

## The power of community



By Nate Smelle

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS I've come to realize just what a privilege it is to have the opportunity to express myself here on page 4. While on most weeks this column only runs from 500 to 800 words they are usually the most difficult to write. At the same time they are the words that I find the most satisfying to put together. Connecting the dots between current issues and events, and then reflecting on where I stand in relation to them each week always proves to be enlightening disturbing and most importantly fun.

For the sake of self-discovery and science I implore you to give it a shot. Write down your thoughts on anything that matters to you, anything that makes your heart race or your blood boil. For the sake of your community, send them into Bancroft This Week, share them with your friends on Facebook, Tweet them to your flock on twitter. As the Russian philosopher/journalist Fyodor Dostoyevsky once said ?Much unhappiness has come into the world because of bewilderment and things left unsaid.?

Gazing outward to observe and report the news week after week I have recognized a number of cycles and patterns emerge from the community from one year to the next. Year after year I have noticed the same people giving of themselves for the sake of others over and over again. These people are the same volunteers organizing the fundraisers and events aimed at improving the quality of life of people in need. Getting to know many of these movers and shakers making a difference in North Hastings and beyond has also given me a new appreciation for the power of a community.

On the road early Sunday morning I came across two prime examples of this communal power in action before the sun went down. First, I headed north to Algonquin Park for a gathering at the East Gate to celebrate the public unveiling of a totem pole carved and gifted to the park by Algonquin Elder and artist Dan Bowers. Arriving just as the ceremony began I joined a crowd of 300 or more people as the drumming started. Speaking with Bowers afterwards he took the time to explain the significance of the pole and the stories it told. As he explained to me that the totem was intended to bring all nations together, a child dressed in Algonquin regalia approached him with a very thoughtful and telling gift. Thinking of how sore his hands and muscles must be after carving such a massive creation, she caringly handed him a bag of medicinal creams and lotions to soothe his aches and pains.

This simple act of compassion spoke very loudly, reminding me of one of the most valuable lessons I have learned from Algonquin culture. That being to respect the Creator in all that we do. Substitute the name of any Goddess, God or all-pervading life force that you choose for the word Creator and you will see that this wisdom of the Algonquin has far reaching implications no matter what your personal interpretation of spirituality might be. By suggesting that we ought to respect our Creator implies that we must honour all creation. Likewise, if we are to honour all creation we must therefore also honour our ancestors, elders, friends, family, neighbours, enemies and future generations; basically our planet and all living beings who appreciate it as home. This celebration continued on down the road in Whitney with a feast provided by the staff at Algonquin Park who helped to create a place for the totem at the East Gate. Catching up with friends and making new ones while sharing in an abundant spread of healthy and delicious

food provided by volunteers...now that's the power of community in action!

The trail of evidence signifying the power of compassion and community didn't stop there. Driving south on Hwy. 127 to Maynooth the friendly and festive vibe continued at the Fusion Fundraiser for the North Hastings Community Trust at The Arlington.

Organized by a large team of caring local activists the event was destined for success. This prediction was confirmed before I even entered the building by the line-up at the door and the laughter coming from the 100 plus people already having fun inside. The walls and tables set up around the room were full of arts, crafts, food and other gifts donated by various individuals, businesses and organizations from the community. In every direction I looked there were tangible signs of the spirit of giving at play here. Enjoying the arts, music and local culture while having a good time, doing good things with good people is another great example of the power of a community in action.

These types of compassionate and creative communal energies thrive best when they start growing from the grassroots upwards.

Harnessing such renewable energy is the only true path to progress. If we are to genuinely honour our ancestors, our community and our future generations, our leaders would be wise to seek guidance from the Algonquin people?the stewards of this land since time immemorial?before moving forward with any new development.

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