

- TOP STORIES:

Ombudsman not a concern for CAO

BY SAMANTHA BEATTIE

The Ombudsman's new powers to investigate complaints against municipalities is only concerning for towns, cities and districts that break the rules, said Gravenhurst's CAO Glen Davies.

"It's like speeding tickets. You only get a ticket if you speed, so if you're not speeding you don't have anything to worry about," he explained.

Last December, Bill 8, the Accountability and Transparency Act was passed, expanding the Ontario Ombudsman's powers to investigate complaints against municipalities, universities and schools.

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Jewish war slave meets GI who bombed her factory

BY BRENT COOPER

Many years ago, Eva Olsson was giving one of her riveting speeches about her experiences as a Holocaust survivor when she paused and looked straight at a man who had just entered the room.

"That," she exclaimed, "is the man who almost killed me."

While the statement may shock some people, especially given the circumstances of Olsson's history, the comment was actually made in jest.

"That man," was Mike Napolitano, a former New Yorker and at the time recently-transplanted Muskoka resident who, truth

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WEDDING FEAST ANYONE? There was plenty to taste and dream about at the Muskoka Wedding and Boutique Show hosted at the Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre. (Photo by Bev McMullen)

Wedding show offers a little bit of everything

BY BRENT COOPER

There was everything you would expect to see at a wedding show ... and some things you might be surprised at spotting.

The seventh annual Muskoka Wedding and Boutique Show was hosted at the Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre on Jan. 16 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with more than 50 vendors displaying their wares and services in virtually every corner of the Gravenhurst-based building.

There were traditional offerings for the

bride- and groom-to-be, such as photographers, disc jockeys, makeup artists, caterers, florists and resort operators, all providing their services to potential clients.

There was even a display for portable washrooms, for those who wished to enjoy their nuptials in the beautiful Muskoka outdoors, while keeping their guests comfortable.

Cathy Tait, the director of sales for Muskoka Steamships/Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, was one of the organ-

izers for the annual wedding show. She said the 2016 show featured 55 vendors, the maximum amount the centre could host, with many other businesses placed on a waiting list should there be any last-minute openings.

"The vendors do change up but we have a lot of repeat vendors because they receive bookings from the show every year," she said. "I think we can call this a signature Muskoka event now since we are in our seventh year. We had some

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'So you're the guy who almost killed us,' Olsson replied to Napolitano —

■ *Continued from front*

be told, had been partially responsible for Olsson almost losing her life during the Second World War.

Napolitano had been a member of 256 Field Artillery Battalion of the U.S. Army, which in February of 1945 was charged with marching on Germany and destroying various targets during their campaign.

"We were heavy artillery. I was actually a prime mover-driver, pulling these 20-foot-long guns," he said. "Our target was anything that was German that was contributing to the German effort."

One of the targets he and his battery mates had been instructed to bomb was a German-run military factory in Essen, where Olsson worked as a slave labourer.

"It was called the Krupp Works, which is still in business ... it is like the General Motors of Germany," Napolitano said.

Olsson is a Muskoka resident who has become one of the country's foremost speakers on the Holocaust. She was an 18-year-old when she and her family were taken to Auschwitz. They were Jewish Hungarians. She and her sister were the only ones to survive the death camps and later both were moved to the slave labour camp near Essen.

"I started working at the Krupp manufacturing in late fall of 1944," she said. "We worked from early morning until night. They would march us back and forth to the camp ... it was about 30 minutes, 45 minutes (walking), from one end of the city," she said.

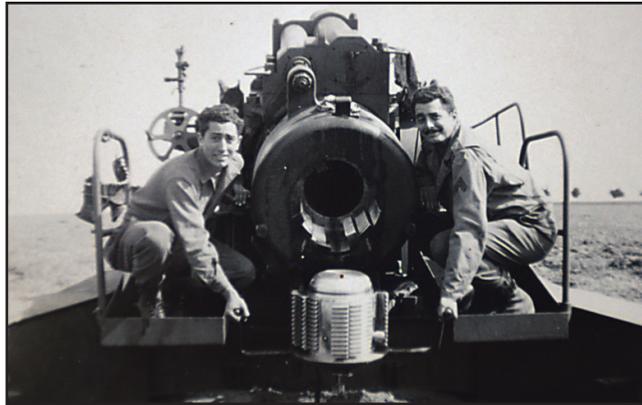
Allied bombing raids were nothing new to Olsson. She said she and the other workers routinely had to deal with bombing during their work periods. In some instances, they were forced to go onto the roof to do repairs, and actually could feel the breeze of the missiles as they shot past the factory.

In fact, at one point the allies had levelled the camp where the workers stayed with phosphorus bombs, forcing them to sleep in the hole left by the bombs and on mats of straw in some cases.

"We slept in a hole in the ground," she said. "There were no lights, no windows, just literally earth taken out from underneath a kitchen, which had a concrete floor and didn't burn. That is where we stayed until the middle of February when they took us away."

The factory didn't fare much better when Napolitano's battery arrived with orders to destroy it.

"We levelled it," said Napolitano. "We destroyed it completely. It took a couple of days to do it. When we were firing we were firing at specific times. We might let up a couple hours. We weren't continually firing. We were told when and what to hit. We didn't even see where we were firing. There were times they thought the shooting was over and everyone could come back to continue working and then we would start shooting again."



WAR MEMORY: Mike Napolitano, left with his brother Joe, poses with the gun that was used to destroy the German factory.

Olsson said that when the factory had been bombed heavily during working hours, the guards would go downstairs to a shelter, and the slave workers had to go outside the building and enter an above-ground building with an entrance only accessible from the outside.

"We weren't allowed to go underground where the Germans went. Sunday (of the time Napolitano's battery fired) we didn't work. Monday when we got back to the factory that morning, that room wasn't there anymore because these guys (gesturing to Napolitano) destroyed it. If we had been in that room I wouldn't be sitting here," she said.

When she wasn't doing her regular job of operating a crane, Olsson said she and others would patch up holes in the building caused by the American missiles.

The guards would stand behind you and say 'fill it up more, fill it up more,'" she said.

"They never knew when we were going to hit," said Napolitano. "We continued to bomb when they least expected it. They didn't know where we were because we always moved our position."

Olsson said throughout the bombing, it was a

scary situation, but she maintained the same resolve she had learned from her mother ... that she had faith she would be fine.

"You had a choice. You give up or you keep telling yourself 'I'm going to get out of here.' I never, ever lost that."

The factory was essentially destroyed in three days, and Napolitano and his mates headed off to another target while Olsson and her sister, along with the surviving slaves, were taken to another camp called Bergen-Belsen. Not long after they arrived there, the Allies liberated it, just hours before the Nazis had planned to execute all remaining inmates.

Here's where the story takes an even more unique and local twist. Napolitano returned home after the war to live his life in his native New York. He met his second wife, a Canadian and in 1980, the two eventually moved to Port Carling. Some time after his move to Muskoka, he and his wife were inside the old Zellers store in Bracebridge when they happened upon a woman who was selling her book in the store ... Eva Olsson.

Ever the conversationalist, Napolitano began talking to Olsson about her book and her life story and the discussion came to the point about their experiences in Germany.

"So you were working in Germany? Where?" he asked.

"The Krupp works," she replied.

When she told him when, Napolitano said "Cripes it was us who blew you up."

"So you're the guy who almost killed us," is what Olsson recalled she said to Napolitano, who said the discussion "made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up."

Olsson invited Napolitano and his wife to her next nearby speaking engagement, and the couple accepted. However, they arrived late to the venue, and when they entered Olsson stopped speaking and made her humorous "man-who-almost-killed-me" reference. Today, Napolitano and Olsson live only miles apart,

he in Gravenhurst and she in

Bracebridge. They greeted

each other this particular

day as long-lost buddies,

forever linked by an

unimaginable tragedy

they both lived to tell

about.



BOUND BY BATTLE: Mike Napolitano and Eva Olsson share an unlikely bond.

Many brides travelled from southern Ontario to attend wedding show —

■ *Continued from front*

premier Muskoka wedding services, but we also had some vendors coming up from the GTA."

Amanda Payne was hard to miss as she and her bridesmaids walked the floor of the centre looking at the various booths. Decked out in a pink shirt with the word "BRIDE" across the back with a sash to boot, the Huntsville woman and her bridesmaid were in town to see what the show had to offer her and her wedding party.

"I am here looking for ideas, and for maybe a photographer and some entertainment," she said, adding she was hoping to perhaps book someone from the show.

Carolyn Kitchen, a Bracebridge resident who is soon to be a bride, said she was at the show looking for some inspiration for her wedding.

"I am looking for some ideas for decor and dresses and other ideas," she said.

"It was a great inspiration," said her sister Jessie Curtis. "We saw some great ideas and some pretty cakes."

CAO emphasizes transparency and openness —

■ *Continued from front*

Before Jan. 1, 2016, the Ombudsman was only able to look into complaints about closed municipal meetings.

When Davies began as CAO in November, emphasizing transparency and openness in government was among his goals, he said.

"I strongly endorse the Ombudsman's role and think it should be a mechanism for people to bring concerns

forward," Davies said. "It's clear from Gravenhurst's track record that this won't be an issue."

"We don't have anything to hide."

In the past two years, prior to its expanded oversight, the Ontario Ombudsman's office has had to turn away more than 2,200 complaints, said acting Ombudsman Barbara Finlay at a press conference in December.

For more on this story see muskokaregion.com.