

Tuques off to wind turbines



By Nate Smelle

ON THE ICE TAKING OFF your tuque means the same thing as dropping your gloves, or for the non-hockey player, getting in a fight. In this context the phrase is meant as more of a salute, as in 'hats off.'

When the Ontario Liberals decided to nix the two gas-fired power plants proposed for Oakville and Mississauga it was more than just a political decision. While many across the province see this controversial decision as a waste of taxpayers' money, the individuals living in the communities adjacent to where these plants were to be located may tell a different story.

When the Citizens for Clean Air coalition formed in Oakville back in 2009 to oppose the proposed power plants they did so because they considered the project a hazard to their health and well being. In fact, on this grassroots organization's website (www.c4ca.org) they tout the cancellation of the power plants as an accomplishment. The Liberals may have swung the axe on these plants, however, their blade would not have been sharp enough to cut mustard if it had not been sharpened by the voices of the people in these communities who stood up and said, 'Not in my backyard (NIMBY).' We witnessed the same sort of community activism when the citizens around Benoit Lake mobilized to say 'No' to Armatec's proposed military testing site.

So, what are we to do about the energy crisis when the NIMBY scenario seems to arise whenever a new gas-fired power plant, a nuclear power plant or wind turbine field is proposed? No easy answers here. We need energy, but not the air, water, sound and light pollution that comes with its production. We want to maintain the North American lifestyle, but we don't want to pay for it.

Like it or not we all need to become a little more conservative with our consumption. Not the kind of shop until we drop neo-conservatism imported into Canada via Texas, but the type of conservatism that responsibly uses energy resources at a sustainable rate. Recognizing that the demand for energy is rising rapidly as the global population climbs ever-higher it is foolish for us to continue feeding subsidies to the fossil fuel industry when we could be supporting a cleaner and more sustainable energy future. The Feed-in-Tariff (FIT) program may not be perfect, but then again what government program is?

In 2006 on one of my two or more journeys beyond Y Road, I found myself travelling throughout Europe by bus, bike and boots. Along the side of the road in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands there were fields of wind turbines stretching out as far as the eye could see. What did nearly every tourist do as we passed by these massive towers? They stopped, took photos and discussed the merits of renewable energy.

I agree that a wind turbine may not be as beautiful as a tree. I would however most certainly rather welcome a field of wind turbines to my neighbourhood than a nuclear power plant or a gas-fired power plant.

Do we need wind turbines dotting the scenic Eagle's Nest Lookout Park in Bancroft? Of course not.

Do we need to harness the power of the wind to provide us with unlimited clean energy?

Yes!