

# Opinion

## MUSKOKA MOSAIC

### Introducing John Finley

BY PAULA BOON

John Finley's energy and passion extend to everything he does, but it is his family that matters most to him. "That is the essence of what I'm about," he says. "I love having my children and grandchildren around me."

The Town of Huntsville's economic development officer, who was born in Huntsville and married his high school sweetheart Cecilia, says that while two of his "gorgeous daughters" are living in British Columbia, he is glad that his three granddaughters are closer by, where he can see them often. "Having four daughters was amazing," he says, "but now to see them bringing home these little angels – it's even better."

Finley grew up the middle child of three. At Huntsville High School, he says, he specialized in having fun and electronics. Although he had no particular interest in or aptitude for electronics, he chose that path because that's what his friends were doing. Eventually he went to Centennial College and graduated as an electronic technologist. Soon afterward, he and Cecilia were married.

Finley's first job was as a technical

representative for Xerox, fixing and installing fax machines. "It was the worst possible job for me," he said. "Shortly after they found out I couldn't fix things, they offered me a position in sales and marketing, where I just flourished. It was like someone showing me where the tap was."

Over the next few years, Finley moved from place to place working for Xerox, and his family continued to grow. Finally, he had the chance to return to Muskoka as the sales representative for central Ontario. "It allowed me to bring my children to the place I loved," he says.

Then, after 20 years in the private sector, Finley was hired by the Town of Huntsville to run Muskoka Pioneer Village, where members of the family had been volunteering for years. "It was always the unrecognized jewel of Huntsville," he says, "not to mention a political hot potato."

Under Finley's direction, the pioneer village experienced some enormous changes designed to draw more visitors and make

it more financially viable. He developed working relationships with local resorts, updated the education program, used the village to host meetings after hours, and got involved with bus tours.

"Then came the challenge and opportunity of restoring the lost piece of heritage of Huntsville/Lake of Bays known as the Portage Flyer," he says. "It was sitting derelict in St. Thomas, and with the help of the Friends (of the Muskoka Pioneer Village), we were able to purchase it and return it to Huntsville."

Finley saw right away that the steam train was tremendously attractive. He says, "Our long-term plan was to introduce a steam transport element with a ship on Fairy Lake. That needs another champion. Now might be the time with the eyes of the world on us."

Because of Finley's success at raising funds from the government and other sources for the development of the new Muskoka Heritage Place, Finley was asked to become the town's economic development officer

in 2000. His favourite part of the job is working with the town's many talented volunteers. His least favourite? "Politics are a challenge sometimes," he admits.

Finley's enthusiasm is obvious when he talks about future opportunities for Huntsville. "People love Muskoka," he says. "And it's perfect because conferences and events are mostly not time-sensitive, so you can bring them in the shoulder season when things are empty. They get a great deal and you can showcase the community."

Finley is excited about the rejuvenation of the downtown core, including the theatre, renovated town hall with its beautiful square and River Mill Park.

"Box stores being built were the best thing that ever happened to Huntsville because they forced the community to get together and do something," he says. "The vacancy rate on Main Street before that was about 13 per cent. Since the opening of Commerce Park, business has doubled, the vacancy rate is around zero, and the shops are trendy. It's just a great place to be."

Thanks to Charlotte Holland for suggesting that John Finley be profiled.



## LETTERS

### District might be better off without snowmobile trails

Calling the landowners "terrorists" because they close down snowmobile access is one of the most ridiculous statements made by elected officers, and makes me wonder who really is "terrorizing" the Muskokan population.

The use of snowmobile trails by these heavily subsidized snowmobile clubs is a privilege, not a right. Landowners have given thankless unsubsidized access and permission to their land, yet it is a well documented fact that these trails permanently ruin the flora and fauna, terrorize the wildlife, pollute the water, land and air with noxious fumes and irritating noise.

Saying snowmobiling is good for the environment is like saying gasoline is good for the water tables. Where do you think all that exhaust gas actually goes? A snowmobile certainly is useful in a utilitarian way, but recreationally it has become a menace. I live beside a snowmobile trail and definitely feel "terrorized" by snowmobilers, many of whom exceed the speed limit and abandon the trails and trespass on nearby properties, mine included. When they reach the road access their speeds are ridiculous to the point of being dangerous. I've had to jump

into a snow bank to avoid being killed by a snowmobiler who crested a hill in front of me and was going so fast he couldn't control his machine. He neither slowed down nor stopped to see if I was all right. That was back when I used to try to have a nice walk on a sunny winter day out here in the "pristine" country. I stopped also because of the disgusting fumes after a machine passed by, let alone the usual convoy of 10 or more machines.

The air after a day of snowmobile traffic stinks and also a blue cloud of the accumulated fumes is very visible in the air. Nearby neighbours were robbed of valuable equipment by snowmobilers, and when they then decided to close off access to their trails, they were so harassed by snowmobile clubs and business owners they re-opened their trails and gave in to this overpowering "terrorist" type pressure.

There are so many more incidents I could list here of crimes and discourteous behaviour from snowmobilers toward landowners, but my grievance is with a government that wants to call the kettle black.

What so-called planners and developers decided to turn Muskoka into a snowmobile

destination? Where was the "focus" group on that foolish decision? If district council is so concerned about imitating the bylaws of other counties, perhaps it should look to counties in Ontario, where Nordic and downhill skiing is featured and whose resorts and restaurants are filled with sane, healthy individuals with just as much money to spend as snowmobilers.

If we want to promote Muskoka's natural beauty, inviting pollution-based activities here doesn't make sense. Why can't the (unfortunately) inevitable snowmobile trails run parallel to the main corridors like they do on Hwy. 118 West, where we can contain all polluting traffic in the same place instead of crisscrossing the district with these destructive trails?

Why not then convert the snowmobile trails into Nordic skiing, dog sledding, snowshoeing, tobogganing and year-round walking or horseback riding? That would help maintain the health of the environment as well as individuals.

Come on, Muskoka. Let's take the green initiative and return our district to a go-to destination for nature and healthy activity. There are government subsidies available for

these activities and many more employment possibilities.

I applaud the landowners. They have generously opened their land to snowmobiling with no benefit to themselves and now have chosen to close the trails to protest the tree-cutting bylaw and the right to peacefully manage their own forests as they always have.

They've played the one card they have and their protest is peaceful and only disruptive to the snowmobilers and defiantly not a "terrorist" action. I hope we still have a democratic system here. I think the clear cutting, heart breaking development of Mattamy and the so-called "Smart Centres" with no accountability for ugly land destruction, as well as clear cutting shoreline "cottage" development is a catalyst to try and regulate, or rather make money from, landowners who for the most part already are natural experts of forestry management. These property owners shouldn't be the ones to suffer the consequences of the mistakes of blind development where excessive, unregulated snowmobiling appears to rule.

Alison Boyer  
Bracebridge

### Snowmobilers should support landowners

Why there is such a ruckus over the closure of snowmobile trails in the area is really a no-brainer. Why don't shop owners in Baysville and other area business enterprises who value their snowmobiler clientele join out-of-towner sledders and the Muskoka Snowmobile Region District 7 and support the landowners with their grievance over the bylaw law instead of complaining?

Look at it this way. Snowmobilers have been given access to land owned by people who value their properties in this relatively quiet and remote area for its natural beauty, the forest, lakes and many of nature's treasures.

Snowmobilers should perhaps think how lucky they are that landowners have freely allowed them to use their land, so don't bite the hand that feeds you, as someone once said. Perhaps it's time Muskoka Snowmobile Region District 7 and its members educated themselves about Muskoka Landowners Association's (MLO) grievances and lent the MLO their full support with their campaign.

Why don't snowmobilers and the Muskoka Snowmobile Region District 7 consider purchasing property in this region and providing themselves with land over which they can ride to their hearts content, without outside deterrents? Of course, there will be the small matter of taxes to pay, adherence to bylaws and costs of maintenance and upkeep, but that really isn't a problem, as MLO members will testify.

Hugh Reynolds  
Dorset

### Female mentors deserve thanks

March 8 is International Women's Day. It is a special day to celebrate the achievements of women in Ontario and all over the world.

It's a day to reflect on the many successes we've had on the road toward women's equality and prosperity – and on the work that still needs to be done.

Women have made great strides in acting as role models in boardrooms, community centres, academia, and politics.

But we need to do more.

We know that there is injustice when there is a gender wage gap. We know there is inequality when women continue to live with the threat of violence.

Our government is making systemic changes to break down barriers and create opportunity.

Through our Domestic Violence Action Plan, we've created programs aimed at increasing public awareness of woman abuse and improving supports to victims.

Our Neighbours, Friends and Families campaign focuses on recognizing the warning signs of abuse so we all know what to do to help. It is now in over 140 communities across Ontario. And we've launched similar campaigns in francophone and Aboriginal communities.

Our communities need to see strong women in

leadership roles. Women who are making a difference. Women who act as role models for our young people.

Role models make a big difference. Our government launched the Leading Girls and Leading Women/Building Communities awards to celebrate Ontario's women leaders and achievers. I encourage you to contact your local MPP about future nominations.

All of us have women in our lives who have made us who we are – women who have inspired us to do better, to speak out, or to advocate for change.

This International Women's Day, let's celebrate these women.

Take a moment to send a letter to a woman who has made a lasting contribution in your community, or a woman who has touched your life in a special way.

It could be a teacher, a parent, or perhaps it's someone you've never even met but that you have always thought of as a strong leader and mentor. Someone who's made a difference and inspired you to make a difference too.

Let's take this International Women's Day to thank a woman for the lasting contribution she's made.

Happy International Women's Day!

Deb Matthews  
Ontario Minister Responsible for Women's Issues

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