Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Kate Austin

BY PAULA BOON

Kate Austin is enjoying every moment of living in Huntsville. "It feels like home now," says the event tourism coordinator at the Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce, who moved here with her husband Andy Cantelon almost three years ago. "I just love this community. Everything about it is perfect for us."

A graduate of the University of Guelph's Bachelor of Commerce program, Austin describes her job as "another excellent fit."

One of her main duties is to help write bids to bring events to the area, especially during the shoulder seasons. "We have a lot of accommodation in Huntsville/Lake of Bays and want to make sure we have people to fill those beds," she says.

When events are scheduled, Austin often works with organizers to help bring them to fruition. For example, she is involved with plans for the Olympic Torch Relay event, which takes place at the end of December. "I'm working with people from 2010 and a committee of people from Huntsville to create the celebration," she says. "Our aim is to showcase what's unique about Huntsville. It's neat because they're really focusing on keeping these Canada's Olympics. That's exciting."

Austin lends a hand with established events, too, such as the Muskoka Triathlon and the Ironman 70.3. "I do a lot of community education to alleviate concerns about bringing big events here," she says.

Austin's other duties at the chamber of commerce include assisting with chamber functions and the general flow of the office, including spending some time responding to tourism inquiries. "I love working with tourists," she says, adding that she is bilingual and has fun helping French-speaking visitors.

Much of Austin's free time is spent with her horse Rocky, a Dutch warmblood. "I've had him for about a year and a half," she says, adding that every day after work she spends a couple of hours at High Hurdles stable, where he is boarded. "My husband is so understanding. I usually don't get home until about 8 p.m," she says.

Austin has always been a horseback rider. She grew up in Sudbury and rode just outside the city at a place called Foothills Farm. "It was wonderful, out in the back 40, with lots of space to run around," she says. "I literally spent 50 per cent of my childhood there."

Austin competed in the hunter/jumper division and worked on horse farms in summers through to the end of university. She's thrilled to have been able to hook up with the horse community in this area.

"There are a lot of nice farms around here," she says. "I've made friends with so many horse people."

At home, Austin and her husband have a dog and a cat as well. "I'm passionate about my animals. We all are in this office," she says. "That's in tune with the way I was raised. My mom has fitted sheets for her dog's bed."

Austin also enjoys keeping fit and goes to Fitt gym most mornings "I really enjoy it. I do some personal training there," she says.

Food and nutrition are a huge part of her life. "I love cooking and eating. I've always been a big eater," she says, then laughs. "I remember when I was 13 I could eat more than my dad."

Avid snowboarders, Austin and her husband try to go on a couple of snowboarding trips each year and keep their ties to British Columbia, where they lived for three years after graduating from university. "It was great, a really amazing experience," she says. "It's a beautiful part of the country, but a little far from home in the end."

Austin is content with her life in Huntsville and has no plans to make any major changes, beyond possibly starting a family. "I'm very happy with this job. We all work well together and have such a great time together," she says. "The job is always changing and growing, and the next couple of years are going to be exciting."

Thanks to John Finley for suggesting that Kate Austin be profiled.

LETTERS

There is no reason for Canadian military to stay in Afghanistan

I have been vindicated!

Surprisingly, this vindication came from the least expected quarter: from the Right Honorable Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister (as I write) of Canada.

Over the years I have submitted numerous letters to the Huntsville Forester. With the exception of two former town mayors who threatened me with legal action, most often the response from the reading public has been positive.

But one year ago, in a letter to the Forester on Feb. 27, 2008, "Hold out for diplomacy and negotiation, not guns and bombs, in Afghanistan," I voiced the opinion that contrary to what our generals and politicians tell us, we will not win in Afghanistan. That history was on the side of the Afghans, and there was no just reason for our soldiers getting killed fighting the wrong war in the wrong place for the wrong reasons.

One reader responded, "Not only did you miss the boat, but I don't even think you had a boarding pass on this one."

Another reader cleverly jibed in, "As Mr. Earl said, 'You've missed the boat,' and I figure all other modes of transportation."

The phone calls and comments of others voiced the same disapproval. It was a humbling experience.

But what goes around comes around. A single year can be an eternity or just a moment. In the past year 23 more soldiers were shipped home in bits and pieces in body bags stuffed into flag-draped coffins; planeloads more of maimed and mentally disabled arrived. Homes across Canada house suffering parents, loved ones, and scores of little ones left behind, for the rest of their lives.

Why? To what end or purpose?

Some time ago our prime minister, mouthing George Bush, declared, "There will be some who want to cut and run (from Afghanistan). We don't and we will not, as long as I'm leading this country."

A few weeks ago, still leading the country (in a manner of speaking), he reversed himself: "We cannot win this war. Quite frankly, we are not going to ever defeat the insurgency."

Harper vindicated me, but it is cold comfort.

If we cannot win, then why stay? Why more bloodshed and pain, why continue spending $150,000,000 per month to finance a military operation that has zero promise of success? And why Afghanistan?

The vast majority of those who planned and carried out the attacks on the World Trade Centre were Saudi Arabians, including its leader, planner and financier Osama bin Laden. There wasn't a single Afghan involved. Yet we attacked this poverty-riddled country that was absolutely no threat to Canada.

It disturbs me to hear politicians and military leaders mouth platitudinous statements such as:

• they (slain soldiers) gave their lives for our nation to keep Canada safe;

• they forfeited their lives so that we can be safe, prosperous and free.

In what manner did Afghanistan ever pose a threat to our safety, our freedom, or our prosperity? It's all shameless hypocrisy!

The world is teetering on the edge of a possible depression; tens of trillions of dollars have evaporated from the world economy; nations have gone bankrupt and multi-millions are now unemployed; the poor are beyond poor.

Those responsible for this financial meltdown are not the "terrorists" from without, but the enemy from within: bankers and investment advisors, Milken, Madoff, Boesky, Greenspan, Kelly, Thain, Blankfein, Paulson, Spencer, Summers. The list goes on and on, with not a single Arab or Muslim name among them.

Let's face it; we are no longer a democracy: of the people, for the people! We have become a corporate welfare state! The poor (nations and individuals) are squeezed and hammered, while manipulative corporations (banks, oil barons and autocratic rulers) are coddled and under girded with bags of taxpayer dollars.

It has been ever thus, but now it has become disturbingly more so.

Harry Wahl
Huntsville

YWCA is grateful for support after loss of Carolyn Bray

On behalf of everyone at YWCA Muskoka, I would like to extend a huge thank you to all who lended their support, both personal and professional, following the tragic passing of our executive director Carolyn Bray and her daughter Jolene Robinson.

Thank you to all of the friends of YWCA Muskoka who stopped by to offer their condolences, hugs, and to share a laugh with their favourite Carolyn story. Thank you also to those who kept us fed. Your friendship during this time is so appreciated.

Our heartfelt condolences and positive thoughts go to Tony, Savannah, and the Bray and Robinson families. We hope that the support of family and friends, and your strong and positive dispositions, will give some ease through the tough times ahead.

A special thank you to Jodi Golding and all of the local therapists and support workers from Muskoka Parry Sound Sexual Assault Services, and Muskoka Victim Services, who were immediately accessible for counselling and debriefing for the family, at Monck Public School for Jolene's classmates, and for whomever needed it as they dropped in at YWCA Muskoka throughout the week.

Thank you to our staff, board directors, and past presidents, who I am so grateful to be associated with. I couldn't say enough about you and the support you have given me, the organization and each other. What a team we have. You are some of the smartest and most confident people I know. The very fact that we work so well together and respect each other so much is a true testament to the quality of people Carolyn attracted into her life. I am so proud of each of you.

Thank you YWCA Canada and YWCAs across Canada for their support and for sharing in this time and flying in from all over the country to be present.

Thank you to everyone who has donated to YWCA Muskoka in honour of Carolyn and Jolene. Your generosity has brought smiles and tears to all of us. In the near future, YWCA Muskoka will announce how we plan to honour Carolyn's legacy with these funds.

Thank you to Reverend Peter Hill and all who represented and celebrated the lives of Carolyn and Jolene so beautifully.

And finally, thank you to Carolyn and Jolene, whom we are all left better, stronger, and happier people for knowing. Your cups were never less than half full, and there was always a positive for every negative. Thank you for showing us the power of change that one person can have, and that being good and kind has a ripple effect a long way from where it began. Thank you for fiercely believing that every individual has gifts to offer, and if we all just gave a little more the world would be a better place. But closer to home, thank you for passionately leading the communities of Muskoka to have happier, healthier people, families and communities.

Carolyn, you have left us with big, flashy, pointy, sexy, shiny, fun shoes to fill, but YWCA Muskoka is a strong organization that you left in good hands.

We have so much to look forward to at YWCA Muskoka and we will remain the great organization that you all know.

I have every confidence in our staff, board of directors, and the support of our community partners and friends as we transition through the weeks to come.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, to everyone; we couldn't have done it without you!

Virginia Hastings
president, board of directors
YWCA Muskoka

Note to G8 Summit budget planners: we're in recession

Re: Lake of Bays submits G8 funding request list, Huntsville Forester article, March 17.

As a Canadian citizen, taxpayer and resident of Huntsville-Lake of Bays, I believe it is necessary for me to comment on what is happening to our tax dollars. $50,000,000-plus for a three-day summit and everyone, it seems, wants to get on the bandwagon for their share. Where is this money coming from? Correct: you and me, the taxpayers.

If you haven't heard, we are in a recession and yes, I know this was planned before the recession started. Or was it?

I believe, if I am able, in paying my fair share of the multitude of taxes we are assessed. However, it is incumbent on those elected to office to not only assess it within the means of the population, but also to spend it wisely.

If you are like most of us, you discuss this subject with friends who, of course, can change nothing. We must voice our opinions to the people we have elected.

I encourage you to make your thoughts known where it counts.

Dennis Wilks
Huntsville

HEALTHCARE HEROES

Spring Gala

Cameron & Helena Renwick of Algonquin Orthotics are sponsoring the special cocktails bar at Spring Gala 2009. No, not martinis, we hear they're passé. This year it's Champaign Cocktails!

Thanks to the Renwick's and their intrepid cocktail friend Karin Terziano for helping to make the Spring Gala a must attend event. You can order your tickets to the Huntsville Hospital Fundraiser by calling 789-4756.

Cocktails: 6:30 Dinner: 7:30

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