

## Controversy and secrecy surrounds sudden departure of Seat of Wisdom College President

JAMES DI FIORE  
BARRY'S BAY

On August 14 Seat of Wisdom College (SWC) posted an announcement on its website stating: "Dr. Ryan Williams will no longer be continuing as president of Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College."

The announcement did not give a reason for his sudden departure, but subsequent investigation by *The Current*, based on discussions with sources who say they are familiar with the events, has revealed that he was dismissed.

During the weeks prior to that announcement, *The Current* had been approached by individuals who volunteered information concerning allegations about Dr. Williams' conduct. The information was provided on the understanding that *The Current* would not reveal their identities, one of the sources referring to a "culture of fear" prevailing in the college. Information provided by these sources included allegations that there had been several accusations of "abuse" and "harassment" levelled against Dr. Williams.

Upon seeing SWC's announcement of Dr. Williams' departure, in light of the information that had been previously provided to *The Current*, on August 18 a call was placed to Dr. Christine Schintgen, who has been appointed Interim President while a search for a new president is underway. *The Current* asked her to comment on the reasons for Dr. Williams' sudden departure, advising her of the information that *The Current* had received concerning his conduct. Dr. Schintgen replied, "I cannot comment on that," but suggested that *The Current* contact Richard Sauro who is Chairman of the SWC Board. Despite attempts to do so, including leaving messages for him to contact *The Cur-*



Above: Aerial photo SWC Veritas. BELOW: Dr. Ryan Williams.

*rent*, he has not yet responded.

*The Current* has been shown an email circulated to alumni on August 19. It said, "We respectfully request that alumni refrain from speculating as to the reasons for Dr. Williams's departure so as to avoid the spreading of baseless and harmful rumours. We regret that we are not able to share more information at this time. We urge that people stop spreading rumours, out of respect for the reputations of both Dr. Williams and the college."

*The Current* also reached out to Dr. Williams seeking his comments on the reasons for his departure and the allegations made to *The Current* about his

conduct. When this reporter first contacted him, he expressed a willingness to give his side of the story, but when contacted subsequently to provide him that opportunity he stated that he had since been advised by his lawyer not to do so.

Dr. Williams was appointed President of SWC in July 2019 and in September 2019 he was invested as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre—a medieval Roman Catholic Order of chivalry that, like the Knights of Malta, answers only to the Holy See. He and his family were planning on a permanent move as they had recently bought land in Killaloe and had plans to build a new home.

# Breakfast is back at the Barry's Bay Legion

DANIELLE PAUL  
BARRY'S BAY

As the province reopens, community events gradually return. One of the first to do so was the Barry's Bay Legion Branch 406 monthly all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast. Under the guidance of the Renfrew County and District Health Unit, the Legion held its first breakfast since last winter on Sunday August 16, with the next one scheduled for Sunday September 20.

Differences were visible: guests provided contact information upon arrival and were asked to wear masks and practise physical distancing. Masked Legion volunteers circulated to sanitize surfaces. But there was no difference in the great tasting food for the "Most Important Meal of the Day" thanks to the work of many behind-the-scenes volunteers.

Branch 406 reopened its Patio and Club Room earlier this summer and cooked up a family-friendly Canada Day Barbecue. A free barbecue is planning during Labour Day Weekend. While indoor activities such as card games remain pending, the Branch is delighted that the newly-formed Barry's Bay Horseshoe League regularly uses the



The Zasowski, Ostapowicz and Lepine families at the Legion breakfast, including youngest members Emilia (two years old, being held) and Laura (seated).

Legion pits, both for weekly practices and for tournaments. The next tournament will take place on September 12.

Branch 406 President Heather

Poliquin points out that membership in the Legion is open to all, and they appreciate your support in this difficult year especially.

## July record-setting home sales — Valley broker says, “It’s crazy here!”

ROGER PAUL  
MADAWASKA VALLEY

Figures just released by the Renfrew County Real Estate Board (RCREB) show that home sales in the County continue to surge while at the same time setting a new record for the average price.

Residential sales activity recorded in Renfrew County totalled 278 units in July. This was a large increase of 36.3 percent from July 2019. It was also a new sales record for the month of July, and it also resulted in being the first time in the history of the month that sales have surpassed 250 units.

The average price of homes sold in the County in July 2020 was a record \$309,613—a rise of 20.6 percent from July 2019.

The Current contacted local broker Cathy Pitts who commented, “It’s crazy here! All real estate professionals are run off our feet. Not enough properties, ready buyers! Not enough hours in the day! Since September 2018 there have been three increases in market value: 10 percent, 10 percent, and 15 percent respectively.”

Pitts’ comment about there not being enough properties is borne out by additional statistics provided by RCREB who advised that the months of inventory numbered 1.3 at the end of July 2020, down from the 3.5 months recorded at the end of July 2019, and below the long run average of 6.5 months for this time of year. The number of months of inventory is the number of months it would take to sell current inventories at the current rate of sales activity.



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# Story Walk wraps up busy summer for Library

DANIELLE PAUL  
MADAWASKA VALLEY

When Madawaska Valley Public Library CEO Karen Filipkowski suggested to summer program coordinator Julia Beggs that it might be fun to try a Story Walk, she wasn't sure how Beggs would approach the project but told *The Current* she was delighted with the successful result. Filipkowski said, "Julia just ran with it. She came up with the idea of approaching local student/author Tasha Rankin and it worked out really well."

A StoryWalk station described the author: "Tasha Rankin is a Grade 9 student at MVDHS. She wrote "Dapper's Muddy Dilemma" when she was in Grade 7. Tasha loves writing because she gets to use her markers and it makes children happy when they read her books. When Tasha isn't writing, you can find her feeding her chickens, cows and looking for frogs under her apple tree."

Beggs told *The Current* that they were pretty excited when Tasha agreed that they could use her story, "Dapper's Muddy Dilemma" for the subject of the Story Walk. Beggs used Tasha's illustrations for each of the interaction stations on the Story Walk, so children could meet each animal character in turn. The children could read a part of the story and also act it out for themselves.

Tasha's story explains how some farm animals get into a muddy muddle and how they manage to get out of their messy state. Story stations included washing off animal cut-outs with squirt guns and blowing bubbles. Filipkowski said about 35 children enjoyed the walk, despite a drizzly grey start to the day. Participants also entered their names in a free prize draw.

*The Current* arrived in time to record Tasha's reaction to how her story was portrayed. She introduced us to Jasmine Owl, one of her characters, and used a water gun and bubble blower to demonstrate how the animals in her story could be cleaned off. Tasha said she was pleased to see how her story was brought to life through a StoryWalk for children.



Student/author Tasha Rankin (r) with help from mom Ann Burkart at a story station.

The Story Walk was just one of several summer programs developed by Beggs for the Library. During eight weeks, Beggs developed and made the hugely-popular weekly Free Craft Kits—Filipkowski said 1,175 in total were given out. In a typical summer due to the very restricted space in the library, usually only about 200 crafts are made by children. Beggs said they missed the in-person programs a lot: "It's a big part of our summer." As well, library staff learned they had more audiences for the Craft Kit program. In addition to parents picking up kits for their children, they realized that case workers from Madawaska Valley Association for Community Living and support workers for housebound seniors also used the kits with their clients.





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## OPINION

# A gentle reminder of lake etiquette

WENDY WOLAK  
MADAWASKA VALLEY

As the last long weekend of the summer approaches, many of us will flock to a lakeside retreat to embrace the best of what the remaining days of summer offers. COVID-19 has created an especially difficult and challenging year for us all to find enjoyment within the restrictions of social distancing and self-isolation from family and friends, especially at the lake.

But as we find ways to unwind this Labour Day Weekend, please consider the points in this gentle reminder as a means to maintain a harmonious relationship with your lakeside neigh-



Cabin, Ketha Newman, artist.

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bours—and your lake—for continued enjoyment by all in coming years.

## WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER... TO ENJOY

**NOISE:** Water is a great carrier of sound. So any noise made, including conversations, can be heard from a distance. Consider waiting until after 9 a.m. to use those power tools, machines and lawn mowers.

**MUSIC:** Remember not everyone shares your taste in music and some folks seek peace and tranquility. So kindly please keep the volume down when playing your tunes and remember water carries sound.

**FIRE BANS:** This is serious. Please refrain from lighting campfires and using fireworks during a fire ban. Lighting fires during dry conditions could have a disastrous and deadly outcome for the Valley. If in doubt about our fire status, check the Madawaska Valley website madawaskavalley.ca

**FIREWORKS:** Please be considerate of

your neighbours when choosing and using fireworks. The explosive noise created can disturb folks who have to get up early to work, frighten pets, babies, or cause distress and panic in wildlife.

**OUTDOOR LIGHTING:** By reducing the outdoor wattage, we all can enjoy the starry skies, an opportunity denied by many who travel here from urban areas. The illumination has the potential to disrupt not only your neighbor's sleep but also the habits of nocturnal wildlife. Prey that rely on the cover of darkness will become vulnerable to predators.

## SHOW YOUR LAKE SOME LOVE

**SHORELINE:** Show love for your lake by naturalizing your shoreline using a vegetative buffer to prevent toxins from entering our lakes and diminishing water quality. A vegetative buffer will also enhance natural habitats and biodiversity.

**SAFE BOATING:** When using your personal watercraft, please keep your

speed down when near shore as the large wake created damages personal property and accelerates erosion of the shoreline. The larger the wake, the more destructive it can be especially in shallower waters. Loons and other birds that nest along the shore can negatively be impacted. The wake can drown nests and their young especially during the month of May and June. Prop wash can churn up sediments in shallow water which releases dormant nutrients that promote weed growth and algal blooms. (FOCA)

As a reminder, the legal speed for all vessels near shore must be less than 10 km/hr and boats must travel at least 30 m from shore. If wakeboarding, please keep a minimum of 100 m from shore so that the waves created will have time to dissipate before reaching land.

**FERTILIZERS:** Thinking about that fall application of fertilizer for your lawn? Resist the temptation. Keep fertilizer use away from our lakes. The nutrients in fertilizers will only promote weed and algal growth if heavy rain causes run off into our lakes.

**SEPTIC:** Keep your septic in good working order as effluent from a leaky septic will make its way into the lake affecting water quality. Remember what goes in must come out (FOCA). So if your septic tank is over or heavily used, untreated wastewater escapes and makes its way into the lake via runoff or seeping into the groundwater. Additional signs that your septic is failing include: sewage backup, water from sinks, etc. draining slowly, bubbling sounds in plumbing, and bad odour or standing water around the drainfield. Use only biodegradable cleaning products when draining into your septic system.

**GARBAGE OR LITTER:** Continue taking the time to dispose of your garbage and recycling at our Township landfill or transfer sites. Finding garbage in our lakes or roadside ditches is heartbreaking. It can lead to ground and water contamination and disease or death for our local wildlife.

**SOAPY PRODUCTS:** Bathing, shampooing or laundering in our lakes contributes to the degradation of poor water quality by adding phosphates and other unwanted contaminants. And let's not forget microbeads! Keep personal hygiene and laundering habits indoors with biodegradable products that are drained into the septic.

I know that the majority of you are already practising good lake etiquette. But from time to time as we get caught up in the moment, we might benefit from a reminder now and then.

Enjoy your final days of summer and may they be stress free. Continue being safe from COVID-19, being a great neighbour to all and living in harmony with our surrounding environment. As we all come together this holiday weekend, remember we all share that one common interest... we love being at the lake!

*About the author: Wendy Wolak is currently the Vice President of the Carson Trout Lepine and Greenan Lakes Association. This article expresses the author's own personal views.*

## VALLEY HERITAGE

### Herron's General Store

THE CURRENT  
BARRY'S BAY

In this 1959 photo taken on Dunn Street in Barry's Bay, Herron's General Store is visible across the road behind the three girls in the foreground. Connie Schweig provided information about the picture. Her pandemic project included organizing family photos, and she came across this one taken by her late sister, Joyce Lorbetskie. Pictured from left: Connie herself, Joyce's best friend Dolores Stoppa and her little sister, Connie Stoppa.

At that time the Lorbetskie family lived on Dunn Street across from Herron's store and Connie says it has not changed since 1959. She said, "When we came home from school we always made an excuse to drop in there because Julian, the owner (Michael's dad) always gave us candy. In those days Dunn Street was the 'Girls' Street' and Bay Street was the 'Boys' Street.'" When the photo was taken Connie was roughly six years old in her first year of school, so she has few memories of living there as her family later moved to Conway Street. But she remembers this picture because her sister told her about it. Connie believes that Dolores and Connie Stoppa later moved to the Kitchener area.

Thanks to Mickey Herron for alerting us to this photo,



and to Connie Schweig for providing the background and allowing us to publish it.

**NOTE:** If you are interested in having a picture and story featured in *The Madawaska Valley Current*, please submit the information to Bob Corrigan at [madvalleycurrent@gmail.com](mailto:madvalleycurrent@gmail.com) (subject Heritage Photos) or mail your photo to Bob c/o *The Current* at PO Box 1097, Barry's Bay K0J 1B0 (originals will be returned).

# An outsider's perspective of lake living

ADELLE PURDHAM  
MADAWASKA VALLEY

Where I come from, on the other side of Toronto, we are landlocked. Rivers flow through, but nothing stays. Even the people get in their cars by day, drive into the city to work, and return by night. A steady flow of traffic. Where I come from, humanity dominates.

We moved to a waterfront property in Barry's Bay for the summer and now my life is all reflections, stillness, pools of glass. Animal sounds. The dark silhouette of a mountain undulating in pristine water. In the Madawaska Valley, nature abounds.

I swat the bug on my leg and toss it into the lake. Seconds later, a fish bobs up to gulp it down. That trick never gets old.

In June, when we arrived, the blackflies feasted behind the ears of my children, leaving their scars; then came the deerflies and the horseflies, which soon thinned out, and as I write this, sitting on the end of my dock, the mosquitos are like the hummingbirds I often see sucking at the sweet nectar of my flesh. But, without the bugs, what would the birds and the spiders and the fish eat? And without the fish, how would we tell stories about the fish that grow bigger each year?

This summer, it's the little fish that helped reel in the big fish we netted; next summer, it's the big fish that caught the whale. We're learning how to be fisherfolk (with a licence); how to be storytellers around the campfire (one hour before sunset until one hour before sunrise, when the burn ban is not in effect!), and to only take what we need, which isn't much.

My youngest daughter has fallen in love with catching toads in our marsh –

"I need something to put these in!" she exclaims, fistling three wiggling toads cupped in her meaty hands—while my favourite visitors are the loons with their eerie majestic calls. The day we moved in, a pair sat perched on the edge of our dock—the welcoming committee, I suppose.

Now it's August, and the wolves have returned from making their dens; their



PHOTO: ADELLE PURDHAM

howls echo across the lake and never cease to thrill. We are borderline in cougar-country – there was a sighting of one reported on our road. Then there's the busy bears: the cub that vandalized our neighbour's shed, and those pedestrian bears I read about opening people's car doors (don't forget to lock!) And the deer. How commonplace the deer must become for those who live here, such are their numbers, but not so for the city dweller. A few pranced by right in front of me on my morning stroll with the dog and I was entranced. The deer are as magical as the forests they inhabit. The forests around here, with their draping hemlock, snow-white birch; red, white and jack pines painted by that famous group.

Algonquin Provincial Park is not far, and my goodness—how many folks are lucky enough to say that? There are twenty plus well-marked day use trails there—a hiker's dream—not to mention Barry's Bay has its own trail system nearby, the Thomas P. Murray Recreational Trails, good old Tom and his lookout, halfway to Combermere. Along those paths is as fine a place as any to be, by foot or on an ATV.

And the people, there are people

here, though many of them are tucked away. They're as kind as they are tough. I haven't exactly experienced that toughness but to make it through the winter here—I see those stacks of wood—and I can imagine the bitter cold, the piles of snow. The people here are obviously made of granite (just look at the landscape), with hearts of gold. I have yet to ask someone for help and not receive two hands.

On my bike rides, more than anything, I have felt the hilly terrain. What goes down, must... go... up. But every time I make that climb, the view here, oh the view. Nothing beats it.

Except perhaps the sun setting over the water nestled into white pillows of fluffy clouds atop the pink bed of the sky. And the replication of that heavenly slumber scene reflected on the water's surface. Symmetrical, divine.

When I leave Barry's Bay at the end of the summer, I'll remember the toads in my four-year-old's hands, the deer stopping by to say hello, the warm hearts of those we met, the echo of the wolves' howls to one another across the lake and I'll have to ask myself—was it all a dream? The loon's call will carry me back.

# OPP investigate racist attack on elderly Pembroke woman at her home

THE CURRENT  
PEMBROKE

The Upper Ottawa Valley Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) seeks the public's help in investigating a serious assault and harassment on an 80-year-old resident of Pembroke that occurred on August 20, 2020. The OPP bulletin states: On the evening of August 20, 2020 OPP officers responded to a report that an elderly woman had been hit in the head with a rock in the Isabella Street and Rotary Park area in Pembroke. The victim was treated in hospital and later released.

The investigation has revealed that the assault was part of ongoing harassment. A group of young people had been committing vandalism to the victim's home and yelling racial comments.

The four individuals are described as 15 to 17 years of age. At the time of the assault they were wearing shorts and baseball caps. One was wearing a red shirt. They travel on bicycles.

Investigators would like to hear from anyone in the Isabella Street area, who has home surveillance video, specifically from August 20 and 22.

Anyone who can assist this investigation should contact the Upper Ottawa Valley OPP at 1-888-310-1122. Should you wish to remain anonymous, you may call Crime Stoppers Pembroke/Renfrew County at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), where you may be eligible to receive a cash reward of up to \$2,000. All tips are anonymous and you will not have to attend court.

## VICTIM'S GRANDDAUGHTER RESPONDS TO ATTACK

Prior to receiving the above OPP Bulletin, *The Current* had been in contact with Cindy Tran, granddaughter of the victim. Tran, a Vietnamese Canadian studying for her Master's in Journalism at Carleton University, wrote a heartfelt piece on her blog about the incident and the devastating impact of this type of behaviour on victims and their families.

In it, she describes how the youths banged on the door until it was opened by her grandmother, who was home alone. Although her grandmother does not speak English, she recognized the swear words shouted at her in a stream of hateful abuse while the teenagers attacked her and threw eggs at the house. Tran also states the harassment has been repeated—twice—since the

original attack. In her article, she says, "It's shocking that a town that marches for Black Lives Matter still breeds hate toward people of colour."

Tran told *The Current* the police confirmed the attack was racially motivated but were unable to determine if it was related to COVID-19. Tran's article "Racism and Discrimination" is at [kcindytran.com](http://kcindytran.com).

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Check online for COVID-19 related announcements and all the need-to-know information for Valley residents at: [madvalleycurrent.com](http://madvalleycurrent.com)

## PORCH VIEWS

# Good fences make good neighbours



MARK WOERMKE  
BARRY'S BAY

We are all familiar with the phrase “unprecedented times” used in reference to the social, economic and lifestyle changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has generated. The most unprecedented thing in my world since March’s lockdown, however, wasn’t COVID-19-related at all. It was the appearance, about a month ago, of a “For Sale” on the property of my long-time neighbour Conrad Etmanskie.

I was truly saddened by Connie’s death, even if I wasn’t entirely surprised. You see, I had noticed some changes in the previous year. He had slowed down and he had given up his truck. I didn’t know exactly why, but the disappearance of his vehicle was noteworthy since Connie used to drive everywhere even 50 metres down the street to visit his cousin, the late Bob Kulas.

Our last conversation, a week before he died, was about my new car. I was shovelling snow and he shouted to me from his verandah. He thought the car was pretty small given all the driving I do and he didn’t think it would hold-up very well in a collision with a deer (I totalled my vehicle in that manner a few months earlier). “I can’t even see it over the snow banks,” he laughed. Since then, there have been many occasions when I have been working in the yard or garden and I have thought of him and would have welcomed a chat over the fence. Over the years we had some great conversations standing on our respective sides of the chain-link.

## CONNIE PASSED ON LOCAL GARDEN WISDOM

Our gardens were the usual conversation-starters. I would hear “Gidday” and turn to see Connie standing by the fence. “Your garlic is coming along pretty good,” would start a ten or fifteen-minute conversation that could range from that crop, to the “arseholes”



The Etmanskie boys carry their infant brother Anthony to his funeral in 1947.

PHOTO: WOERMKE COLLECTION.

driving around town without mufflers, or the latest local scandal. He was quiet, but he always spoke his mind with a unique vocabulary of expletives. (I have included some of the milder ones.)

Even though it got smaller every year, Connie’s vegetable garden was impressive. He enjoyed working in it and sharing his harvests with his family. He usually had his garden in earlier than mine, so he would share green onions with me before mine were ready. I gave him rhubarb in return and his niece Sharon baked him pies.

My grandparents had been avid gardeners, but after their deaths, during my father’s tenure, the yard had become a lawn-mower’s paradise—a rectangle of green devoid of trees, shrubs, vegetables or flowers. When I first started to re-cultivate the property in 2000, Connie watched with interest. He offered technical advice and gave me some milk crates to shield my first tomato seedlings from the hot sun. Because he always had his garden in first, I watched and followed his cycle of preparation, planting, harvesting and clean-up. He also

passed on some local garden wisdom to me: “Plant your peas before the ice is off the lake,” and “Put wood ashes on your onions to prevent worms.” He also told me if I planted my potatoes—he recommended Kennebec—on Victoria Day, I would have new potatoes by time of the pilgrimage to Cormac.

A cat can make a mess of a well-prepared and freshly-seeded bed of carrots, so we often complained and strategized about that. This spring, I would have been keen to show Connie the fresh coyote droppings that appeared daily along a pathway running the length of our properties. That coincided with the cats’ disappearance. However, the wild canine didn’t deter the grackles—Connie called them “those goddamn blackbirds”—that harassed the robins, pulled up our seedlings and made a messy and noisy nuisance of themselves.

This spring I declared war. Discovering three nests high in my spruce trees, I assembled the parts of two roof rakes and attacked. Within seconds, I was surrounded by at least twenty angry, swooping birds. I dropped my weapon and high-tailed it to the summer kitchen. They were less defensive on my second and third forays and have since relocated. Had he been out in the garden or leaning on a fence post, I know Connie would have gotten a big kick out of that ridiculous scene.

I am not so naïve to think that Connie approved of all my gardening decisions. He laughed at my inability to control potato bugs by handpicking them. He sprayed his. If he couldn’t eat it, he didn’t grow it, but he never disparaged my evolving “English garden” with its winding paths and fieldstone borders. He actually gave me a bunch of stones once, although our mutual friend, Joe Matusheski, tells me Connie couldn’t understand why I wanted “all those frigging stones.” Several years ago, when my garden became neglected, overgrown and unruly, Connie never voiced a complaint, but when I started to get the garden back on track last fall, he was very encouraging. The past five months have given me ample oppor-



**TOP:** Conrad and his mother Bella. If you look carefully, you can see the jagged edge of the roof of the old summer kitchen in the background. It was removed from the main structure when the Etmanskie house was moved to allow for improvements to Highway 62 in 1962. **BOTTOM:** Connie and his father Pete at a fire tower when Pete worked for the Department of Lands and Forests. PHOTOS: MARY GOLKA.

tunity to re-design and rehabilitate it. I even purchased a load of fieldstone to finish the borders. I wish Connie could see it now.

#### SEVENTY-SIX YEARS

I suppose my city friends would say "Neighbours come and neighbours go." That hasn't been my experience in the village of Barry's Bay, and it may not be the experience of my rural and small-town readers. While the property to one side of me has changed hands eight times in my lifetime, the Etmanskie land which abuts mine on two sides has been occupied by four generations of that family since 1904. The property directly across the street has been oc-

cupied by Hildebrandt descendants since 1901. I'm a newcomer. My grandparents bought this place in 1944.

The first people to welcome them were Connie's parents, Pete and Bella Etmanskie. Bella and my grandmother soon became close friends and in the seventy-six years that have passed, their children and grandchildren have remained friendly neighbours.

#### THE "NEIGHBOUR GATE"

When my Grandpa Woermke said, "Good fences make good neighbours," I doubt he imagined the fortress-like privacy fences that have appeared around town. He was referring to the livestock, decorative-wire or chain-link fences



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Body Braid is looking for a dedicated quick-learner to assist the inventor in Killaloe to develop an online store. Highly flexible and creative position starting part-time with huge potential for growth as the business grows. Attitude and personal skills more important than experience. Requirements: excellent personal and written communication skills, resourcefulness, humour. Familiarity with social media a key asset. Apply by sending a letter of interest to [blair@bodybraid.com](mailto:blair@bodybraid.com). Resumé optional.



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that were ubiquitous in the Bay back then. The posts and chain-link that currently demarcate the Woermke-Etmanskie line were installed and stretched by my father, Connie and his brother Howard in the late 1970s or early 80s. It is still solid because the posts are old creosote poles my dad was able to obtain through some railroad connection. It is a great fence, but its construction eliminated the “neighbour’s gate” that formerly linked our two properties.

That gate saw a lot of traffic. Much of it involved eggs and bread travelling from one kitchen door to the other. My grandma, who raised laying hens, kept Bella in eggs in exchange for loaves of her excellent homemade bread. Bella and Pete’s daughter, Mary Golka remembers passing through that gate with bread or with her sister Isabelle to play my grandmother’s piano when they were children. When I was a boy, I ran through it with my new puppy in a water pail to show him to Bella. Sometimes, on long, hot summer evenings, my parents and I would walk over to visit Pete and Bella on their old-fashioned swing.

Not all of the traffic was happy. In 1947 when Bella and Pete’s infant son died, food was sent and my grandparents passed through the gate to pay their respects. In 1970, when Grandma collapsed, Grandpa ran for Bella. She was with Grandma when she died.

There were funny moments in our neighbour-lives too, like the night the Etmanskies mistook my grandparents for chicken rustlers. Grandma and Grandpa had returned late from a family visit to Golden Lake and were clipping the wings of some pullets they had picked up, when Pete and the boys arrived with a rifle. Another time, my grandfather got “feeling good” at Leo and Irene’s wedding and fell while dancing the polka with Mrs. “Bull” Burchat. And then there was the year of the poor harvest – the year Bella took my grandma’s seeds to church for a blessing. Only a few seeds germinated. My grandfather laughed, “What else could Protestants expect?”

I witnessed a humorous incident between Howard and my dad. Howard, who was well-known for his short-fuse was installing storm windows on the second storey. When one didn’t fit, he



**Conrad Etmanskie on his First Communion day.** PHOTO: MARY GOLKA.

turned it one way and then another without success. “Howard,” my father shouted from the verandah, “I think you have the wrong window.” Howard practically jumped off the ladder muttering something about “friggin’ square-heads” and stormed away. My dad who knew Howard was good-natured, as well as hotheaded, thought

that was hilarious. A number of years later, when I was in a cribbage tournament at the Legion, Howard bought me a beer. “You people are the best god-damned neighbours anyone could ever have,” he said. I said the same and we clinked our glasses.

#### **THE BEST GODDAMNED NEIGHBOURS**

Pete, Bella, Conrad and Howard and the Etmanskies family were great neighbours. We rarely visited beyond the fence or kitchen door and we didn’t have dinner parties or barbecues. We respected each other’s privacy yet kept an eye on each other and on each other’s properties. To a respectful degree, we shared in each other’s joys and sorrows for over three-quarters of a century. Connie’s death and the sale of his home signify the end of that era in my life and have given me an opportunity to reminisce and reflect on the nature of neighbour-relationships. I wonder what kinds of chats, if any, I will have over the fence with the new neighbours.

Now, back to work. I have to get those “friggin stones” off the driveway.

## **House, vehicles destroyed in Combermere blaze**

THE CURRENT  
COMBERMERE

Twenty-eight fire fighters from both Madawaska Valley fire halls responded to a structure, vehicle and tractor fire on Perrier Road, Combermere on Saturday August 22 at 12:24 p.m. MV Fire Department’s response involved two pumper trucks, two tankers and one rescue truck. Large black plumes of smoke billowing into the sky were visible to fire fighters leaving both halls as they responded.

Madawaska Valley Fire Chief Corwin Quade said the fire appears to have started in the car parked beside the house, then spread to the home and the tractor that was parked near the car. The total estimated loss caused by the fire is \$320,000. He said fire investigation is ongoing, and is not deemed suspicious.

The department was met with multiple hazards at the scene and Quade said, “I am so proud of the Madawaska Valley Fire Fighters working that hard; they are



a great team of men and women.”

Quade gave credit to the many players who responded to the emergency. The Renfrew County Paramedics were on the scene for hours to assess the fire fighters’ vital signs. Hydro One personnel were there to disconnect the power going into the house; the OPP handled traffic control; and Madawaska Valley Operations staff closed the road to allow easy access for all necessary emergency vehicles. The Fire Chief said, “I cannot thank everyone enough for all the help on this incident, it is great to see how everyone works so well together.”

# Creative photography project honours seniors



PHOTO: MAUREEN MACMILLAN, GAL CAPONE PHOTOGRAPHY

**ANYA GANSTERER  
KILLALOE**

Ottawa Valley Creative Arts Open Studio (OV-CAOS) and our community partners are working with seniors to honour their lives and contributions to our community. We are doing this by collecting stories and taking photographic portraits of up to fifty seniors. The portraits are taken in a location chosen by the participants. The stories and portraits will be exhibited publicly at the end of the project and will also be turned into a printed book.

We are challenging existing stereotypes and preconceptions by creating a senior-centred art exhibition and publication where people are presented to the public in a respectful, professional and ultimately beautiful way. The project will support seniors to explore creative expression on their own or within a group setting. Through the process the participants will be empowered to show the world who they are and have centre stage.

This project is for people aged 65 and over. All are welcome and we look forward to sharing the full diversity of our communities here in the Upper Ottawa Valley. If it is safe to do so, the general community will be invited to attend an opening reception of the photographic exhibit.

Project coordinators: This project is brought to you by Ottawa Valley Community Arts. Andrew Trull and Anya Gansterer, Artistic Directors and

Project Co-ordinators; Maureen MacMillan, Portrait Photographer; Kathy Blomquist, Seniors Support Consultant

Community Partners: Community Resource Centre; Jennifer Bennett Pond, CRC Senior Active Living Centre; Barry's Bay and Area Senior Citizens Home Support Services.

This project is funded by New Horizons For Seniors.

If you're interested in participating in this project, please contact Anya Gansterer at 613-633-1236 or email: [anya@ov-caos.org](mailto:anya@ov-caos.org)

The Madawaska Valley

# Current

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**BARRY'S BAY Legion**

**OPEN HORSESHOE TOURNAMENT**  
Barry's Bay Horseshoe League  
SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 12  
Register at the pits from 9 am, \$10  
Play starts at 10 am  
Legion lunch available.  
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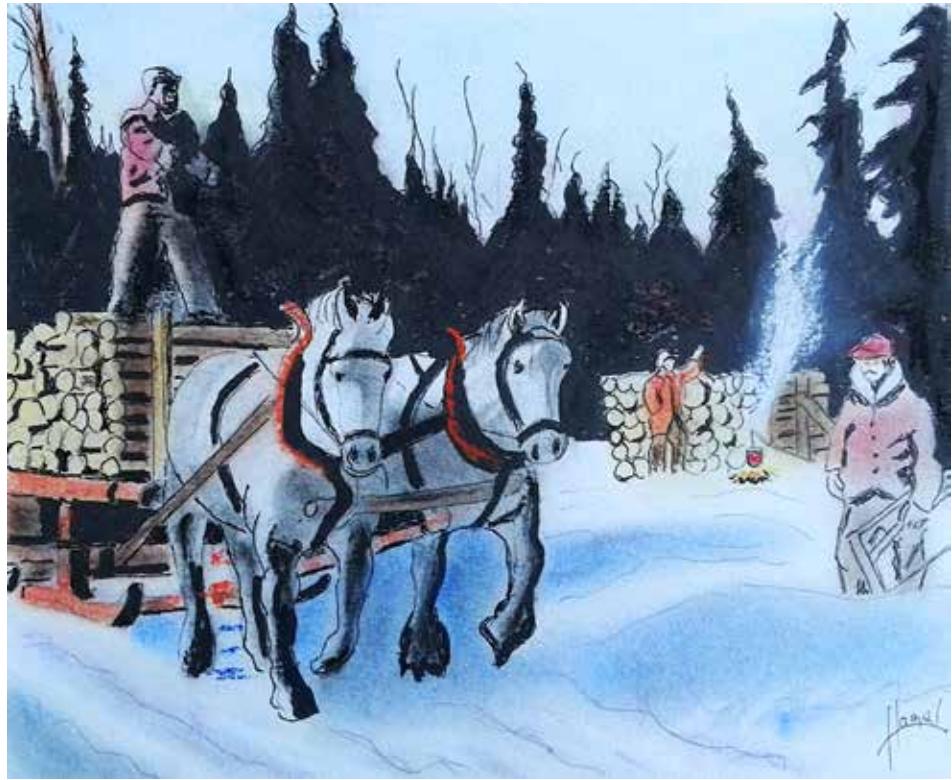
# Former Bay resident and railroader turned artist

DANIELLE PAUL  
BARRY'S BAY

A reader from North Bay, Peter Hamel, contacted The Current to say he had many fond memories of Barry's Bay. Upon hearing his name, this reporter immediately asked if he was "related to Joe Raymond Hamel who (I believe) was telegraph operator at the Barry's Bay station in 1952." That hunch proved correct, as Hamel replied that Ray was his brother.

Hamel comes from a long line of railroaders and told us he worked for 35 years as a telegrapher for the Ontario Northland Railway. As telegrapher it was his job to receive and relay train orders and other information. He told a reporter from the North Bay Nugget that "all the boys learned Morse code. And when the time came to get a job, working for the railroad seemed only natural."

A little research reveals that the Hamel Family were inducted into the Canadian Railway Hall of Fame in 2019 in the Rail Heroes category. A media release dated December 19, 2019 states, "Four generations of Hameles have contributed a total of 570 years of cumulative service to the Grand Trunk, CN, CP, and Ontario Northland railways. Third-generationer J.G. Hamel is credited with saving the lives of 150 people aboard a disabled passenger train by alerting an oncoming freight train. Three of his brethren—James, Steve, and Perry Hamel—continue to serve Canadians today as CN employees."



Logging in the bush, sketch by Peter Hamel

Hamel said, "I started drawing at the age of 12. I took a commercial art course in 1964. I retired from the railroad in 1990 and have been drawing and painting ever since."

Telling us he is "an ex- Barry's Bay resident with wonderful memories of the Bay," Hamel sent us this drawing, saying he thought it might bring back some memories for the "old timers" in the area.

He uses pen and ink, wash and gouache, pencil, charcoal and acrylic for his art work. He says, "Then a little bit of imagination and choose a subject, then check my files or the library. Then I choose the medium, colour or black and white. Then I go to work." Of the finished product, Hamel says, "If I am successful that night I'll go outside, look up at the dark sky and wink at the best artist of us all and say *Thank You.*"

## Back to school (or not) — the student's view

HAYDEN SMITH | BARRY'S BAY

I am a grade nine student at Madawaska Valley District High School. I will be going to school physically in September and I'm fairly sure lots of the kids around here will also. There is no way I would miss out on the opportunity to see my friends and have the routine of school as I am very routine-oriented.

I usually am not the guy who really wants to go back to school. However, this year is different because school essentially stopped at March Break for

quite a while before online learning started. Therefore, we haven't been to real school since March 16.

The quarantine was fun for a couple of months. I have always loved summer break; however, this break just went on a bit too long. I really hoped we would be able to go back to school as eventually the pandemic got boring and I just wanted to actually see my friends and BE WITH PEOPLE! As the summer went on I was able to hang out with my friends a bit and my cousin came over for a week so I did get to

be with people somewhat. However, I still can't wait to go back to school.

I understand that some people (or their parents) are afraid to physically go to school, which is understandable because COVID is still around. Also if they are little kids, they won't be wearing masks as it would be hard to physically distance them. However, older kids can wear masks and understand the need to physically distance. Also, the staff will be doing everything they can to create a safe and sanitized environment. (*Abridged for print*)