

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Susan Lowe

BY PAULA BOON

Susan Lowe loves to help people succeed.

That's why the president of the Muskoka Literacy Council (MLC) thrived in her career as a special education teacher and why she gravitated toward the literacy council when she and her husband Michael moved to Huntsville in 2002.

Lowe says the most wonderful part of both jobs is seeing people begin to feel good about themselves when they meet with success. "Relationship forming is most important," she says. "If you have a trusting relationship, you can conquer mountains together."

She gives the example of a favourite former Grade 6 student. "He was a nightmare on the schoolyard, a real hood. I loved him," she says. "We had an amazing rapport. He was bright as a dollar, but it wasn't coming out."

Three years later, while waiting in line at a fast food restaurant, Lowe heard a booming voice calling her name, and there he was, thanking her for getting him the help he had needed. "I just about wept," she says. "His goal was to be a truck driver. Every time I see a truck go by I think of him. I hope he made it."

Lowe has formed those same strong relationships at the literacy council. "Each person comes in with an individual goal," she says. "We're not teaching a program, we're teaching individuals."

Born in England just after the war to a Canadian father and British mother, Lowe's family moved to Huntsville in 1957, when she was 11. She met her husband Michael,

whose family has a long history in Dwight, at Huntsville High School. However, the two didn't begin dating until they reconnected in Toronto after she had attended Ottawa Teachers' College.

The couple married in 1968 and had two children, Wendy and Jason. "Being their mom is the most important thing I have ever done," Lowe says. She took 17 years away from teaching to be there for her family.

When Michael was ready to retire, the Huntsville area was a natural choice. Soon after arriving, Lowe responded to a newspaper advertisement for MLC volunteer tutors. Shortly thereafter, she was assigned the role of assessor because of her background. By 2003, she was on the board, and in 2005 she became president. That was a difficult time for the literacy council, which was in need of restructuring.

"The first huge change was to add computer classes," she says. "That removed the stigma associated with coming to the literacy council."

Now, courses are also being created that are specific to the education and skills required for jobs in different sectors. Last August, the MLC co-located with the Employment Resource Centre at 64 King William Street. "It's seamless. It's working beautifully," she says. "More people are being served by both agencies as a result."



Besides her day-to-day duties at the literacy council, Lowe's biggest jobs as president have been running annual fundraisers the golf tournament and the Muskoka Novel Marathon, which takes place this year from July 17 to 20.

She has kept busy outside of work, too. For example, Lowe is an art aficionado and owned Gallery in the Woods in Dwight from 2002 to 2006. "I featured the works of 64 artists, 95 per cent of them local," she says. "The whole premise was for people who travelled here to take back original local art to remind them of where they'd been."

Lowe also organized Art Among the Pines, an annual event, in Dwight from 2003 to 2006, with help from her husband and children. She is also a member of the Huntsville Festival of the Arts board.

When asked about the future, Lowe says she plans to continue her volunteer work, but the recent death of her younger sister has reminded her of the importance of stopping to smell the roses and watch the birds. "Wendy was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in October and died Jan. 7," she says. "My sister lived a very balanced life. I need to take lessons from her."

Thanks to Doris Villemare for suggesting that Susan Lowe be profiled.

LETTERS

Afghans aren't getting the help and expertise they need

Re: Canada has a duty to down-trodden nations, letter to the editor, Huntsville Forester, April 1.

In the above letter, Hugh Holland's opening statement is, "Mr. Wahl forgets and twists historical facts."

I'd like to suggest, Mr. Holland, that we are looking at history from a different perspective. Having lived in many different countries, I have learned that "historical facts" are like Jell-O: hard to nail down, because many interpret history through their own bias of culture, tribalism or nationalism.

Yugoslavia — the country I was born in — influenced my perspective regarding war, occupation and resistance. Yugoslavia was similar to Afghanistan: a loose confederation of diverse cultures and nationalities. Bitter rivalries existed between them; compromise was difficult, if not impossible.

The invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers unified them. They now had a common enemy. The rag-tag resistance fighters led by Josip Tito were more savage, brutal and elusive than the Taliban.

In the end they defeated the Germans, the Italians and the Hungarians, just as the Afghans had defeated the British and the Russians, and will likely wear out the NATO countries trespassing on their land.

To claim — as Mr. Holland does — that Canada went to Afghanistan with the pure aim of preventing the Taliban from obstructing girls getting an education is base hypocrisy.

Before 9/11 a large proportion of Canadians wouldn't have found Afghanistan on a map; few lost sleep worrying whether girls in Afghanistan — or in any other country — got an education or not.

Let's be honest. We went to war at the behest of George Bush.

Yes, the Taliban at present provides 90 per cent of the world's heroin, but according to the U.N. Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, "Well before the United

States invasion, the Taliban had banned poppy growing, because it was contrary to the tenets of Islam."

The Observer, Sunday 25 Nov. 2001, reported that the Taliban ban on poppy growing, which slashed Afghan opium production by 94 per cent the year before, had ended with the American invasion.

Mr. Holland — steeped in Dick Cheney's version of history — makes the mind-boggling claim that the Iraq war was a direct consequence of attacks planned by the Afghanistan-based Taliban and that this somehow was a factor in why the U.S. banks collapsed.

June 16, 2004 — The commission investigating the Sept. 11 attacks reported to Congress that it found "no credible evidence" of a link between Iraq and Osama bin Laden.

The New York Times, Aug. 19, 2008 puts the blame for the mortgage meltdown on investment banks, bond rating agencies, and subprime mortgage brokers. No mention of Taliban involvement!

After seven years of bloody warfare, billions have been spent on combat (only 5 per cent on infrastructure), while Afghanistan has deteriorated to its pre 9/11 state: a tribal country now run by warlords, drug gangs, corrupt politicians, and crooked police, and a puppet president whose stay in office is dependent on his appeasement of Islamic fundamentalists. To that end, a few days ago, President Karzai signed legislation that approved child marriage, forms of rape, and restricts a woman's right to leave the home without her husband's permission. Our western leaders looked shocked! They are scrambling back to the drawing board.

The Afghans need our help and expertise as peacekeepers and mediators. It's not the help we are giving them.

If this is a rescue mission, according to Holland's "historic facts," then God help the girls of Afghanistan.

Harry Wahl
Huntsville

Thanks for telling the truth

Re: Reinstate trapping and hunting of wolves, coyotes and bears, letter to the editor, Huntsville Forester, April 1.

Someone writes the truth about our bear and wolf problems.

Also, why have fewer fawns and calves

been seen? Because of the over-population of bears and wolves.

Thanks to the many trappers still trying to survive and thanks, Ron, for the truth.

Wayne Dodds
Emsdale

It is more important than ever to support local businesses

As we are all aware, the world is in a very tough economical time right now. Canada, including Muskoka, is hit by these tough times as well. I am trying to figure out what people are doing to help fix these problems. I have a few ideas to help our community.

I believe one of the ways that we can all do our part is to buy the things we need and use in our own neighbourhoods. There are a number of ways we can do this. Try to buy local meats and vegetables when available. Try to shop as much as you can in the community you live in. Try to shop at locally owned and operated shops and restaurants.

Muskoka has plenty to offer on its own without the big corporations infecting us. We now have multiple big box stores within 25 minutes of each other. Does this make much sense? They are one of the biggest problems a small town could have. When you buy at one of them your money is going out of Muskoka and out of Canada. If you must shop at a large store, at least make sure it's Canadian.

Try to get to as many local restaurants and bars as you can. One thing I notice is that not enough of the local spots in Muskoka are carrying the local brewery or any of the local wines. Muskoka is blessed with a fantastic microbrewery, Lakes of Muskoka Cottage Brewery. Why is there not more local support for the brewery? One of the local restaurant-bar's slogan is, "Local and Loving It." Well, I don't see the local beer on tap there. All I see is non-Canadian-owned companies served in our local bars. Those beers can be bought everywhere you go. Let's be different here in Muskoka. Let's be proud that we have unique products here. I think that the managers and owners of the bars and restaurants in Muskoka need to help set a better example for the community to help support all of the superb products that Muskoka has to offer. Buy local, spend local and support local. We can all help each other out in these very tough times.

Justin Drexler
Huntsville

Winter has its advantages

This was the first opportunity I had to enjoy the whole day at Idle Acres to soak up the sensations of spring. I was up at 4 a.m. to hear the warbling of the birds making their mating sounds.

After a shower, I put my blankets out on the clothesline. There's nothing better than the fresh smell of blankets after being baked in the sun with a spring breeze blowing through them.

Between loads of laundry, I started the routine of bringing out the lawn furniture. "Oh good, the glass table didn't get broken," I thought as I wheeled it out onto the patio. "Only minor spider webs in the umbrella. Uh oh, one of the arms on the 'brelly doesn't look right. Umf, there we go, it's okay now." The swinging bench was next, and after cleaning the chaise lounge it was time for a break.

As I was relaxing and trying to gauge how much time I would have to enjoy paradise before the blackflies made their omnipotent presence known, I was jolted back to reality. It was only 9:30 a.m. and the local kids were already roaring their ATVs up and down the road.

"Cripes, guys. You have hundreds of miles of trails around here! Why do you

insist on driving on the road?" Maybe their parents think it's safer for their under-age, non-licensed children to drive on our roads than on the trails, where the police may be more prevalent.

At 10 a.m. a neighbour fires up his chainsaw. I still have clumps of snow on my property and the busy beaver next door gets into preparing for next winter! For the brief breaks between the cacophony of the saw and bikes, what do my wondering ears hear but someone running a rototiller!

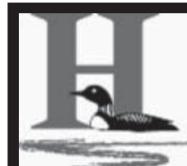
Shortly after, another chainsaw fires up down the road. Great! Now, I have harmony! Oh no! Now that it's accepted, buddy on the other side of my property is at it. Not exactly the three tenors!

I notice that buddy across the street is doing his part to be green — he's fertilizing his lawn. So, it will grow quicker and he will have to cut it more frequently! And make more noise!! And his stereo is blaring!

My family and friends wonder why I enjoy winter so much.

Well, it's very quiet. I admit defeat and put on ZZ Top. At full blast!

Will Perry
Huntsville



HEALTHCARE HEROES



Doug Millikin Volunteer of the Year

Huntsville Hospital Foundation's Spring Gala annual fundraising dinner/dance this year was centred around the celebration of their 25th Anniversary.

The Volunteer of the Year Award sponsored by the Huntsville office of Assante Wealth Management was presented by Chris Edwards, Senior Financial Advisor, to Doug Millikin. Seen here in the photo is Doug & Dorrie Millikin.

Congratulations to Doug for being named the Foundation's 2009 Volunteer of the Year. Doug Millikin was the first Chair of the Huntsville Hospital Foundation and was part of the team to help negotiate the purchase for the land and building of the current Huntsville Hospital.

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