

Editorials & Opinions

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A community's centre

Just last week, this editorial board wrote about the rising cost facing life in Huron County, specifically from the perspective of Huron East and Huron County Council. Later that week, many Blyth residents were gutted by the news from North Huron Council's Jan. 12 budget meeting - first that township staff was proposing a property tax rate increase in excess of 20 per cent and that the closure of the Blyth and District Community Centre, temporary or otherwise, depending on who you ask, was being floated as a potential cost-saving measure.

Officially, North Huron Chief Administrative Officer Dwayne Evans proposed the closure of the centre, annually, from April 1 to Aug. 31 when the centre sees less usage than it does in the winter. Reeve Paul Heffer, however, posed a "question he's been asking for a while" and requested a report on the township's ability to support two community centres and artificial ice surfaces that has many Blyth user groups, residents and even the ward's councillors concerned for the future of the Blyth centre. At that meeting and Monday night's meeting council has urged patience and calm, assuring residents that no decisions have been made, but Blyth residents are rightfully worried.

Is this a decision in the name of fiscal responsibility to close the centre during months when it's seldom used, or is this the first step towards a community losing one of its most valued assets? Where will residents and service clubs turn to host events during the summer? And, if council were to take that devastating step, what, if anything, could the members of the community do to save their centre?

The financial impact facing the township is very real. A tax rate increase of over 20 per cent would be unacceptable by just about any standard. But, a community must offer services to residents both young and old to ensure its viability, sustainability and appeal to potential new residents - especially small families with young children - in order to grow. When Blyth, Brussels and Belgrave lost their elementary schools all those years ago, many feared those losses would spell devastation for our communities. However, innovation and creativity have seen those buildings take on new lives in some cases, while making way for homes in others. And with those schools gone, residents' attention then turned to the community centres. We may have lost our school, they'd say, but we still have our community centre.

The fear now is that Blyth may be facing the very real scenario of losing its centre as the township faces a tough year. At the Jan. 12 meeting, staff suggested that brighter skies may be ahead with reassessment of homes and a curb in inflation in 2024. The closure of a small village's community centre, however, would have an impact that would last for generations.

In coverage from Monday night's meeting, councillors said in the same breath that they need a tax increase that doesn't bankrupt residents, while realizing the "devastating" impact that community centre closures would have on residents. Both are true, but the fear is that they are mutually exclusive for some councillors who will, feeling they are out of options, take such a drastic measure.

Council and staff will have to get creative in order to hand in a budget that will be palatable to both our elected representatives as well as residents who are already feeling the pinch on their tax bills, grocery bills and any other type of bill you care to name. Having said that, a community is nothing without its people and people are nothing without each other and a sense of belonging. A reasonable tax increase (by North Huron standards) is a daunting request this year and councillors have their work cut out for them, but a reasonable tax increase is irrelevant if we have nothing to show for it. - SL

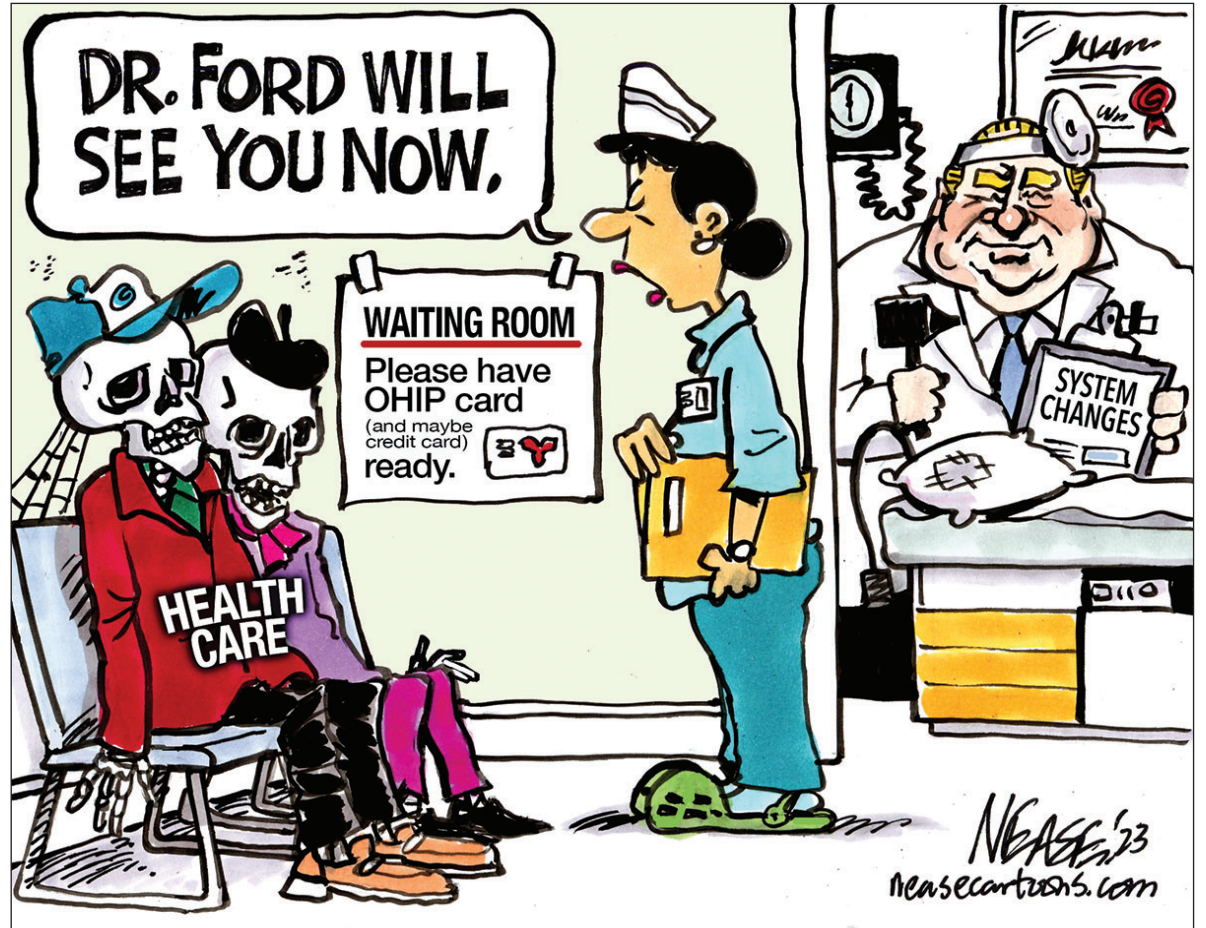
Prescribing nature

A study in Finland has shown that going for a walk in a park, along a lake or in a tree-lined space, may reduce the need for medication for anxiety, asthma, depression, high blood pressure or insomnia. Visiting nature three or four times per week led to 36 per cent lower odds of using blood pressure medication, 33 per cent lower for mental health medications and 26 per cent lower for asthma medications.

While the study couldn't rule out that perhaps healthier people were more likely to get outdoors in the first place, the results are in line with previous research that showed that people living near green space reap significant health benefits. A 2016 study of 100,000 women showed having access to the most green space reduced the death rate by 12 per cent and a 2019 study found a similar trend when studying green spaces around the world.

Fortunately for residents of Huron County, we not only have an abundance of green space surrounding us, we also have many well-maintained walking trails for every level of fitness. In addition to parks and conservation areas, the County of Huron has been promoting its managed forests as an excellent way for folks to get out and enjoy nature.

Since our rural way of life relies so heavily on car travel, we have to make time for exercise so why not take a walk in the woods? - DS



Looking Back Through the Years

January 20, 1966

The Ontario Milk Marketing Board announced an increase to the price of milk, effective Jan. 16, forcing local dairies to increase prices at the consumer level. According to R.B. Cousins, owner of the Cousins Dairy, inflationary pressures had mounted considerably in the lead-up to the decision and farmers were left with few options other than increasing prices. Industry officials pointed out that larger container sizes available to the public meant the average price per quart was still lower than it had been several years prior.

The Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Wm. A. Stewart, announced a new white bean research program coming to Huron County. The operation, managed collaboratively by the Ontario Agricultural Research Institute and the Department of Agriculture, focused on testing of "promising new strains" from Michigan and the Harrow Experimental Station in Ontario. Soil and crop specialists investigated the effects of herbicides and insecticides on grower farms throughout the county. "Under this system the local people are an important part in both the planning and evaluation of the tests," said the Minister.

January 21, 1976

Blyth Public Utilities Commission crews were challenged with finding the source of a small leak in the water main. Foreman Bill Buchanan led the investigation after discovering reduced pressure on the system. The water supply was cut to different parts of town until the location of the leak was determined to be between Wellington and Dinsley Streets on

Mill Street or King Street between Mill and Queen. Additional support was provided by the Public Utilities Commissions of Goderich and Wingham and a special leak detector was brought in, but it failed to determine the location of the leak. The town's water supply was cut off at night, to refill the reservoir and rebuild pressure on the system.

After receiving a resolution from local health care professionals, Huron County Council called for the resignation of Ontario Health Minister Frank Miller and his top staff if they did not reverse a decision to close the Goderich Psychiatric Hospital (GPH). Medical staff of Alexandra Marine and General Hospital resolved that the decision to close GPH without local consultation endangered psychiatric care in the county and threatened residents' right to adequate health care.

The resolution included three recommendations: reversal of the decision to close GPH, immediate withdrawal of plans to close hospital beds in the county, and that the Minister commit to local consultations moving forward. Huron County Medical Officer of Health Dr. Frank Mills said, "We go from crisis to crisis in health care in Ontario. The closure of the psychiatric hospital will create a vacuum. Unless we take a strong stand now we will suffer and the system will deteriorate. Our health is most important and we need the facility and we need mental health care."

July 24, 1996

Community members and service clubs came together in Brussels to support Ontarians affected by a devastating ice storm that struck

two weeks prior. Donations of canned food, diapers, batteries, toiletries, firewood and cash were accepted and loaded into trucks and buses bound for eastern Ontario.

Leona Armstrong, retired reeve of Grey Township, was recognized for her contributions to the area over 23 years of public service. Colleagues, friends, and members of the community joined Leona for a celebration at the Brussels, Morris and Grey Community Centre where memories, congratulations and well-wishes were shared. The next day, Leona received the Brussels Citizen of the Year Award at a ceremony held at Melville Presbyterian Church.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) began accepting applications for an upcoming wild turkey hunter education seminar to be held at the Blyth Public School. Seminar attendance was mandatory for anyone hunting wild turkeys in Ontario and covered topics like wild turkey biology, calling and hunting techniques, hunting ethics and safety procedures. To complete the course, hunters had to pass an examination conducted by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). The seminar series was sponsored by the Quaker Boy World Champion Game Calls and Trebark Camouflage.

January 17, 2013

Huron-Bruce MP Ben Lobb was in Seaforth to announce a grant of \$147,167 for the Brussels Library. Lobb had previously spoken with Huron East Mayor Bernie MacLellan about the need for improvements at the branch. The move was described as a significant investment in the future of Brussels and the historic library building.