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EDITORIAL

The cost of living and renting

Inflation is a strange phenomenon. It's a global concern with many countries hit much harder than we are in Canada or the United States. In the United Kingdom, inflation reached 11 per cent in October 2022 and is now around 6.7 per cent, according to the UK House of Commons Library. In France it's around 5.7 per cent and in Germany about 3.8 per cent, basically the same as Canada's. A Reuter's story says inflation was measured at 185 per cent for 2023 in Argentina. It can be quite confusing to all of us non-economists. But one thing about economics we all know is that prices are supposed to go down when supply exceeds demand. Does that apply to apartment rentals? Around the Temiskaming region we see signs of construction and renovation. The plans to build on the waterfront property next to the marina in New Liskeard are taking shape. Two proposals (see the story on our front page) indicate developers would like to bring residential and commercial opportunities to the community. More accommodations should mean more affordable accommodations. Finding affordable places to live has been a major topic across Canada for many months now. That, plus inflation, have been the scourge of governments here and in the United States and in other countries. According to Rentals.ca and Urbanation's most recent National Rent Report, the "average asking rents in Canada hit a new high, averaging \$2,178." "Over the past six months, average rents increased by 8.8 per cent, equivalent to \$175 per month" in Canada, says the November 13 report. "In October, the annual rate of rent growth in Canada stood at 9.9 per cent, a modest slowing from the 11.1 per cent annual pace in September," they con-

tinued. That's still, according to Rentals.ca, "the second-fastest annual increase over the past seven months." Of course, high costs can be seen right across the nation. "For the ninth straight month, Calgary was the leader in annual rent growth for apartments in Canada's largest cities with a 14.7 per cent annual increase" is just one example cited. Despite great jobs numbers in the U.S. and decent numbers in Canada, people don't think the economy is doing well when they have to pay so much just to get by. If leaders want a more stable, less ornery populace, if they want to increase their chances of re-election, then they'll have to get a handle on costs across the board. Having jobs but being unable to afford proper housing and goods does not bode well for stable communities. People are looking for quality of life, not just quantity.

Stuff and nonsense

If I'd been asked a couple of weeks ago if I owned a lot of stuff, I would have sanctimoniously replied, "no." I don't have a lot of furniture, I find new homes for books I won't reread, and I get rid of clothes during the twice-yearly summer/winter wardrobe switch. Limiting my pots and pans forces me to stay on top of dish-washing chores. I've read *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, and for a while I was a devotee of a podcast by a couple of guys espousing a minimalist lifestyle. When it comes to possessions, I like to think I tread lightly.

And then there was a little water leak that forced me to move some stuff. There were stacks of photo albums, shelves of books I haven't yet read or may read again, letters I've kept, cards I plan to mail. There was a box of spare blankets, a basket of odds and ends, and a couple of chairs that look nice but are seldom used. And there were CDs. The CD player, alas, broke a while ago. If I really need to listen to The Band or Van Morrison, I could use the DVD player...after I hook it up...after I locate the manual. In some strange twist of physics, these things have increased

in mass over the years. I *know* they weren't this heavy when I moved in. I can hear the declutterers now. Who needs books? Get an eReader. Albums, CDs, tapes? Streaming services and online broadcasts mean there's no need to "own" music, or even a radio. As for holding on to old photos, letters and paperwork, digitize them all and save 'em to the cloud. I'm not what could be called an early adopter of tech. I sent my first-ever e-transfer just a couple of months ago. I have deep-seated qualms about turning over my memories

Diane Johnston

– photos, letters, cards – to some nameless, faceless, unaccountable entity. Nor do I like the idea of never-ending monthly fees for entertainment, or being even more dependent on internet availability. I like the feel of a book, and the sight of a shelf of well-loved books is comforting. I enjoy flipping through albums of travel and family photos. So I'm stuck with my stuff. I guess I am a moderately maximalist minimalist.

WEB POLL

Visit our website at speaker.northernontario.ca to vote.

Should Remembrance Day be a statutory holiday?

1. Yes, as a gesture of respect for Canada's fallen and those who are serving.

2. No, it would then be just another day off instead of an occasion to reflect.

57%

43%

NEXT WEEK'S QUESTION

'Tis the season – what's your favourite part of the lead-up to Christmas?

1. Going to local bazaars.

2. Ramping up the shopping.

3. Making travel plans.

4. I'm with Scrooge – humbug to it all.

The results of this poll are in no way considered to be valid or infallible.

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EDITORIAL

There is help out there

National Non-Smoking Week is being observed from January 21-27 in Canada.

It's a time for Temiskaming area residents to seriously consider the health risks of smoking and to stop smoking.

Since 1999, more than one million Canadians have quit smoking to improve their health and longevity.

Someone once said quitting smoking is one of the hardest things to do in life.

But it can be made

easier if people take advantage of the smoking cessation programs offered by health units, physicians and other health care professionals.

The devastating impacts of tobacco use in Ontario is extensive and undeniable – 1.4 million (11 per cent) still smoke tobacco, with 16,000 tobacco-related deaths and \$2.2 billion in health-care costs every year, says Health Canada.

The highlight of National Non-Smoking week is

Weedless Wednesday, falling on January 24. This is where people are encouraged to avoid smoking or vaping for 24 hours.

It could be the start a person needs to stop smoking altogether.

The Temiskaming Health Unit has smoking cessation programs and materials to help people quit smoking.

There is an eight-week quit smoking online program available with the Health Unit and products such as nicotine re-

placement patches and gum and lozenges to save people money.

A Telehealth Ontario Quit Coach can also be reached at 1-866-797-0000.

We wish everyone who decides to quit smoking the best of luck and success. Your health will be that much better as your sense of taste and smell will improve upon quitting, you will have more money in your pocket and your heart rate and blood pressure rates will normalize.

Ghosts of electronics past

All I wanted was to play the piano, and I found myself in a Stuart McLean-ish story.

To back up...

When I visited the folks at Christmas, I decided to dust off the piano and play some carols. (My digital memory is still strong enough to manage a C major scale and *Silent Night*.)

But I needed more light. The lamp on the piano was unplugged – probably for years – and its cord was trapped against the wall.

I pulled out the piano, which wanted to stick to the wall because of a dip in the floor and a bunched-up carpet.

As my uncle came to my aid, my aunt yelled that the TV stand beside the piano needed fixing.

My uncle and I moved the TV

onto the piano bench. I foolishly suggested that we unplug all the electronic gizmos – the satellite receiver, which was on top of a DVD player, which was on top of a VCR. (For any younger readers, that's a "videocassette recorder" that plays things called videotapes.)

No need, said my uncle dismissively. We'll just lower the stand onto its back.

I imagined a crash, leaving wiry innards splattered in the cobwebs.

But we manoeuvred it onto the floor without incident. My uncle – with two artificial knees and a bum shoulder – was down there too. That's when he realized he needed a different screwdriver.

He *could* have said, "It's

on the filing cabinet in the bedroom." But no – the tool was "on that shelf at the north side of the room."

I may use points-of-the-compass directions when I'm on the road, not navigating around the house. But I eventually found it.

The screwdriver proved inadequate.

My uncle then had to rise and retrieve the cordless screwdriver from his truck. (His truck never has any windshield washer, but it could be a mobile DeWalt shop.)

While I waited, I spotted a dust-covered box sprouting wires. And it all came back to me – you pressed a button and held it in place as it hummed and slowly adjusted the rooftop

Diane Johnston

antenna that brought in three TV channels.

It had last been used... decades ago? It was still plugged in, still buzzed, and adjusted absolutely nothing.

I was going to throw it out. My uncle? "Oh no, dear. Put it in the back kitchen." The back kitchen, a.k.a. cemetery for the broken, the unused and the useless (appliances, of course).

In the end, he fixed the stand and we got it upright.

After lunch, I remembered the piano and returned to play. But I needed more light, and the lamp wasn't plugged in....

WEB POLL

Visit our website at speaker.northernontario.ca to vote.

Have you changed your grocery shopping habits in light of rising prices?

1. No. I continue to buy what I want and at familiar stores.

2. Somewhat. I pay more attention to advertised specials and I've cut back on more expensive items.

3. Yes. I've substantially rethought what I buy and where I buy it.

12%

53%

35%

NEXT WEEK'S QUESTION

Will your next car purchase be an Electric Vehicle (EV)?

1. No, they are too expensive.

2. Yes, this is the way of the future.

3. The government will have to provide more incentives.

The results of this poll are in no way considered to be valid or infallible.