

Opinion

MUSKOKA MOSAIC

Introducing Brian Bennett

BY PAULA BOON

Brian Bennett likes to help others.

When he moved to town almost five years ago, he immediately began to look for ways to contribute to the community. An animal-lover, Bennett started by volunteering at the Huntsville Animal Shelter. "I cleaned water dishes, food dishes and litter boxes," he says. "Sometimes I walked dogs."

Two years ago, Bennett was hired by the Seven Main Café to keep the area in front of the business clear of snow in winter and sweep the sidewalk in summer, a job he takes great pride in. "Sometimes I make a wide (hole in the) snowbank. That's good for garbage day and recycling," he says. "I also put out the patio chairs."

Bennett recently began providing the same services for the lawyers' office across the road from the café as well.

Since October, 2007 Bennett has also worked three mornings a week at Harvey's restaurant through Community Living's Supported Employment Program. He does a variety of jobs to help keep the restaurant clean, inside and out.

Born in North Bay in 1963, Bennett attended West-Bay-Field School for the Developmentally Handicapped and was a member of the Sea Cadets for several years. He has fond memories of the time he spent on his grandparents' farm in Commannda, where he helped with gardening, haying, and stacking firewood. His grandfather also took him and his older sister Lisa snowmobiling there in winter. "Good old Albert and Gladys Bennett," Bennett says with a

smile. "Occasionally I miss the old farm."

At age 14, Bennett moved to Halifax with his mother and stepfather. He enjoyed outings, especially to historic forts. "One old fortress I like is the citadel, in Halifax on top of the hill. At 12 p.m. they always fire off a canon," he says.

Two years later, Bennett moved to Barrie, where he stayed for the next 25 years. He moved out of parents' house in 1985 and lived under the supervision of the Barrie Association for the Developmentally Handicapped, doing work placements in an ARC Industry workshop and a Sub-Con Industry workshop.

During his last seven years in Barrie, Bennett worked at Wal-Mart. "That was my first job with the public," he says. "First I used to clean the ladies' stalls, but then I said, 'No way. How about I go outside and collect the carts?'"

Bennett was thriving in Barrie, and the decision to move to Huntsville was a difficult one. "But I really wanted to be closer to my Mom," he says.

And he doesn't regret coming. Bennett has his own apartment downtown and is supported by Community Living Huntsville. "Doug Humphrey is my staff. He checks on me every day," Bennett explains. "Sometimes I give him a little headache, but he's a nice guy."



When he's not working, Bennett likes to watch videos: wrestling, *Xena, Wonder Woman, Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica* – "Not the new ones, the old one," he says.

Bennett is also a fan of animal sanctuaries. "I have visited every animal sanctuary between here and Port Perry," he says. "And one time I went all the way to the lion safari with my sister and mom."

A self-described "history nut," Bennett becomes very animated when he talks about his favourite history shows, like *Battle 360*. "That was about the USS Enterprise, code name Lucky," he says, rattling off the vessel's dimensions and other details. "It was built three days before Pearl Harbour was attacked."

He is also a wealth of information about other military equipment. "Like tanks. They have one weakness: the treads," he says. "Once they go off the track you have to take them off and put them back on. In that time, you're sniper bait."

Bennett likes Huntsville and says he is glad to be living here. "Very nice," he says. "It has nice people, like Ray Porter. He's a nice guy. So's Karen, the bus driver."

When asked what he wants people to know about him, Bennett thinks for a moment, then says, "I'm just a regular person. That's all."

Take steps toward creating a healthier community

BY DR. CHARLES GARDNER

Medical Officer of Health

Whether you live in a city, a suburb or a small rural town, the way your community is designed affects your health. If your built environment (streets, sidewalks, buildings, parks and houses, for example) is poorly designed, it can negatively impact on your level of physical activity, air quality and your safety and wellbeing.

Consider your community. Does it have a park close by, which can help you and your family be active and add to your sense of wellbeing? Do you have sidewalks or bike lanes that make it safe to walk or cycle, which in turn can increase physical activity and reduce obesity? Is there a grocery store in your area that provides access to nutritious, affordable food?

Residential areas located far away from shops, services and schools mean that people have to drive to do their daily business. More driving means more vehicles on the road. This increases the risk of injuries due to motor vehicle collisions and results in increased emissions that contribute to air pollution. And the more time spent driving means

less time to be involved in family, recreation or community activities.

The built environment can also affect your overall feelings of wellbeing and social connectedness. Communities that include playgrounds, that have places for people to meet and that are clean and safe, generally make people feel good about living there. Knowing your neighbours and being involved in community activities can increase your sense of satisfaction and happiness.

Many people wonder what they can do to influence healthy changes in their community. Here are some suggestions:

- Get to know your neighbourhood and the people who live around you;
- Walk or cycle more (or use public transit if it's available) and drive your car less, including to work. Try to live closer to your place of work to minimize your travel and consider other ways of commuting to work, including car pooling;
- Support your local farmers' market and buy locally grown produce at your grocery store;
- Join a local trails association, service club or environmental group that is involved in healthy community initiatives;

- talk to recreation staff about offering programs and facilities in the community that create opportunities to socialize;
- Start a community garden;
- Join your community policing committee to increase safety and residents' peace of mind;
- Plant a tree (or two or three);
- Pick up garbage and recycle;
- Conserve energy;
- Don't idle your vehicle.

You can also speak out for healthy changes in your community by getting involved in the local planning process. Municipalities must consult the public when they review their official plans or make decisions about zoning by-laws and applications for land severance and subdivisions. Take the opportunity to participate in local planning consultations and/or to provide written comment. Your voice is important.

For more information about healthy places, healthy people, visit www.simcoemusokokahealth.org or call Your Health Connection weekdays at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.

LETTERS

McGuinty's stance on absenteeism 'smacks of desperation'

If the provincial government treated jail prisoners the way it is treating its correctional officers, some sharp lawyer would have the government in court for inflicting cruel and unusual punishment.

Premier McGuinty says absenteeism in provincial jails is unacceptable when pitted against the rest of the public service (11.5 days), an average of 22 days a year based on 12-hour shifts or 32 based on eight-hour shifts and he wants something done about it.

The government once tried to publicly embarrass the correctional officers into going to work by publishing the average number of sick days for each jail, rationalized by Norm Sterling as an opportunity for the public to see how their local jails are performing.

The only people who were embarrassed by this transparent ploy were the government and the dunkerhead policy advisors who suggested it to them.

It is easy to see why corrections officers might have more sick time than, say, a stenographer in a high-rise office building.

Even McGuinty acknowledges that correctional officers work in old buildings, do shift work 24/7 and have to deal with prisoners who are, to put it delicately, not always the cream of the crop, if not some of our most notorious.

Even the newest and best-run jails are stressful places to work, and an over-stressed employee is more prone to falling victim to flu bugs, colds and whatever else is being passed around in a community that holds not the healthiest of our society.

Correctional officers agree and advocate management has every right to take action against malingerers and those who take advantage of sick days. So if they have the evidence that employees are abusing the sick time (and they know who they are) they should gather the evidence, suspend them and/or fire them.

Evidently the government is incapable of doing just that, so they have resorted once again to blanket attacks and innuendo to get the job done. Simply put, manag-

ers and corporate corrections will not and/or cannot do the job.

Well, before McGuinty and his cabinet colleagues ride off on their high horses, perhaps they should also publish publicly to the taxpayers of Ontario the number of days the legislature sat these last years and the number of days each cabinet minister, especially Pre-

mier McGuinty, don't bother to show up.

It would be my guess it exceeds 22 days a year on average.

If there exists an attendance issue in the province's jails that needs addressing, then McGuinty should do what good managers do and sit down with the employees and their union and try to find an

answer all can live with instead of dictating with collective bargaining the way it is going to be, which once again smacks of desperation and looks like an attempt to get public opinion to do a job McGuinty and all his cabinet members cannot handle themselves.

Tom Cook
correctional officer

Help find this stolen yellow snowmobile



On the week of Jan. 25 a snowmobile was stolen off a property on Boyer Road in Huntsville.

The owner of the property found the door to his garage broken open and his snowmobile missing. The previous week, the owner had noticed the garage had been broken into, only to find a jerry can of gasoline and snowmobile oil missing. He later recovered these items just down the road in a ditch.

A police report was filed by the owner with regard to the stolen snowmobile. The snowmobile is described as a yellow 1997 Skidoo MXZ 583 with an add-on rear seat, a blue tint stripe across the headlight, large skidoo decal across windshield, missing all idler wheel caps on the track, and registration number 868340 on the hood. Anyone with information leading to the recovery of this snowmobile is asked to call police.

Dominic Chiavalon
Scarborough

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