



Photo by Jessica Nyznik

Changing seasons

Chris Hardy fishes for steelhead and rainbow trout on the Ganaraska River in Port Hope last week. With the first official day of spring just around the corner on March 20, ice melted on the river but Hardy was still able to find a solid patch to park his chair and cast his rod.

Sweet event introduces first tree tapping of the season

By Gail Paquette

A profession that depends on the whims of nature officially opened its season on Feb. 22 with the 'first tapping ceremony.'

Members of the Quinte Chapter of the Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association, or OMSPA, poured into O'Hara Sugar Maples on Harts Road north of Madoc for the celebration.

OMSPA is a producer-based organization formed in 1966 to represent maple syrup producers across the province.

Often referred to as the first crop of the year, the "first tapping ceremony"

represents the first rite of spring for the producers. When the days get longer and warmer and the nights remain cold, the sap is ready to run.

Perfect weather is 5C in the day and minus 5C at night, said producer Dan Osmond. Dan and his wife, Faith, have a slightly smaller operation, Maple Ridge Farm in Roseneath, Ont., with 700 trees.

In Ontario, maple syrup is produced commercially wherever maples are found. Ontario is the second largest producer of maple syrup, next to Quebec, with a production level of close to one million litres per year.

Steve Needham, his wife, Heather, and their two children, Vanessa and Jager, hosted the event on their 100-acre property.

Needham has been tapping trees since he was 15, but the family operation is only in its third year of production.

"It's going to be an excellent year for syrup," said Needham. "The ground had lots of frost and there is a lot of snow."

The Needham crop of 4,000 trees is a fairly new bush and will see the next five generations of maple syrup producing, he said.

The celebration included an informa-

tive talk by Needham about their operations, the official tapping of the tree and a hearty lunch.

Prince Edward-Hastings MP Daryl Kramp did the honours of drilling the first hole using a traditional hand brace drill.

"When I go abroad occasionally, it is traditional to exchange gifts and I always bring one thing: maple syrup. Particularly in Asia, where they have never heard of it, I will go around the table during a banquet and pour it onto their dessert. They look at me like I'm nuts but when they taste it, a smile comes across their face."

"Although the industry has been around for generations, the marketing capacity is literally untapped."

Tree tapping for the Needhams began officially Feb. 23 and took two full days with help, to complete the task of drilling the 4,000 trees.

O'Hara Sugar Maples extends an open invitation to anyone wanting to view the operation. The farm is located at 871 Harts Road, east of Madoc, off Hwy. 7.

"If the gate is open, then we are open," said Needham. "We offer free samples of maple syrup and maple butter at the sugar house."

Hospital funding cuts anger protesters

Liberal government keeping Ontarians in the dark about changes, say demonstrators

By Lyndsay-Lee Quinn and Sofia Rojas

Cold weather that swept across Trenton and Belleville Monday afternoon didn't stop the enraged protesters from waving flags and signs at the front entrances of each community hospital.

Because of the changing ways hospitals are funded in Ontario, health centres must find about \$10 million from savings.

About 30 people protested funding cuts on the sidewalk surrounding Belleville General Hospital and over 100 staff and community members rallied outside Trenton Memorial Hospital, the majority of them being elderly.

Protesters say the Liberal government is keeping Ontarians in the dark about what's to come within the province. The estimated cuts to Quinte Health Care revenues have left them with a deficit of almost \$10 million.

According to the official QHC website, Belleville General Hospital will be the only QHC hospital to provide obstetricians, as cuts are to come to a number of beds in Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital. Picton currently has 19 beds, plus two maternity beds. However, staff says it's possible that will be reduced to 12.

Wally Freeman, a councillor of Quinte West who participated in the SOS (Save Our Services) Day of Action protests had much to say regarding the issue.

"We've been told that the government



Photo by Sofia Rojas

About 30 people protested on the sidewalk surrounding Belleville General Hospital Monday afternoon. After Ontario changed its method of funding, local hospitals are now being forced to find an estimated \$10 million from budgets. Protester Doug Parker holds up an SOS sign to passing cars.

is pulling \$10 million out of the four sites of Quinte Health Care, Trenton Hospital being one of them. They are going to take five beds off of us, pulling out psychotherapy, taking away the lab and we are just saying this is ridiculous. We want our hospital lab left alone. We've gone through enough cuts as it is," said Freeman.

A common theme among protesters is that they are worried about the hospitals.

"We are trying to save our hospital. Put the money back and start looking after patients and all the administration costs. That's why I'm here," said Gary Wilson, a resident of Belleville.

According to the Ontario Health Co-

alition, an estimated \$3 billion has been cut from health care spending. However, according to the Toronto Star, Deb Matthews, the province's minister of health and long-term care, stated they are increasing funding by \$1 billion this year.

"Health-care spending in Ontario, when you talk about hospitals, is actually last in Canada," said Chris Cormier ex-

ecutive board member of OPSEU Region 4 at the protest in Belleville.

"There are a number of things out there in the press that say that health-care spending is rising at a rate we can sustain. But if you look at the numbers, you'll see something very different. Health-care spending in Ontario is actually decreasing," said Cormier.

"These cuts are being made because Ontario has a revenue problem. There are a large number of people that are not paying their fair share and it is those that are making a lot more than any of us standing here today," said Cormier.

"What I want to know here today is how many people can afford physiotherapy? Not many. How many people can afford to pay for X-rays? Not many. How many people paid their fair share in taxes last year? Lots," said Cormier.

"There's an untold story here when it comes to public health care. What it's going to take is each and every one of you to get involved and talk to your elected officials," said Cormier.

QHC has consulted staff physicians, partners and community members and reviewed those proposals with their input in mind. From there, officials will begin to construct further plans; according to the Quinte Health Care press release on Feb 27.

According to the QHC official website, members are planning on continuing to enhance the quality of care, ensure patients are receiving their care in the right place from the right care provider, to ensure the services they deliver are meeting the health care needs of the patients in this region within our available resources, make QHC as efficient as possible, and maximize their revenue streams such as adding fast food and retail services within hospitals.