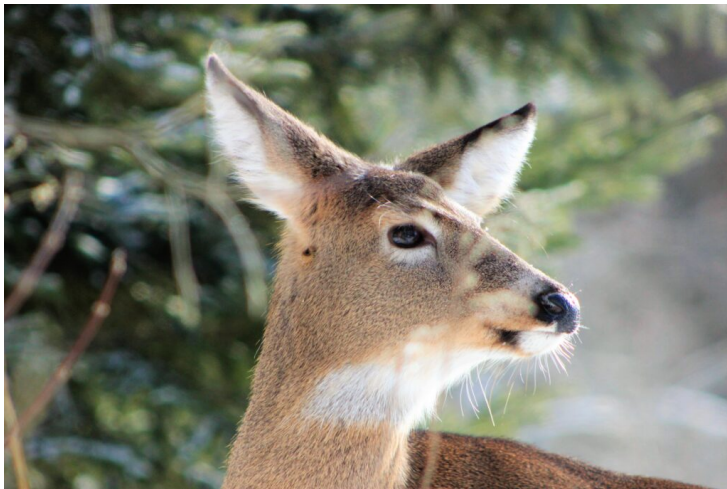


Elections, fires, and wars



By Nate Smelle

ELECTIONS, FIRES AND WARS, oh my there has been a lot to talk about since the COVID-19 pandemic fell off the radar. With an eye on human history, I can't help but wonder if there has ever been a time in which there have been so many intersecting crises in need of being addressed? Certainly there have always been several ongoing wars, conflicts, disasters, and calamities to deal with; however, with the exception of the post-9/11 wave of anti-democratic war mongering, and the first two years of the pandemic, there have been few times in my life where I have felt overwhelmed by the news. Now, as every committed news junky knows, the daily reports arising from around the world do not paint a picture that inspires hope for a happy, healthy, and peaceful future. Putting together this year's Year in Review edition of The Bancroft Times I found myself slipping into a bit of a funk as I was reminded of all that taken place over the past year. Not the kind of funk that forces you to "Get on the Good Foot" and "dance your way out of our constrictions." The only funk arising from the daily news these days is the foul stench of the societal consequences of turning a blind eye to corruption, unfettered greed, and hatred for far too long. Whether discussing the latest lie to slip from the lips of the snake oil salesmen peddling Greenbelts in backrooms, while simultaneously trying to sell the public on the privatization of Ontario's public health-care system, so that private companies and their corporate donors can profit off of the system we built with our tax dollars; or talking about the record wildfire season that forced many individuals "especially senior citizens and those with respiratory illnesses" to remain indoors; or reflecting on the horrendous assault by Hamas on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 and the subsequent barrage of war crimes Israel's leaders have unleashed on the people of Palestine in retaliation,, there is little to smile about when attempting to keep up with the state of our world. Still, keeping in mind the prophetic words of Kelly Clarkson "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," I continued to look for signs of hope as I searched through the 100+ newspapers we published in 2023. With this lens on, I scanned each of the editions carefully, in search of that community spirit I have mentioned time and time again in this column. Overlooking the many obvious shortcomings of our provincial and federal governments, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that in every single edition, the face of our community spirit was there smiling back at us. Living in a community as generous as ours "a shining example of this generosity being the massive fundraising efforts throughout North Hastings to purchase a new CT scanner for the hospital" it is easy to take the efforts of individuals for granted. No matter how cynical one may be, upon witnessing the passion and dedication of all those who work to make Bancroft and North Hastings a happier, healthier, and more peaceful place to live, one can't help but feel hopeful. As we continue to move forward into 2024, we must not forget that the peaceful quality of life we enjoy here in Ontario's cottage country is not disconnected from the perils of those who cannot enjoy living because they are fighting to survive. This is why it is so crucial for local leadership to get behind the Canadian Peace Museum and its campaign to make Bancroft the "Peace Capital of Canada." Who wouldn't want to live in a place boasting such an enticing title?