when an individual gets into politics they do so because they care. What distinguishes a good politician from the status quo depends on what exactly it is that they care about. Those looking to uphold the business as usual mentality of Canadian politics these days tend to throw their hat in the ring in hopes of acquiring money, power, or fame. On the other hand, those seeking to create a better community, province, country and/or world tend to focus their attention on the greatest good for the greatest number of people and the planet.

While many think the vote by Hastings County council on June 27 will just be a formality, I remain hopeful that they will put their personal affiliations with the key stakeholders aside and reconsider their position on the project. To do this they must ask themselves whether the proposed quarry will help more people than it will hurt. Will it provide a significant number of jobs and sustainable economic growth; or will it devastate the local economy by degrading the economic potential of the tourism industry in North Hastings.

As both Grail Springs owner Madeleine Marentette and Bancroft's Mayor Paul Jenkins have said, changing Hastings County's official plan is a serious matter. The sole purpose such a plan exists is to ensure that land use in Hastings aligns with the county's long-term vision, while at the same time, as it states in the official plan itself, "having regard for relevant social, economic and environmental matters."

Catching up with Marentette earlier this week, she believes that any changes to the official plan should be for positive reasons that improve the well-being of the community, opposed to taking away from or harming it. Describing the planning and development committee's decision as "harmful" and "counter-intuitive" to Hastings County's goals and mission, she believes approving the zoning bylaw amendment "blatantly disregards families, economics and the environment."

Recognizing that people, economics and the environment are inseparably interconnected, I believe it would serve the 14 members of county council well to look up the Algonquin word "Ginowaydaganuc." Understanding the implications of what this word means and how it relates to the proposed quarry and Grail Springs might be of assistance if they are truly concerned about the greater good in Hastings County.