Opinion

K O K A

Introducing Jonathan Baker

BY PAULA BOON

Jonathan Baker's approach to life is reflected in his gardening philosophy.

"We grow more than we think we need, and the deer and bugs get their share," he says.

The organic gardener, general contractor, husband and father has a relaxed, humorous, generous way about him that extends to everything he

Baker was born in Keston, England. "That's the hamlet where William Wilberforce signed the document freeing British slaves," he notes, "but I was born a while after that happened."

After graduating from high school, he worked at an optician's office and then as a warehouseman before meeting his wife-to-be at church.

Wendy, a Canadian, was in the U.K. studying to be a nurse. Smitten, Baker asked his mother to arrange for Wendy to babysit for his younger

brother. "When she arrived I was there, and she asked, 'When are you leaving?' I replied, 'I'm not leaving. I'm staying with you,' he recalls with a smile.

Wendy was about to walk out the door again, but after a cup of tea, she decided she would stay after all

'That was our first date," says Baker.

They were engaged within 10 days and married six months later.

Soon after their wedding, the Bakers came

"It was meant to be temporary. We were only going to stay half a year," he says.

That was in 1974. After about 12 years in Bracebridge and the birth of their three nowgrown children, the couple bought the 86-acre farm on Rowanwood Road where they now live.

"I always wanted to be a farmer," Baker says. "I would love to run a market garden full-time, but that's a hard way to make a living.'

As it is, Baker has owned Muskoka Custom Carpentry since 1982. His specialty is home renovations, with a particular focus on tile and hardwood floors. But his heart is always with his gar-

"I grow the vegetables and Wendy sells them at the Huntsville and Baysville Farmers' markets," he says. "The main difficulty is that the busiest time for the garden is spring, which is one of the busiest times in construction. My wife complains her biggest problem is her supplier lets her down and she runs out of produce."

People are too far removed from their food, in Baker's opinion. He tells tales of market-goers who thought that brussels sprouts grew in little rows like cabbages rather than on bushes, and others who can't recognize onions if their greens are still attached. And when his family members eat chicken, he says, "they know who they are eating."

For 17 years, that family included foster chil-

dren as well as the Bakers' own three. Then, in 2000, he and Wendy decided to share their lives with international exchange students.

"The only drawback is they become part of the family and you miss them when they're gone," he says, pausing to show off a photo collage of past guests.

Baker finds it interesting to learn about other cultures. For example, he describes how a Japanese exchange student avoided blowing her nose while in the presence of others to be polite.

Gardening and other farm chores also gain another dimension when they're done with young people from other countries. Laughing, Baker describes how just the day before he had been digging up potatoes with a girl named Minoru, visiting for two weeks from her home in a Tokyo high-rise.

"She was like a three-year-old. 'Wow!' she'd say. 'Look at that one!"

Baker also shares his talents, time and life with members of his church community at Deer Lake Gospel Hall, which he helped to build 30 years ago.

"It's not just about church on Sunday," he says. "It's a great support group. They're good

Asked what is most important in his life, his answer is immediate and emphatic: "My God, my family and my farm."



Public deserves to hear from councillors on staff resignations

I feel compelled to follow up on my letter of Sept. 12 regarding the pending wrongful dismissal of our Town's CAO

I should not be surprised at how many people have acknowledged my letter and are appalled at what is happening at our town hall. I can only urge those of you who are concerned to write or call one of the four councillors supporting the mayor's actions: Fran Coleman, Mary-Jane Fletcher, Mike Greaves, and Chris Zanetti, and ask them to justify their position. Don't let them hide behind the standard line, "It is a personnel issue and cannot be discussed."

Councillor Coleman has the most to explain as she has been on council for several terms. How has our town administration suddenly become incompetent to the point of being forced out of their jobs and out town? Our town engineer has resigned. However, it has been made obvious to

me that she has been forced out. Mr Schmid is being asked to resign, and the mayor cannot provide even one valid reason so he must proceed "without cause." Now I hear that our director of corporate services, Libby Boucher, has resigned.

Who will be left at town hall? Who will want to come and work in such an environment knowing that they could be forced out "without cause" at the mayor's whim?

Beyond the need to ask these councillors to justify their actions in relation to town staff, we need to ask them how much of our taxes have been wasted by cancelling signed contracts, changing auditors, and other commitments made by the mayor without proper costing. I have been told a dollar figure, and it is significant. How much more of our tax dollars will be squandered?

Don Baxter, P.Eng. Huntsville

Aktif Beamers will be missed

As one of the coaches from Aktif Beamers gymnastics club, I would like to thank all of the kids and parents who made my employment there an amazing experience.

My heart is truly breaking knowing that such a family-oriented place will no longer be. From birthday parties, classes and parent nights to competitions, going to work was always too much fun.

I would also like to thank my co-coaches for the great times and every ounce of support in the last four years. You guys are the best.

Lastly, I hope Huntsville realizes what a wonderful facility and sport Aktif Beamers has provided for the last 12 years. It will be greatly

> Linda Coleman Huntsville

Flowers around town receive two thumbs up from couple

Congratulations to the Huntsville Horticultural Society and town staff for the beautiful flowers which graced our town this summer. The hanging baskets, enjoyed for many years, complimented this year by floral barrels below, added an extra blaze of colour.

Together with the colourful Muskoka chairs and benches, our town had a lovely ambience, which had to impress guests and residents alike. Thank you, folks, for a job well done.

Family members who visited recently

commented on the excellent quality of merchandise at Flotron's. However, their comments regarding our Main Street sidewalk being taken over by a local café were extremely negative. Why would town council even consider approving such a thing? This works well in Kingston where wide sidewalks prevail. It most definitely does not work well in Huntsville.

> **Chesley and Betty Fulton** Huntsville

People of Huntsville need some answers to town hall questions

What happened to the big promise of transparency in government made by Huntsville politicians in the last election? Is it more a reality check than a joke, in the letter to the editor in the Aug. 29 Forester, referring to "Claude and the four bobble heads" - letter headed Give new councilors some time to learn?

What is the reason that the Town's CAO, Walter Schmid is being asked to resign? Apparently Mr. Schmid's role covered 10 years and three councils. Is this another example of backroom, closed-door administration? How much money is involved with this issue regarding legal fees, payment to Schmid for closure, etc.? We, the electorate, have a right to know the reasons behind this issue, the total dollar amount involved, as well as why it is cloaked in a veil of secrecy.

There are many other issues that repeatedly appear in the local newspapers that could be

Democracy is defined as government by the people. Supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. A free system means one that expresses democratic freedoms. An important inclusion is freedom of information.

Are we losing, or have we lost, a basic important democratic right, the one that provides us with freedom of information?

We need answers (or do we need a call for another election?) and not the snow job we are getting.

> **Frances Botham** Huntsville

Public schools encourage tolerance

I have one primary concern, the funding of religious schools. It's a topic being discussed throughout the province and within Muskoka.

As a child I attended a public school system. It was a time when it didn't matter if you were of a different faith or even had one. We weren't consciously aware there were differences.

Reflecting back I realize what I learned as a child was a life-long lesson in tolerance.

To me tolerance means holding on to my own personal belief system and in that process respecting those with different beliefs. What troubles me if religious schools become funded is

As the provincial election quickly approaches where will children learn tolerance when tucked away never having the opportunity to learn how to get along with those from different cultures?

Tolerance is learned in childhood and much more difficult in adulthood.

What happens to those who can't afford to send their children to a religious school? Will they be left with a deteriorating public school system? Funding for these schools will be on us, the taxpayers of Ontario.

Support the public school system instead of "you being in your small corner and me in mine." **Shirley Taylor**

Huntsville

Curfew is an OPP project

Re: This town's youth could get curfew, Huntsville Forester article, Aug. 29.

The article requires one point of clarification.

The opening paragraph, making reference to "the Huntsville OPP is working with Family, Youth and Child Services of Muskoka (FYCSM) to implement a curfew," has given some people in the community the impression that this initiative is a joint Huntsville OPP and FYCSM project. For clarification purposes, this is a Huntsville

OPP project.

Consistent with quotations from Constable Cranney in the article, FYCSM will provide the Huntsville OPP with training on the Child and Family Services Act and work with them, as we do now, when issues of child safety arise

Allan T. Hogan M.S.W. R.S.W **Executive Director** Family, Youth and Child Services

