

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Sharon Bacon

BY PAULA BOON

When Sharon Bacon was four years old, she saw someone playing the harp and thought, "I'd really like to play that."

For the next 20 years, through piano and voice lessons – and a degree in music – the dream continued to grow.

Unfortunately, the Port Sydney woman says, the cost of a pedal harp is roughly equivalent to the down payment on a house.

Then, in the early 80s, she realized that folk harps, which are smaller, were more financially viable, and she started saving for one.

"I knew exactly what I wanted, but it was going to be about \$2,600," she says. "I'd put away the \$50 my grandmother gave me for my birthday, things like that."

However, returning to school for further education depleted the fund.

"I saw my dream fade further and further into the future," says Bacon.

Just when she was beginning to give up hope, she received a gift of \$2,000 from a family member with the instruction to go and buy herself a harp.

"It was completely unexpected. Even now it gives me goose bumps. I just couldn't believe it," she says.

Bacon decided to make the trip from Hamilton to Toronto, hoping to arrange a rent-to-buy option on a harp.

"I had my hand on the handle of the shop door, and suddenly I had this flash of inspiration," she says. Right across the road was the Royal Conservatory of Music, and it occurred to her she should check their buy and sell board for a used instrument.

Sure enough, she found a little blue card there offering her ideal harp for \$2,000.

"For weeks after that every time I sat down and touched this thing I'd be overcome with emotion because I couldn't believe it. This was my heart's desire and I finally had it," Bacon recalls.

Since then, Bacon has played the harp and sung, often accompanied by flautist Sandy Inkster, at countless weddings, churches, women's retreats and other events, including a Massey Hall concert appearance in 2004.

But this is only one side of Bacon's story. In fact, there's something else she feels as strongly about as music: her five children, who she has been homeschooling for the past 10 years.

Bacon, who has both a B.Ed. and M.Ed., says she and her husband Steve got to know quite a few homeschooling families, particularly after they moved to Muskoka in 1989, and what they saw intrigued them.

When her eldest two children finished Grade 1 and junior kindergarten, Bacon decided to make the jump.

"It has enabled us to emphasize the things important to us: family values, Christian values, spending time together as a family and music," she says.

Bacon tailors her approach according to the needs of each individual child. For example, she says her son James, who is dyslexic, would probably have fallen through the cracks of the public system.

And her children don't learn only from her. Their grandfather also tutors them one afternoon each week, and the family is part of two homeschooling co-ops which meet to study things like history, science, and art, and to play sports.

The family's frequent guests have much to teach as well. "We have had people from many parts of the world stay with us," Bacon says. "Everyone has a story to tell, which enriches us."

And, of course, the children all take music lessons.

"As a mother and a musician, seeing the kids growing and developing in their musicality and creativity is wonderful," she says. "It's exciting when they want to do things as a family or one of them gets an idea for a song."

So what does Mom dream of now? In the 80s, Bacon made a CD of vocal music accompanied by harp. She recently acquired a new keyboard and software that will make it possible to do her own arranging on a new recording.

"I'd like to do a family project this time," she says.



Municipal versus provincial responsibilities – the first two candidates weigh in on the issue



Should responsibilities at the municipal level like capital infrastructure (roads, bridges, arenas and water and sewer plants – as well as emergency response services) be taken on provincially? Downloading is putting a lot of strain on the property tax system leaving municipalities no choice but to scramble for grants, implement user fees and increase taxation.

Some argue property taxation is a regressive tax because unlike income tax, it does not address one's ability to pay. What are your thoughts on the issue?

Conservatives promise tax reforms in province of Ontario

BY NORM MILLER

Rural municipalities in Parry Sound-Muskoka, like those across the province, face unique challenges. There are many more kilometres of roads and bridges than population to support all of the infrastructure in our communities. Over the past four years, the provincial/municipal gap has grown. Municipalities pay for more and more provincially mandated programs and consequently taxes continue to rise.

Rising assessment in cottage country has translated into spiraling taxation, squeezing out those property owners on fixed incomes. A John Tory government would cap assessment at five per cent for as long as an individual owns his or her home, including if a property is transferred to a spouse. In addition, we would implement a new reverse onus appeal system so the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) would have to justify an assessment increase, instead of placing the burden of proof on the homeowner.

A Progressive Conservative government will ensure that farmers who are encouraged to have value-added production services are not subject to unfair property tax assessments because of them. Most importantly, we will ensure the recommendations of the Ombudsman are fully implemented or build a new model for property assessment.

In recognition of the burden on municipalities, in 2006 Dalton McGuinty announced a review of the fiscal arrangement between the province and municipalities.



NORM MILLER
CONSERVATIVE PARTY

John Tory has committed to expediting the review so it is completed by Dec. 31, 2007, and will act on the recommendations of the review in time for the 2008 municipal and provincial budgets.

Our party believes that local property taxes should be used principally for local needs, not to pay for provincial programs unfairly imposed on a community. We also believe that funding arrangements should be long-term, multi-year commitments to enable better planning and predictability for communities.

We have committed meaningful relief for municipalities beginning in 2008 and growing through 2011 when every penny of the gas and fuel taxes raised in the province will be spent on transportation projects. Two cents per litre of the gas tax, equaling \$300 million, will go to support roads and bridges in rural and northern municipalities, beginning with an immediate annual increase of \$150 million in 2008. As well, a further \$800 million in gas and fuel tax will go to municipal and regional transit. In doing so, we will fight gridlock and reduce greenhouse gases and fight global warming.

Over the past four years, I have supported municipal efforts to obtain funding through a variety of provincial programs and funds. These programs have been inadequate and haphazard, involving a high degree of chance for the few lucky winners who actually receive funds for projects. Our municipalities need stable, reliable funding to ensure long-range planning to help us building strong communities.

Green Party would invest in energy-efficient infrastructure

BY MATT RICHTER

Municipalities have been faced with a tremendous challenge over the past decade as they have had to bear the responsibility of providing services without the necessary sustainable funding from the province. The long-term solution to enable municipalities to offer services to their residents without having to increase property taxes or user fees is made possible when the Green Party provides the necessary funding. The Green Party approaches this real issue with two real answers: Money for smart growth (the opposite of sprawl) and money for making municipal services as energy-efficient as possible.

To ease public concerns over any increases in property tax, the Green Party would immediately place a moratorium on any increases in assessed market value of all residential properties.

Municipalities would be encouraged to create growth within the town, rather than looking at sprawl as an option. Municipalities that discourage sprawl and build within save money. That is a fact. Towns in Parry Sound, Muskoka, and Almaguin will greatly benefit from an investment in municipal public transit. The Green Party will match federal investments in transit with a baseline contribution of 50 per cent of the total cost, rising to 75 per cent where municipalities have established working policies to encourage smart growth and prevent sprawl. The Green Party would further fund municipalities that establish requirements that all new commercial and housing developments be served by transit.

The Green Party would invest \$16 billion over the next 15 years to provide loan guarantees, grants and tax credits to help municipalities reduce their demand for energy and save money to reinvest in municipal services.

Municipal buildings pay money to heat hot water (even on those warm, muggy days of summer). The temperature on a municipal building (i.e. recreation centre) roof top on a typical sunny day between mid-spring and early autumn reaches 50-60 degrees celcius (in

Fahrenheit, extremely hot). Therefore, the Green Party would implement legislation (with funding) that requires all new construction to have solar water heating enabling municipalities to take advantage of heavily subsidized installation, and recognize immediate and long-term savings.

As we consider the connection between investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency and increased dollars for municipalities to maintain their services without penalizing their residents, we have moved forward to providing a sustainable system. The dilemma facing municipalities is the cost to implement these renewable energy initiatives. The Green Party recognizes this and will create a grant program for municipal building projects to utilize green building technology. Furthermore, it will also fund municipalities to



MATT RICHTER
GREEN PARTY

exempt new and retrofitted net zero energy buildings from municipal development charges, building permit costs and transfer taxes.

The Green Party would double the current funding to municipalities for groundwater studies, technical assessments, and plan developments to cover planning costs. An Ontario-wide standard for sewage treatment needs to be implemented. The Green Party will fund municipalities to make the necessary upgrades to meet the new standards and ensure that municipalities have long-term, stable, and predictable financing options.

The long-term, sustainable real answer for municipalities is to recognize the necessity to invest in renewable energy and energy efficient infrastructure with the assistance of the provincial government. A question now emerges: How can the government assist funding such a huge investment without jeopardizing social programs or running a deficit? The Green Party would eliminate the currently proposed 20 year \$40 to \$60 billion dollar investment in nuclear power and redirect approximately 35 per cent to the municipalities over the next 15 years. For more details on the Green Party platform, please visit www.gpo.ca.



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