

From the people



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By Nate Smelle

Last Tuesday afternoon our office received an anonymous phone call informing us that Premier of Ontario Doug Ford was visiting the Bancroft area. Having not been notified that he would be in town, our news team scrambled to track him down while preparing the paper for press. Receiving word that he was at the Bancroft Brew Pub, I hopped in my car and made my way over to the bar in hopes of getting a few questions answered.

By the time I parked my car and searched the restaurant he was nowhere to be seen. Disappointed, I got back in my vehicle and noticed a message on my phone indicating that the black SUV he was traveling in had been spotted outside another restaurant in town. Taking Cleak Avenue to avoid the crosstown traffic, I arrived at my next destination, scanning the property for any signs of the Premier.

Within moments it became evident that I had been skunked again.

Feeling like I was on a wild-goose-chase, I decided to make one last attempt. Weaving my way through town, I did my best to think like a politician.

Asking myself where I would choose to visit if I were Premier, I first headed for the hospital, then North Hastings Children's Services, the municipal office and finally the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin First Nation land claim office. Shifting gears, I pondered the remaining options and soon found myself peeking in on the Beer Store and the new LCBO.

Still, not a trace.

Defeated, I made my way back to the office with a notepad full of unanswered questions.

As I sat there reading over the final pages one last time, I remembered the last time I had a close encounter with a premier of Ontario. While working as a news editor with The Voice of Pelham newspaper in Niagara, I received an invite from former premier Kathleen Wynne to attend her private tour of Brock University.

After arriving on the scene with about 10 or so other journalists, we were soon informed that the premier would not be taking questions. We were however allowed to follow her around and take photos of her in the laboratories; and if we were patient enough to wait around a couple hours to get a shot of her wearing a hardhat outside the groundbreaking of a new facility being built on campus. Already having wasted enough of our time, not a single reporter stuck around for the second photo-shoot.

Hanging around in the parking lot with a few of the other journos, we took turns expressing our frustrations. By her lack of engagement it was clear to each of us that she had no interest in addressing any of the contentious issues filling the local newspapers ? the high cost of hydro, the province's push for biodiversity offsetting in provincially significant wetlands such as Thundering Waters, and inadequate funding for health care and education. It was also evident that the only reason we were there was to help disseminate a diverse range of shiny happy images of the former premier as her popularity waned rapidly.

Nearly every week either Bancroft This Week or the Bancroft Times features carefully crafted press releases from the Premier's partner in politics and tour guide last Tuesday, our Conservative MPP Daryl Kramp. Oftentimes these press releases contain invites for one of our reporters to attend cheque presentations or funding announcements taking place in North Hastings. These same press releases are sent to our local radio station, which they also publish on their website and broadcast on-air. Like us, they did not receive an invite to attend any of the photo-ops with Premier Ford.

Why neither news agency in town received an invitation remains a mystery. When politicians avoid the media, we lose track of the political reality shaping our quality of life. When the only news we read is telling us how wonderful a job our governments are doing we are not getting the full story. There is no reason a government claiming to be 'for the people' should be hiding from the people.