

Messenger Editorial

MESSENGER EDITORIAL

Growth and progress go hand-in-hand

Sometimes, we feel for Rideau-Goulbourn Councillor Scott Moffatt.

He has a handful of communities and vast parts in between. And you can't help but look at many of these farms that are nudged up against our villages and think that they are housing developments waiting to happen.

And maybe, like it or not, that could be a good thing.

The most difficult part of Moffatt's job has to do with being the peace-keeper in times of development.

Simply put, everyone wants the amenities and the good things that come with growth, but a lot of people don't want the actual growth.

"Sometimes everyone has a different outlook on what growth means," Moffatt said at the Manotick BIA AGM last week. "But there will be growth. There has always been growth, and there always will be growth."

Moffatt and neighbouring Councillor George Darouze are in the vortex of growth in Ottawa. The city has earmarked village growth to be concentrated in Manotick, Richmond and Greely. All three communities have their own unique identities, but all three are going through similar phases.

Greely has the excitement of a downtown being planned and developed on the east side of Bank Street in the near future. That, along with the community's proximity to the anticipated growth at the Rideau Carleton Raceway and Hard Rock Ottawa, will give Greely a cultural facelift.

Manotick is going through the realization that maybe the Minto Mahogany community is not such a bad thing after all. There will always be some opposition voiced from those on Potter Drive who back onto the new community, but in the long run, Monto has been an exceptional and sensitive partner in the community.

In Richmond, growth will mean more amenities. A good example of those amenities will be the new medical centre in the village's downtown.

"A lot of people who move out to our communities want them to stay exactly as they are when they moved in," said Moffatt. "But they don't understand that it is growth that brought them here. It is growth that brought all of our families here."

Part of Moffatt's challenge has been to change that mindset. With growth comes progress, he said.

"When we make decisions on growth, we have to do what is right for 2030, 2040 and 2050," Moffatt said. "We can't base things on what is right for October 8th."

A winter sky filled with balloons

Gone but not forgotten.

It's one of those phrases that we hear all the time. We can use it in a number of contexts.

I thought about that phrase on Sunday. I was with about 50 friends and family members standing in the sunshine and unphased by the temperatures south of minus-20 at Pinecrest Cemetery singing happy birthday to Maddy Otto. She would have been 16 years old last week. The same group of people began releasing balloons at her gravesite ten years ago, when she would have turned six. But even though she passed away at the age of five from an inoperable brain tumor, she is not gone. And she is anything but forgotten.

"I still can't believe that so many people come out every year," said Jeanine Otto, Maddy's mom. "It's like an annual event. I get calls every year from people asking when we are coming out."

Each year, Jeanine, her husband, Dean, and Maddy's older sister, Hannah, gather at Maddy's gravesite and sing Happy Birthday to her. Then, the sky is filled with colours as the balloons are released. There are Superman and Spiderman balloons – Maddy loved superheroes – and there were balloons in all shapes, sizes and colours.

Clearly, Maddy Otto is not forgotten.

And it's pretty hard to accept that she is gone. She is still a big part of the Otto family's lives. Her legacy is something that could only be called legendary. The Otto family has raised close to three quarters of a million dollars for Roger's House since their daughter's passing. This year, the 11th annual Maddy's Gala will be the biggest and best to date.

Maddy's story is a heart breaker. The Ottos were at the family cottage in July, 2007. After going for a swim, five-year-old Maddy went for a nap. When she awoke, her parents noticed something wasn't right with her. They travelled to CHEO, where they received the devastating news that their little girl had an inoperable brain tumour and had only days to live. After two days, she was moved across the CHEO campus to Roger's House, the children's hospice that was built in honour of former NHL hockey coach Roger Neilson. Family members immediately flew in from places like New Brunswick and Alberta and the Yukon to be with Maddy. Two days after her diagnosis, surrounded by family members and close friends, Maddy passed away in a room full of love. She came in after spending time on the swing outside. She came inside, and her parents assured her that it was okay to let go.

Standing in the doorway, Dr. Robert LaBerge knew he was witnessing something intensely beautiful.

"I remember that day vividly," said Dr. La-

berge. "It was just one of those things that you see – so remarkably sad but also so filled with love – that when it happens, you know it is a rare moment that will change your life."

Jeanne still remembers how Maddy had dirt in her fingernails from playing outside. She even had a trace of green face paint on, as she was pretending to be the Hulk at the cottage. She never got the chance to wash the rest of it off.

"There are two things I will always remember about that day," Dr. LaBerge said. "I will always remember being with her and her family in the park when she was on the swing. I will also always remember being in their room at Roger's House. I knew in those moments that I was experiencing

something special. To see that kind of raw emotion with her family had a sense of sadness, but there was also a sense of peace and calmness as we transitioned from CHEO to Roger's House. It was a degree of love that you only hear about."

As she watched the balloons fly away, high into the blue, winter sky, Jeanine knew Maddy was watching.

"A few years ago, I went to a medium," Jeanine said. "I was a bit skeptical. I didn't know what to think. We sat down, and she started to talk about an older woman. But then, she said, 'Wait, she's giggling and laughing. It's a little girl.' She started to tell me things about Maddy that no one could know. She told me that Maddy died peacefully and happy. And then she told me that Maddy said thank you for the balloons on her birthday."

We talked about the medium as we watched the family and friends emerge from their warm cars and mini-vans with bunches of balloons. Most of them did not know about the visit to the medium. It wouldn't make any difference if they did. These balloons were for Maddy, and they all knew Maddy would be as excited as they were when they were released.

"She has done more in the last 10 years after her passing than most people have when they were alive," she said. "She has this power to bring people together and to make things happen. It really is incredible."

After the balloon release, it was off to East Side Mario's in Bells Corners. They go there after the balloon release every year, as it was Maddy's favourite restaurant.

On the way home, I kept thinking about something Jeanine told me about eight years ago.

"I still have the coolest little girl," she said. "She's just in heaven."

And now she's 16.

Happy birthday, Maddy.

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

by Jeff Morris



Messenger

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Managing Editor: Jeff Morris

Contributing writers:

Grace Thrasher, Larry Ellis, Phill Potter

Advertising and Marketing:

Gary Coulombe

Photographer: Mike Carroccetto

Phone: 613-692-6000

email:

Advertising: advert@bellnet.ca

Editor: newsfile@bellnet.ca

News/sports: newsfile@bellnet.ca

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Letters to the Editor welcome – email to newsfile@bellnet.ca

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It takes a community to raise a newspaper

We were beyond humbled last month when we were the big winners at the Ontario Community Newspaper Association annual awards gala. We were extremely proud for a number of reasons, but most of all, we were proud for the community we serve.

The other newspaper people in the room were shocked when they learned that we operate with a full time staff of two, a few part time people, and a heck of a lot of support from the community.

We have a great photographer, Mike Carrocetto, who is always keeping his eyes and ears open for us. Our intern, Charlie Senack, has done a phenomenal job and will have a bright future as a journalist. Our graphics team at our Prescott office – Wilbur Bastian, Ryan Birtch and Skyler Fraser – work their butts off for us, too. Klaus Beltzner has really opened up a great relationship between the MVCA and the Messenger, something that Grace Thrasher has continued. Phill Potter does an amazing job showcasing the young people in the community. And, since we are at every home in Richmond now, we can't give enough thanks to John Shearer and the community association and 200th anniversary committee for forming a great relationship with us and making sure their community is covered.

And there are others who have been a big help to us. Randy Fletcher makes sure that anything and everything important to the local curling community is in the Messenger, Margot Belanger has provided her series on 'Chicks in the Tick' for us, Jason Moore is always quick to give us a heads up of anything going on in North Gower, and just in case anyone serving our community gets complacent, Andy Braid is always there to pen a letter to the editor to entertain us and keep everyone on their toes.

It's a privilege to steer the community vessel we know as the Manotick Messenger. This is your vessel – your forum.

It's an honour for us to produce something that many of you have made become a part of your lives.

Manotick Miler this weekend

This is a big weekend in Manotick. The village's annual Health and Wellness Day is on Saturday, while the Manotick Miler takes place Sunday.

This year's event will be bigger and better, as it is an amalgamation of the Barrhaven Run for Roger Neilson House and the Manotick Miler. Please come out Sunday and cheer on the runners and enjoy the festivities.

There will be road closures throughout Sunday morning. These closures will affect Manotick Main Street, Century Road, First Line Road. Please plan your route accordingly should you be travelling anywhere on Sunday morning.

JM

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A cold glass of lemonade and a warm smile

Mr. Jackson rang the doorbell, backed off of the front step, and took off his straw hat. He was an African-American man with the lean build and rough, strong hands of someone who had worked hard for his entire life. I wasn't sure whether he was a 60-year-old who looked like he was in his 80s, or a man in his 80s who looked like he was 60.

Likely the latter.

Mr. Jackson came to cut our grass every Friday, late in the afternoon. He rode his old bicycle through our neighbourhood in Frisco, Texas, pulling his lawnmower behind him. It was hot that summer, reaching 100 degrees Fahrenheit more than 60 straight days. Because I was travelling so much, flying to either Denver or Nashville on Monday mornings, returning home Thursdays, and then often back on the road again for week-end trade shows, I was thankful that Mr. Jackson was there to take care of our little one-sixth-of-an-acre patch of Texas. I told him he could use our lawnmower, but he liked to use his. He was particular – an artist – kind of like Prince picking out the right guitar for each song.

My thoughts drifted to Mr. Jackson after I saw what happened in Philadelphia at Starbucks earlier this month. Two black men were arrested for sitting in Starbucks, waiting for a friend to show up. Maybe you saw the video that went viral. Police came in, arrested them, and off they went without making a sound.

I would have freaked out, but then again, I am not black, and I would not have realized that making a fuss would only lead to more violent consequences against me.

I loved the scenario their defence lawyer painted on the news last Monday night. Could you imagine if they were two white women arrested? Imagine the 9-1-1 call? "This is Starbucks. There are two soccer moms sitting here and they haven't ordered yet. One has a baby, and the other is pregnant. For God's sake, get the SWAT team here and do something!"

To make matters worse, that day was the 71st anniversary of the day Jackie Robinson broke the colour line in Major League Baseball. Other than Martin Luther King and maybe Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson is the most important black man in American history.

Every Friday, I would invite Mr. Jackson in for a glass of water or a glass of lemonade. He would never come through our front door. He grew up in a time and a place where that wasn't what you do. I would always try to convince him to come in. "It's okay," I even said once. "We're Canadian."

He would just smile and flash a mouthful of an old picket fence, and his eyes would give me a warm twinkle that would cut through the leathery skin on his face.

We went through this Friday after Friday after Friday. Mr. Jackson would come to the door, ring the bell, back up, and take off his hat. I would ask him in for lemonade or water, and he would say, "Thank you sir, but no sir."

I was familiar with the effects of racism in the United States. I remember playing football on a team near Buffalo. My best friend on the team was an African-American who worked at 3M for his day job. When he and his wife and family moved into their new house in a middle class neighbourhood in Buffalo, he was sitting on his front step when

the police circled three times before approaching him.

"What are you doing here, boy?"

How's that for a Welcome Wagon?

But meeting Mr. Jackson gave me a look at racism from a whole new perspective. He

was probably a generation or two removed from working in the fields and singing "Cotton Eyed Joe." As for me? As self-righteous as I might have thought I was, I am only three or four generations away from marching in the Orange Parade.

Finally, one day as Mr. Jackson finished, I walked up to him with a glass of lemonade.

"Sir," I said, "I would be honoured if you would sit in the shade on the step with me and have a glass of lemonade."

He awkwardly accepted, and we sat down. He was quiet at first, but I broke the ice.

"So do you think the Cowboys will make the playoffs this year?"

He smiled at me, and began to talk football.

We had found our common ground. Each week, before he left, I gave him a \$20 bill.

"But it's only \$12, sir," he would say.

"I know," I would reply. "But you should charge \$20."

He would thank me, backing up, and off he would go. The extra \$8 would end up on the collection plate at his church.

They say that a picture can tell 1,000 words. If that's the case, the look in Mr. Jackson's eyes could write an untold American history. What has he gone through? What has he endured? Why was his America so different that the one I was living in now?

Twenty years have passed since that glass of lemonade. I imagine Mr. Jackson has passed on, now.

I think I will pray for him tonight. I will pray that he has found peace, and I will pray that souls in Heaven are colourless.

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

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Letters to the Editor welcome – email to newsfile@bellnet.ca

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Ghamari still an underdog despite being favourite

It seemed like we have anxiously awaited a provincial election for years, and yet, it seems to have crept up on us quickly.

Perhaps the reason for that is the soap opera that took place over the race for the party leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. In fact, all that Doug Ford's unlikely rise to party leadership lacked was Victor Newman getting inside information on Christine Elliott, the implementation of the Jabot Industries' Blood Abbott Clause, and maybe Dollar Bill Spencer cooking up some kind of crazy and narcissistic scheme.

Then again, all of that would have been more believable than Patrick Brown's implosion, and then entering the race to replace himself, and then Doug Ford showing up and grabbing hold of the party.

Make no mistake. People want change. But is Doug Ford too much change? They are sick of the Wynne Liberal Government, the scandals, the overspending, and the fiscal mess they have left the province in.

But we have seen this scenario played out before, and the Wynne Liberals have come out on top each time.

Through it all, Lisa MacLeod plowed through the last few elections and won the riding on the strength of her support in Carleton. She was the ultimate overdog here, and we are still a little bit surprised she opted to run in Nepean and not Carleton

when the riding split.

Even though Iranian-Canadian trademark lawyer Goldie Ghamari is the frontrunner to win the riding for the PCs, she has been made an underdog by her own party. An email leaked to the Ottawa Citizen last year quoted MacLeod as saying that Ghamari would not be a suitable replacement for her.

Ghamari, however, has been nothing but a professional and reputable candidate for Carleton. She has hosted public forums over the past year in most of the communities in the riding, gathering information and opinions and hosting discussions on small business, hydro, education, health care, and other topics.

But this election will transcend local options in Carleton. The NDP candidate, Courtney Potter, will get a lot of support because of Andrea Horwath's popularity. Potter is a 22-year-old student who was among the last NDP candidates selected in the party. Teresa Qadri, the Liberal candidate, has name recognition as the wife of Shad Qadri and her volunteer work, primarily in Stittsville.

Perhaps the criticisms Ghamari has taken have made her work harder. She has clearly been the most visible and hardest working candidate throughout the campaign. She has also run a clean campaign with integrity and respect. If she wins, we are confident that she will be an outstanding MPP for our riding.

Exposing his scars for the world to see

We all shake our heads when bad things happen to good people.

But when bad things happen to good, young people, it emotionally handcuffs us and then locks us in a cell of frustration.

We think of those who were abused who had nowhere to turn. There has never been a template for victims. Every situation is different. Every predator is different. The victims' shame seems to be the only common denominator.

But what if there was a template? What if you did stand in and take the curveballs that the demons threw at you and you knocked them out of the park?

That's exactly what a young man has done. Last week, his middle school teacher, Kyla Cowan-Wilson, pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting him while he was her student.

Although he is now an adult and wants his story to be told, he cannot be identified because of a court ordered publication ban. We will refer to him in this column as Michael.

"Over the years, many of my friends have told me that the best way to face her would be in court, by reading a letter detailing how she has affected my life," he said. The reality, however, is that he has faced her in his mind every minute of every day since the abuse occurred.

Michael felt compelled to share his story and go public with it to help others. He wants to take advantage of his own tragedy and help other victims who might feel lost. He wants them to know they are not alone, and that they should never stop fighting to take back their lives.

Michael was a confident kid and an exceptional athlete. Kyla Cowan-Wilson was the coach of his school team at Sir Winston Churchill Public School.

Like any kid, Michael blamed himself for what happened. What could he have done differently to avoid being abused? Why did this happen to him? He trusted this woman, so was this all his own fault?

At the beginning of Michael's Grade 8 year, Cowan-Wilson noticed that he was not in her class. She immediately requested a change to ensure he would be in her class for the year. Michael said he was being targeted long before he was aware that she had taken an interest in him.

He shared an excerpt from a five-page love letter that the teacher had written him at the end of that school year.

"I saw a sensitive and vulnerable kid," she wrote. "I knew at that moment I wanted you in my class. When I saw your name missing

I instantly knew there was a mistake. I don't know why, but something in me knew that you needed to be with me."

Being switched to be in Cowan-Wilson's class set off what Michael calls an avalanche of tragedy. It is one which he will never truly be able to dig out from. Yet, if he could go back, he would not have changed it.

"Even if I could, I wouldn't change that moment," he said. "Despite the ruin that one change of class brought about for me, what would the alternative have been? Which of my friends would (she) have targeted if (she) didn't pick me? This sorrow (she has) infected upon me, this pain that made death feel like the only solution, I wouldn't wish upon anyone."

Perhaps the most disturbing scenario that Straw recalled was at Bluesfest that summer. Cowan-Wilson's husband had found out about the relationship. Michael said she texted him telling him to leave Bluesfest, as her husband was

there looking for him. He left, terrified.

Michael said that he has feared running into either of them over the years, and added that there have been many days where he has been afraid to go outside his house. His life became blanketed by darkness.

"The scars she carved into me will be there forever and no words that she or I could say will ever change that," he said. "The only impact I can make is in helping others. I've shared my story specifically for anyone who's experiencing depression, anxiety, mental illness, or any kind of abuse. I know that everyone's story is different, and from personal experience, I know that no one can truly describe what someone is feeling. But what I do know is that I never thought I would get here, and I'm sure many feel the same way. I never thought I'd survive this. I know what it is like to feel completely hopeless and empty. I know what it feels like to feel as if everything is caving in on you. But, what I want to tell you is that you are not alone. I, too, felt hopeless. I, too, felt that I had no future ahead of me. But you can't give up. As cheesy as it might sound, there will be light at the end of the tunnel. There will be an end to the darkness."

Michael says that although the bad days are crippling, the good days are more frequent.

"I now know that in time, I will find peace in my life," he said. "There will be a day when my past no longer defines me. And that day is coming soon."

Michael, to us, is not defined by his past. He is defined by his courageous fight to take back his own life and to be a beacon of hope for others.

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