



Photo by Anica James

Out in full force

A small but vocal group of protesters held homemade signs outside of Frank Meyers' home on Sunday afternoon. People from all across Ontario came to the Hamilton Road farm to show their support against the expropriation of Meyers' farmland by the Department of National Defence.

Youth look for more community engagement

By Melyssa Gloude

During Monday's first council meeting of the new year, representatives of Belleville's Youth Friendly Community committee made the first deputation to council about the "Youth Friendly Application" report.

The report pertains to the amount a community invests in youth play through the Playworks Partnership – an organization with concerns for the future of youth in Ontario. Representing the areas of sport, physical activity, civic engagement and recreation,

the Ontario Playworks Partnership has dedicated itself to advancing play for 13- to 19-year-olds on local, provincial, public and political agendas.

"What we're asking of city council is to reinstate the Youth Advisory Committee and fund a part-time youth programmer to improve youth engagement in the community," said Mike Whitaker, who is a representative of the Youth Friendly Committee.

"Our next step is to get advisory council up and running. We need to look at other areas we need to work on, such as getting a staff person to be able

to engage with youth and get involved with the community."

The goal of the committee is to reinstate the previously disbanded Youth Advisory Council, and to recognize a "Youth Belleville Recreation" committee as a subsidiary part of the Youth Advisory Council.

To be considered a Youth Friendly Community, a city must adhere to 16 different criteria. Tanya Grierson, Belleville's recreation program supervisor, is also a member of the committee and is hoping to see the requests

reviewed for the April 2014 budget deliberation.

"We applied for 12 qualifications and received 10, which is how many you need for bronze-level designation," said Grierson, who said she believes that with more opportunity for youth involvement, Belleville could reach the necessary 12 to 13 qualifications needed to bring the town up to silver level youth designation.

"We also need significant evidence of diverse play opportunities. The Youth Room at the Sports and Wellness Centre was also seen as a progressive

step. Youth now have an official place to convene," according to Brandi Hodge, also a committee member.

"The municipality can address that the Youth Advisory Committee was a significant part of the reason why the first bronze-level application was met."

The group is hopeful that the budget requests will be granted, but little will be known until the 2014 budget deliberation.

"The real hard work is when they do the budget," said Whitaker.

"Hopefully council look at it positively."



Photo by Duncan Cairns-Brenner

Tabitha Lowndes, 24 and Jennifer McKee, 24, sift through donations they collected for their friend Danielle Boyce, 24, whose home burned down on January 3, 2014. In the fire Boyce lost most of her and her daughter's possessions, leaving the pair with almost nothing. Boyce did not have tenant's insurance, leaving her completely responsible for replacing her belongings.

Community comes together to help victims of Grier Street blaze

By Melyssa Gloude

Due to the aftermath of an accidental fire, two diligent women were inspired to bring together a community for the relief of two families devastated by the tragedy.

"I was at work when I found out," said Danielle Boyce, 24 and her daughter, Ember Maracle, 5, occupied one of two apartments destroyed in an accidental blaze that began in the Grier Street home Jan. 3.

According to the official release from the Belleville Fire Department, at about 10:54 a.m., the property owners' attempt to thaw frozen pipes with a high temperature heat gun ignited combustible material in the home, which was divided into two separate rental units. Due to the age and construction of the building, the blaze quickly spread to the attic and wall-space, leading to a fire that could not be extinguished until late into the evening.

The structural integrity of the building was compromised once the fire was extinguished and had to be torn down, according to the release. The final cost of damages was estimated at \$200,000.

None of the occupants had purchased

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Jennifer McKee

tenants' insurance.

Boyce made it to the scene around noon.

"Once I knew no one got hurt, I just started laughing and crying hysterically. I couldn't stop. It was terrible."

Victim Services Belleville, an agency that specializes in family crisis, was soon on the scene and spoke to both families.

"Victim Services came and offered me a hotel for three days, but I refused because my parents had room for Ember and I."

Enter Jennifer McKee and Tabitha Lowndes – two 24-year-old women who made it their mission (and their full-time jobs) to give back everything that had been taken away from the two families. McKee, who has known Boyce

since grade school, immediately knew that she had to do anything she could to help.

"We barely even thought about it," McKee said. "Somebody had to do something, but we weren't going to wait for somebody else to get around to it."

McKee and Lowndes tackled this task using the quickest medium available – social media.

"She (Danielle) was really overwhelmed, and we thought, 'what's something we can do to give her a little bit of space?' The answer was that people could talk through us instead, until she was ready to accept the help. On her terms."

"The first thought to pop into my head was Facebook," said Lowndes. "Jenn made the Facebook page a few hours after the fire."

With just over 500 hits to the Grier Street Fire Relief page in the first day, donations began to roll in only a few hours after the fire was out.

"The donations started coming in on the same day," McKee remarked.

With the sudden influx of mass amounts of donations, they agreed on a donation drop off, Lowndes' empty garage. "People who didn't even know

either of the families were coming from Trenton, Kingston, Peterborough and even as far as Cornwall," said Lowndes. "It became a full-time job. We were spending 16-hour days doing pickups, organizing drop offs and sorting. We began taking donations for the second family as well, and we barely slept two hours through the weekend."

Although they have received enough donations for both families, these young women have no plans of stopping their crusade any time soon.

"We'll be finished when both families are happy and settled in a home, with everything they need," said Jenn.

"It's very inspirational for me, I didn't realize our community was so giving," added Lowndes. "I'm so proud of everyone. We definitely cried more than once."

"I don't have much faith in people, and when they started telling me that people were donating, I had no idea what was going on. I had no idea. I've always looked at life like I would always have to rely on myself," said Boyce, who says that she still hasn't been able to fully process what has happened.

"I think they have ended up doing more for me and my daughter than I could even dream of repaying."

Birthday party for Sir John A. a big celebration

By Dawn Barger

Despite the rainy weather, over a hundred people gathered at the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald to celebrate the 199th birthday of Canada's first prime minister.

Unfortunately, the rainy weather was too extreme to hold the event at the monument at City Park in Kingston, Ont., so they moved the event to City Hall.

Sir John Alexander Macdonald was one of the Fathers of Confederation. This dominant figure of Canadian history had a political career which spanned almost half a century. Macdonald served 19 years as prime minister.

The Sir John A. Macdonald Bicentennial Commission is promoting events in the arts, education, tourism and other sectors locally, regionally and nationally in the countdown to the 2015 Bicentennial of Macdonald's birth.

"This is the largest I have ever seen the turnout," said Brian Osborne, past president of the Kingston Historical Society.

"There's always an informal gathering around the monument, but this is a major reception," he said.

Osborne was attending the event to propose a toast to Sir John A., something they have done since people started celebrating his birthday. He was one of many taking part in the ceremonies at City Hall.

There were also many immigrants attending to say the citizenship oath, something that persons new to Canada are able to take part in. A local youth group invited Odile Burume to the event.

"They invited me to say the citizenship oath along with the immigrants that came to Canada," said Burume.

Viva Dadwal and Luke Maccaul were visiting from Ottawa. They are part of a group called Friends of Sir John A. Macdonald.

"We hope to bring to Ottawa in celebration of the bicentennial, some guided walks through the city as well as hosting our own dinner on the bicentennial in 2015," said Maccaul.

A number of sites associated with Macdonald are preserved. His gravesite located in Kingston has been designated a National Historic Site of Canada. Bellevue House in Kingston, where the Macdonald family lived in the 1840s, is also a National Historic Site administered by Parks Canada, and has been restored to that time period. His Ottawa home, Earncliffe, still stands and is today the official residence of the British High Commissioner to Canada.

Statues have been erected to commemorate Macdonald across Canada, with one standing on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. A statue of Macdonald stands atop a granite platform originally intended for a statue of Queen Victoria in Toronto's Queen's Park, looking south on University Avenue. A statue of Macdonald also stands in Kingston's City Park.

Chris Whymen, who has been Kingston's town crier for 30 years, said the birthday celebration started as a small gathering.

"It started off with eight people and a bottle of scotch so they could do a little toast to Sir John A. Each year, it gets bigger and bigger. As we get closer to his birthday, which is next year, there just seems to be a growing crowd of people wanting to attend the event."