

► EDITORIAL

Missing Mr. Hockey

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BRANT NEWS

The passing of Mr. Hockey was mourned widely in Canada and across North America following Gordie Howe's death on June 10 at the age of 88.

We thought it important to take a moment to reflect on Howe's impact in Brantford.

From a broad perspective, it could be argued – quite effectively – that Brantford would not be the city it is today without Howe.

His relevance is immortalized in the Gretzky Project statue at the Wayne Gretzky Sports Centre. As part of the monument, a young Wayne is shown standing with his parents wearing a No. 9 Howe jersey looking up at the larger statue of Wayne.

Without the influence of Howe, Wayne Gretzky wouldn't be Wayne Gretzky. And without the influence of Wayne Gretzky, Brantford wouldn't be Brantford.

The connection runs deeper on a personal level for some individuals, including Howe's first professional linemate.

Sam Kennedy was a pro hockey player from Brantford who made his way through the low pros in the 1940s, earning a short stint in the AHL at the pinnacle of his career. He lost some of his best hockey years to serve in the Second World War, but still enjoyed some professional time after tearing up the junior hockey scene in Brantford.

But his claim to fame to his friends and family until his death in 2010, was the year he debuted as a rookie in 1945-46 with the Omaha Knights in the United States Hockey League.

His linemate was a fellow rookie by the name of Gordie Howe.

Craig Kennedy, Sam's son, said his dad played right wing, forcing Howe to his unnatural side on the left flank.

"But my dad was also amazed at Howe's strength from both sides," Craig said. "He said (Howe) could literally flip his stick around and shoot left-handed when he wanted to."

Kennedy only played 14 games with Howe and the Knights that season, but earned 13 goals sharing the ice with Mr. Hockey – and a lifelong friendship to boot.

"Whenever (Howe) was in Brantford from then on, he would meet with my dad just to hangout," Craig said.

The year the Brantford and District Civic Centre opened in the late 1960s, the Kennedys, Howes and Gretzkys all sat together to watch Howe's son play. Craig has the moment immortalized in a photo.

Spending more than a half a century in the limelight, Howe made a connection with many people – including yours truly.

My very first memory of Brantford is heavily influenced by Howe.

Before we moved here for my dad's job when I was nine years old, we attended one of Wayne Gretzky's celebrity softball tournaments. Howe hit a frozen rope into the bleachers that ended up in my dad's left hand – leaving quite a bruise.

Later that year, my brother and I attended a hockey skills camp that was run by Howe in the Greater Toronto Area. We told him the story and had him sign the softball.

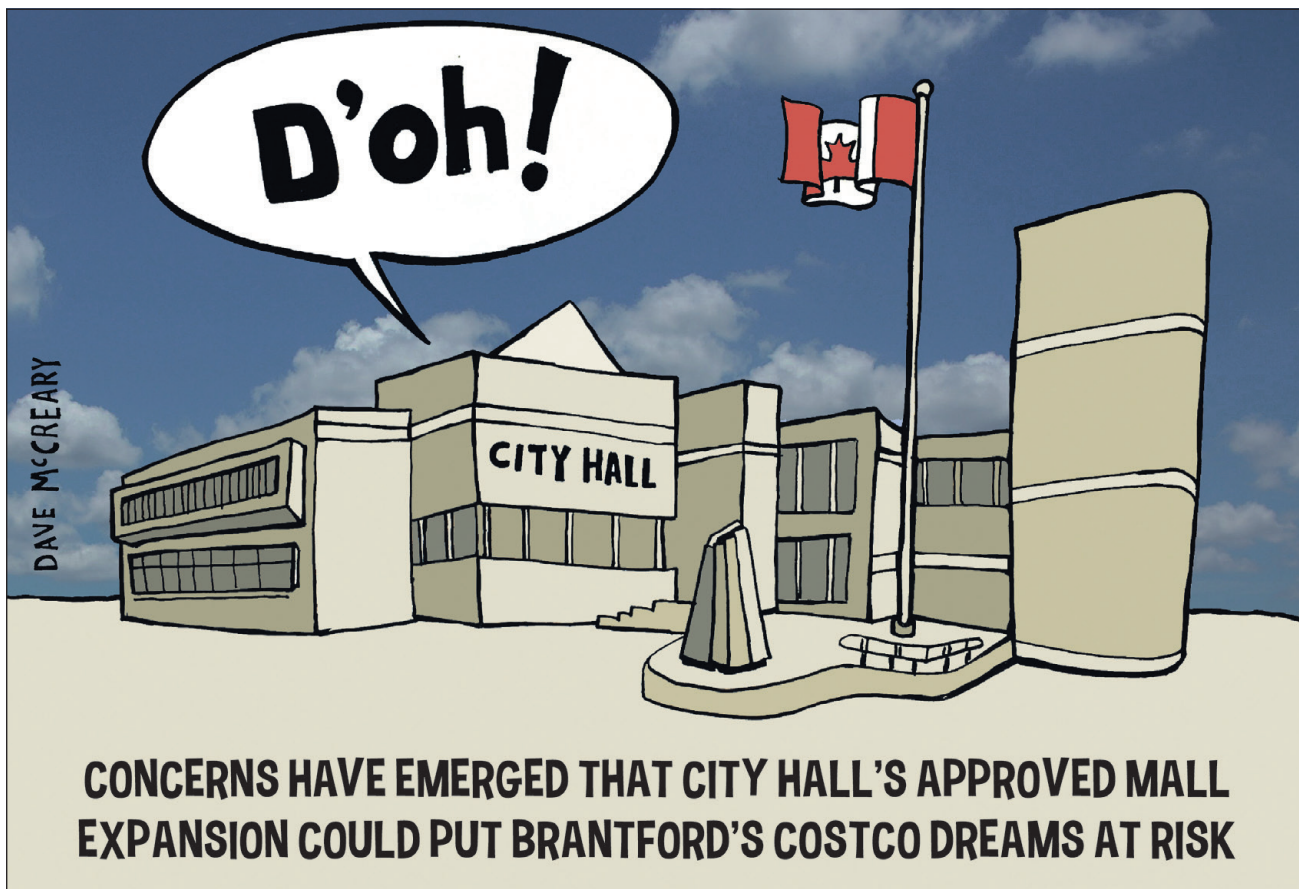
It's still a family keepsake.

Always looking for a teaching moment, when my brother and I were posing for a photo with Howe, he made a quick chopping motion and knocked my stick out of my hands.

"Don't let your guard down, kid," Howe told me.

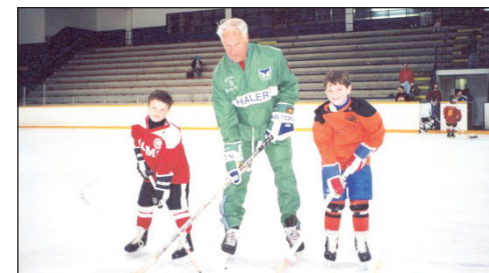
Pretty good advice for a momentary run-in with the player the Great One calls the greatest of all time.

► EDITORIAL CARTOON



A team photo of the 1945-46 Omaha Knights shows a young Gordie Howe in the centre of the back row, with teammate and lifelong friend Sam Kennedy of Brantford to his left.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



Gordie Howe posing for a photo with Brant News reporter Sean Allen, right, and his brother Jeff at a hockey camp 25 years ago, moments before teaching Sean a lesson about never letting his guard down.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



A photo supplied by the Arnold Anderson Sports Fund shows the longtime Brantford sports reporter interviewing Gordie Howe at a celebrity golf tournament.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

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EDITORIAL

Hi, how are you?

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Personally, the most-rewarding Mike on a Bike runs are the ones that happen completely unexpectedly.

The times when it seems almost inexplicable that he's even there and you wonder if such encounters happen to other people.

Earlier this year, I got a "Hi, how are you?" outside the Brant News office at around 7:30 p.m. when I was leaving late one Thursday evening. There was no reason whatsoever for Mike Crechiolo, better known as Mike on a Bike, to be riding around on Easton Road, but there he was: Zipping by and spreading friendliness without breaking his pedalling.

See, it's easy to get a patented Mike on a Bike "Hi, how are you?" at a public event. A fair is almost too easy, as Mike rarely misses one around these parts.

It's those moments when you just don't expect him that are the most fun.

How about the time the St. John's College Green Eagles celebrated a football championship by taking a team photo with Mike on a Bike at Bisons Alumni Field?

My personal favourite was the 2014 JCI Brantford Santa Claus Parade, when Mike was cruising the route about two floats in front of Jolly Old St. Nick – and probably getting more love from the crowd.

To catch those up who – somehow – don't know who we're talking about, Mike on a Bike is the most popular man in Brantford. Period.

Mike is in his 40s, autistic and lives with his supportive parents in Brantford. He spends his days – all of his days – cruising around town on his bike, helmet on head and saying hello to everyone he sees.

How do I know he's the most popular man in Brantford? I'm probably not supposed to tell you this, so I won't be posting this editorial online, but when Brant News reporter Mike Peeling posted a story on Tuesday about the theft of Mike on a Bike's livelihood, it received more website hits than any other story in all of Metroland that day.

More hits than anything any other Metroland community newspaper in the province posted. More hits than any in-depth, breaking news about stabbings in Brampton or anything the Hamilton Spectator did.

We love our Mike on a Bike.

His bike was stolen from the strip mall on Fairview Drive at West Street on Monday evening.

The lime green bike, which will be hotter to unload for the thief than the sun at this point, is on the radar of the Brantford police.

But in the meantime, a GoFundMe page managed to get enough money to buy Mike a new bike, three times over, in the span of just a few hours.

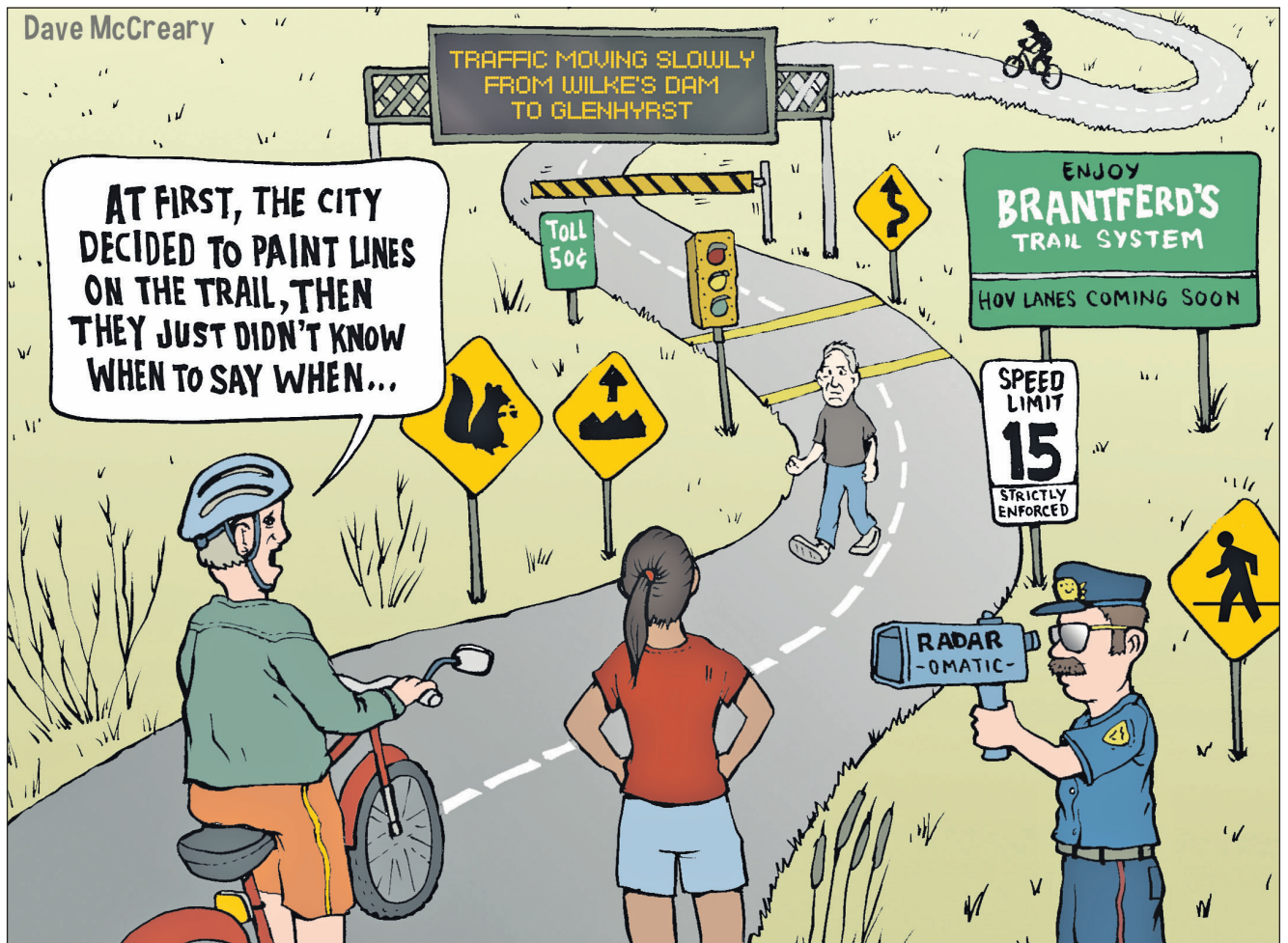
Alexander Borsos, a name I recognize as a star goalkeeper for the Assumption College Lions boys soccer team from a few years back, started the campaign on Tuesday afternoon after reading the Brant News story.

In eight hours, 100 people had donated just shy of \$2,000. The campaign's goal was only \$600.

So while Mike has faith that his bike will be recovered, the GoFundMe campaign will ensure that the unexpected lift we all get from a familiar "Hi, how are you?" won't be absent from the community for long.

Kudos, Brantford.

EDITORIAL CARTOON



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Grade 10 student opposes bike park

I am writing to you today to address the article, "Public bike park debate rages on." This new bike park will impact many people living in Brantford. It will add to the busyness and perhaps even crime of the neighbourhood, and take away from the green space. My family walks and bikes along the rail trail regularly and we've seen the beautiful, peaceful places that Brantford has to offer.

Bike parks can become loud and noisy with many people, which would

disrupt the quiet walking trails and park.

Residents living near Waterworks Park should receive a letter informing them of this new build, and be able to oppose the bike park if they so desire.

Although a bike park is a good idea for youth fun and fitness, I think that it would be more beneficial in another, more public location.

Elise deBlicq
Grade 10 student

Grade 10 student supports bike park

In response to your article

"Friel takes on 'aggressive' bike park opponents online" on Sept. 8, I think that the bike park to be built in Waterworks Park is a good idea because it is a safe place for people to exercise by biking.

This issue is important to me because people need to exercise more. It would also help with our health system because less people would need to go to the hospital or visit the doctor because of health issues relating to a lack of exercise. If we have a safe place for people to exercise it would make people more likely to bike.

As a Grade 10 student, I

see many people who like to use personal electronic devices rather than exercising. By not exercising as much as they should, their health will decline.

Therefore, having this bike park will make people more likely to exercise more often and help their health. A solution for the people who don't want the park is to have a public consultation to see what the public opinion of the people living near the park is and to possibly convince those who don't want this park that it is a good idea.

Rebecca Sikkema
Grade 10 student

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www.BrantNews.com

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► EDITORIAL

Searching for our south side thermos

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Recent news regarding the discovery of 400,000-plus artifacts at the site of the future Laurier Brantford YMCA Athletics and Recreation Centre got us thinking about one of our favourite photos never published in Brant News.

You might recall that back in 2009 and 2010 there was quite a battle at Brantford city council over the expropriation and demolition of 41 properties on the south side of Colborne Street, where the \$66-million Laurier-YMCA athletics complex will soon take shape. Without rehashing extensive details, city council was split by a narrow 6-5 margin in favour of acquiring and clearing the land.

In January 2010, then-city councillor Mark Littell offered to take reporters inside the buildings. The city had already expropriated the properties, but the fight over demolition continued at city hall. Littell, a forceful advocate for demolishing the buildings, wanted to show off their decrepit state. We're sure reporters saw the worst of the worst that day, but Littell certainly made his point.

While I was taking photographs in the south side's most westerly building – the one that used to overlook the intersection of Colborne Street and Brant Avenue – I came across a particularly rundown upper floor apartment full of debris, including a spoon with heroin residue. Nearby on the counter was a beer bottle full of syringes. (Yes, that sort of thing did happen on the south side.) I took a photo of the beer bottle to go along with his story, thinking the image emblematic of what I saw in many of the now-demolished buildings.

Fast forward to June 2010. The lead up to the start of demolition of the south side buildings was a big news story. As a result, I took a lot – and I mean a lot – of photos on the very first morning of demolition. Later that day in the newsroom, I was sorting through all of those images when something in one of them caught my eye: a silver coffee thermos sailing through the air. The image of the thermos was contained in a photo that showed a high-reach excavator tearing through the south side building at the corner of Colborne and Brant like it was butter.

Something told me I had seen that thermos before – and it turned out I had.

I soon realized that the thermos – as well as an empty cottage cheese container also pictured falling in the debris – were both sitting on the counter along with that beer bottle full of syringes I had photographed months earlier. With so much debris falling with the buildings, I was blown away to have captured an image of such a small item I recognized during the demolition. It's kind of surreal. Have a look at the photos at the top of this page and see for yourself.

Many of the artifacts discovered as land was prepared for the new Laurier-YMCA complex are historically significant. They include a shoe that could be more than 100 years old, an Upper Canada sloop penny from the 1820s, as well as many others.

But we have just one question: Did anybody happen to find a thermos?



LEFT: A beer bottle full of syringes was left behind in an apartment in the former buildings on the south side of Colborne Street in January 2010 – prior to their demolition. Notice the silver coffee thermos and cottage cheese container in the background. RIGHT: The same thermos and container can be seen falling as an excavator tears into the building months later. PHOTOS BY SEAN ALLEN, BRANT NEWS

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