

- TOP STORIES:

Park board looks to involve public in rehabilitation

BY MARY BETH HARTILL

The Annie Williams Memorial Park board has taken stock of the devastation caused by recent high winds and it's not pretty.

According to board chair Cathryn Willard, about 30 large trees came down and the park board is looking to step up the game in efforts to reforest the park.

"There's going to be more to come and you know the population (of the trees) is aging," she said. "For her to take out the healthy ones and leave the not so healthy ones wasn't a good plan on Mother Nature's part."

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Passion breathes life into clock tower

BY MARY BETH HARTILL

There is an old familiar sound ringing out and an old building springing back to life in downtown Bracebridge.

On Friday, Nov. 13, a ribbon was cut signifying the opening of the Clock Tower Centre at the corner of Manitoba Street and Taylor Road. Martin Sheffield has been pouring his heart and soul into the beloved building.

"This building is, I would say, the most important building in Bracebridge and it's undergoing a complete transformation," said Sheffield.

It is now home to craftsmen, artisans, a jeweller, business professionals and medical services.

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A courageous battle against homelessness

BY MARY BETH HARTILL

A Bracebridge man is helping put a face to homelessness.

Adam Gillard had everything a young man could want. College educated, he had a truck and a car in his driveway and lived in a nice condominium on Beaumont drive. But due to a battle with mental health issues including depression and anxiety leading to a life-long battle with alcoholism, his life spiraled out of control. This summer was the second summer that Gillard made his home in the woods.

He isn't the only one who has found himself sleeping in the wooded area behind Monck Public School or Gagnon's Independent Grocer in Bracebridge. The homeless travel far back into the woods to avoid police detection.

"But when you've got no place to go and you've got nowhere to sleep at night..." he said. "I think the last time I slept outside it was behind Monck and I woke up soaked because it had rained."

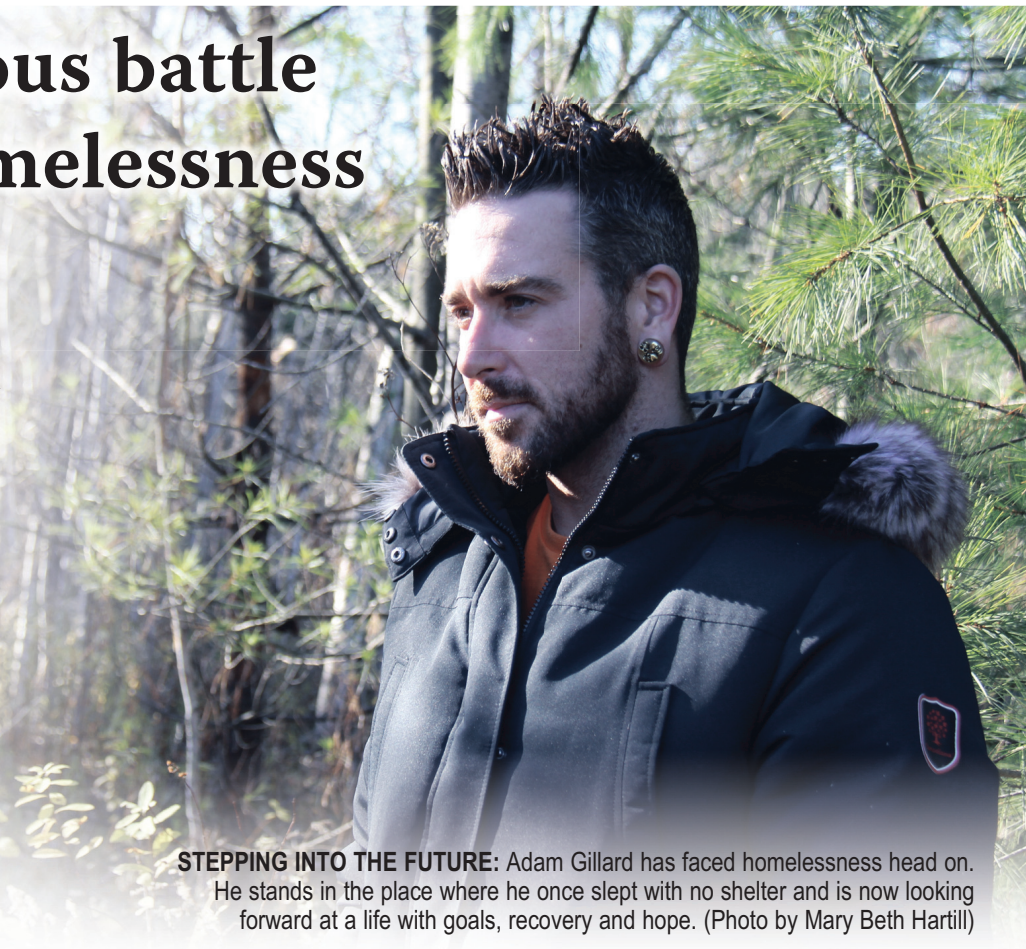
He had nothing but a sleeping bag to keep him warm but it did not protect against the elements. He had tried to find shelter, sometimes crashing with friends, other times with family members but couldn't stay anywhere long because of his personality when he drank. He describes himself as "not very nice" when he drinks, much different from the calm, well-spoken 32-year-old who sat down for an interview.

"I was tired. I was hungry. I was just out of it. I was beaten down. I was just like, 'Please, somebody help,'" he said.

Fortunately, in Gillard's case, somebody did help and it was without asking.

"It must have been all over my face," he said.

It wasn't the first time that Gillard's drinking had gotten him in trouble and most recently it resulted in a disturbance charge and a mischief charge in Huntsville. He was picked up again another day while he was drunk by Bracebridge OPP, who took him to the station to let him sleep it off.



STEPPING INTO THE FUTURE: Adam Gillard has faced homelessness head on. He stands in the place where he once slept with no shelter and is now looking forward at a life with goals, recovery and hope. (Photo by Mary Beth Hartill)

Alcoholism in Muskoka is not uncommon. According to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's HealthSTATS report, eight of every 10 adults aged 19 and older are current drinkers, two-thirds of those regular drinkers. One in five report drinking heavily.

Being picked up by the OPP was a blessing in disguise for Gillard. It was that incident that gave him the opportunity to meet an OPP officer who offered to find him help when they met up again in a chance encounter at Tim Horton's.

"She asked me, as a human being not just an officer, she said 'Where are you staying?' and I said, 'Over there in the bush,'" he said.

She offered to contact Muskoka Victim Services on his behalf. Perhaps they would be able to get Gillard in touch with someone who could help. Chris Eby, executive director of Muskoka Victim Services, was thankful that the police officer called telling him that Gillard was down on his luck, having a difficult time and asking if there was any way the organization could support him.

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