

Blessed are the rink-makers

A call came into the newsroom Monday afternoon urging us to have someone check out the pond hockey venues fashioned at Grange and Watson on Guelph's east end. The rinks, first snowblown into existence by a neighbourhood dad about five years ago, were back in action and being enjoyed. Really enjoyed. By the time Greg Layson of our staff arrived, there were dozens of kids of a variety of ages on them. There were several adults, too. Some were shovelling. Others were on pond hockey. Some were lacing up. More were converging — skates and stick in hand to join in. A line of cars formed on Watson Road. They served as much as dressing rooms at times as a means to the pond.

It was an: If-you-build-it-they-will-come — Canadian version. Ken Danby likely looked down at the scene and smiled. Certainly, many skaters and onlookers did.

Blessed are the rink-makers who allow for such scenes to happen.

Theirs is often a thankless and frequently miserable lot.

If you've never built, flooded or carved out a sheet of natural ice for skating, you've missed out on quite an undertaking. It's cold work. It's hard work. It's a labour that requires continued attention and commitment. And, it's one that can see the fruits of that effort lost ever so quickly. Hard ice today; slush tomorrow.

It's an enormous investment for such a fleeting asset. But thanks are due to those volunteers who make rinks and clear skating ponds for people to enjoy.

There is something wonderful about spending time on and around these places. Perhaps it's because they're so seasonal and temporary. Perhaps it's because they're a part of our culture that easily links generations and eras. Likely though, it's just because they're such fun.

Enjoy these ice sheets while they last this winter. Wear a helmet while you do. And, please remember to thank the people who help to make them ready for use whenever you have the chance.

Hope for pension reform

This editorial ran in Tuesday's Toronto Star:

There is hope yet for an expanded Canada Pension Plan as a solution to looming retirement woes, but it is hanging by a thread.

At their meeting Monday in Kananaskis, Alta., the federal and provincial finance ministers agreed that officials would continue working on enhancements to the CPP. "We will come back at the June meeting to discuss options and concerns," said federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty.

Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, a big proponent of CPP reform, defined this outcome as a success. "We managed to keep CPP on the table," he explained. Perhaps, but several provinces are cool to the idea of expanding the public plan, and Flaherty himself appears decidedly lukewarm.

That's a far cry from last summer in Charlottetown, where the federal and provincial finance ministers (with the notable exception of Alberta) all agreed on expansion of the CPP, with details to be worked out later.

The financial meltdown of 2008-9 has provided the impetus for CPP reform. By gravely undermining the value of corporate pension plans and individual RRSPs, the meltdown underscored the need for a stronger public alternative. It also accelerated the move by corporations away from defined benefit and toward defined contribution plans, which promise less for workers upon retirement.

Unions and other progressive voices began pushing for a gradual doubling of the CPP maximum payout — to \$22,400 a year — as an alternative. Given that the CPP is both portable and solvent, that seemed a better option than trying to squeeze more out of private sector plans. And the country's finance ministers bought into the idea last summer.

What happened between then and now? Clearly, the opposition of Alberta — home base for this federal government — had some impact. So, too, did lobbying by financial institutions pushing private sector solutions such as "pooled registered pension plans" for small businesses, an idea the finance ministers endorsed at their Monday meeting. (Duncan described it as "another modest savings vehicle that may or may not be taken up by individuals and companies.") ...

The federal opposition parties should continue pressing for CPP reforms in Parliament and on the campaign trail, if, as expected, we have a national election in 2011.



letters to the editor

Christmas spirit is missing in Guelph

Dear editor;
Where the heck is the Christmas spirit? Where the heck is the newspaper's Christmas content?

I drove 3,600 kilometres to get here from northeastern Alberta to spend time with my elderly mother. Every day I read the paper to her. Have all your writers become uninspired? Is the Christmas Spirit lost in Guelph? Has it been paved over by one of the work crews? Is the copper penny really that important? Is property taxation of such paramount concern?

Where are the Christmas articles of interest and inspiration that regularly adorn your fine publication at this time of year? I am very disappointed and so is my mother. We're searching for some Christmas spirit.

Sandy Fraser
Guelph

City bus service must become more user-friendly

Dear editor;
I got on a bus on College Avenue a couple of weeks ago and got a transfer to downtown on my way to a meeting at the west end of Speedvale Avenue.

As soon as I boarded, the bus was pulling away I told the driver I needed to keep my transfer as my stopover was only about five minutes, and that I would be continuing on. She looked at the transfer and told me it was invalid. The reason, I was told, was that the transfer was torn off at the incorrect time by the previous driver. She then explained that it was my responsibility to check the time on the transfer and to correct the driver if it wasn't correct.

That I had just got my transfer from the previous bus was not disputed. The issue was that I should have checked the time on the trans-

fer. The driver kept my transfer.

I asked for another transfer that would allow me to transfer after my meeting, but was refused. The driver was clearly frustrated with transfer policies.

When I said I disagreed with this and wanted to file my complaint, the driver would only give me the bus number, and wouldn't give me access to a supervisor, nor suggest an alternative way to settle the dispute.

With nowhere to get change for another bus fare, I walked a considerable distance to get change, then further yet to get another bus.

How is this promoting the use of public transit?

This was a waste of my time and for what? The problem was not about me, but about the wrong time on a transfer and the confusion around the city's policy.

Guelph must make public transit more user-friendly. Many different people use the bus for different reasons, so why can't the city make the bus system less complicated?

I was offered 10 bus tickets to resolve this issue. I turned them down. The issue is the transfer system, not the fare I pay to ride.

Dan Drohan
Guelph

Behaviour inappropriate, but they're young

Dear editor;
I'm writing in connection with the recent coverage about university students taking their rivalry onto the web with trash-talking videos.

Kids will be kids — is that not the saying? Although these students are technically adults, they are still young. By posting these videos on YouTube they are just behaving in the way young people do. They make videos and post them on YouTube.

I understand why the universities are so appalled by the behaviour of their students. They ex-

pect their students to be as well behaved outside of class as they are in. In reality, they do not see anything wrong with this behaviour, which is the case with most university students.

Their behaviour is not correct, but they should not be punished for a joke that offended a minority of people.

Natasha Samouity
Mount Forest

We must count our blessing at Christmas

Dear editor;
As we come to this Christmas season, may we reflect on what Christmas is really about. Christmas is about Jesus' birth.

Why was He born? Why did He die? If it wasn't for the baby in a manger, we wouldn't be celebrating Christmas. But He also died on the cross. The bestselling book in the world relates the plain truths. Search the scriptures.

It has nothing to do with religion, but totally what really happened. It can be a life changing experience. We must count our blessings. Be thankful for our freedoms, our country, our families and friends. Take time to care about others at this special season.

Put the Christ in Christmas and enjoy the season.

God bless you.
Marilyn Fowler
Guelph

letters welcome

We welcome your feedback. All letters will be edited for clarity, style, length and legal concerns. Letters should be no more than 250 words. Letters will be verified. Please include your name, address and daytime phone number. E-mail: editor@guelphmercury.com; write: Box 3604, 8-14 Macdonell St., Guelph, ON, N1H 6P7; fax: 519-767-1661.

City Hall is a great venue for the market

One of my weekly rituals is to visit the market every Saturday morning. I go to the same stalls for staples such as organic carrots, parsnips, mesclun mix, arugula, ginger cookies, and a big bag of empire apples.

I always try to take the time to peruse other stalls, just in case there's something new that I shouldn't miss and just might need. Part of the enjoyment isn't just the shopping, but running into friends for an impromptu chat. It's a meeting place for many, and I know that the breakfast counter is being missed for that very reason.

The market has come full circle, returning to the location where it first started 180 years ago. I didn't realize how important this ritual was to me and so many other people until it almost disappeared suddenly. I was very surprised to hear not only of the pos-



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sible collapse of the roof, but of the relationship between the vendors and the city. The controversial site switch was a hot topic at meetings, dinner tables, and parties. When a regular vendor jokingly suggested the market be relocated to the City Hall lobby, I don't think they were the only ones surprised that the suggestion was not only used, but quickly implemented.

I visited the market at City Hall its first Saturday there to show support to the ven-

dors. It was the first time I had been inside the new City Hall, and was blown away by the architecture, with light from the enormous windows and the framed photos of old Guelph on many of the walls. I was so impressed by the positive spirit and energy prevailing. Many people came out in support of the market and the city. Live music was playing, faces were being painted, Santa and Mrs. Claus strolled through greeting everyone. There was a vibrancy and communal feeling throughout that was contagious. I noticed items I hadn't before, as well as vendors I hadn't seen.

One of the vendors who sells baking said she has regulars who come every single week for bread, and because it was at the other side of her stall, they realized for the first time that she sold cookies, too. Appreciative murmurs rustled through the crowd

about how warm the venue was, how great the bathrooms were and several times I heard it expressed that people wished the market remain in City Hall.

When any relationship has problems, it is often easy to see both sides, and still be puzzled about the eventual outcome. I felt so proud of our city and of the vendors, both sides rising to the challenge making it a positive experience for those who do their weekly shopping there.

A tradition worth repeating every Saturday is go to the market and see the beautiful new City Hall at the same time. Enjoy your holiday traditions right here in the city of Guelph, a place we should all feel proud to be a part of.

Melody Wren is a member of the Guelph Mercury community editorial board.