

The Westend Weekly

Bringing Communities Together



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Ed Yerxa heads new treatment support services project



Seated, from left, Hugh Dennis, Cathy Bruyere, Ida Linklater and Ed Yerxa and standing behind Albert Calder and Christine Jourdain.

by Marlene Deschamps

A new District wide program funded through Health Canada has been set up at Couchiching First Nations. The program will operate out of the newly renovated former Treaty #3 Police offices. This new Couchiching Treatment Support Services Project will do an assessment of drug/alcohol services available in the Rainy River District. There is also formal support for the program from Ontario Substance Abuse Prevention Team, the Health Access Centre on Couchiching, Rainy River Substance Abuse Prevention Team, the Health Unit, Health Access Canada, Canadian Centre for Addictions/Mental Health and the LHINS.

There is a committee led by Ed Yerxa, the Director of the program, and comprised of Hugh Dennis, Cathy Bruyere, Ida Linklater, Albert Calder and Christine Jourdain. They have already been meeting for some months now and will continue to meet at their new office on a monthly basis. The First Nations target population and they include on and off First Nations communities members, Status and non-status, Metis and Inuit.

The mandate is to enhance access to treatment within the target area. They will develop a strategy using resources available and finding gaps in services to identify the need for a treatment centre. Yerxa said it

was important for this identification of need to come from the communities. Some of the groups involved will also be able to assist families to learn what those dealing with addictions are going through.

Ed Yerxa is the co-ordinator and there will be six fee-for-service persons and consultants working on the project. There will also be tech support and the funds for the entire project will flow through Couchiching. Ed Yerxa brought the idea to the table in 2008 and it was supported by Chief and Council. There is an intention to share information with all district resources. They received letters of support from Couchiching, Stanjikoming, Big Island, Big Grassy, the United Native Friendship Centres in Fort Frances and Atikokan and the Sunset Country Metis and will be working with them throughout the project. They are willing to accept other First Nations or groups that want to work with the program and you can find out more about the project by phoning 274-3297.

The focus will be to survey the District, have round table discussions regarding the treatment system within the target area and gather statistics. The ideal system would offer outpatient care, detoxification, residential care, counselling, pre and post treatment for the methadone program.

They will begin their assessment with a survey of 600 people. Those conducting the survey will receive training in ethics and confidentiality so the people requested to take part can be assured of confidentiality and protection of information. The surveys will be tabulated by the Centre of Addiction and Mental Health (Ontario). LHINS is also involved in the project. The purpose of the project, in Phase One, is to enhance existing services and identify gaps. Phase Two will entail sitting down with the stakeholders and developing and implementing recommendations brought forward.

The focus groups are the kids. It has been estimated that 80% use some form of drugs. These numbers come from the kids themselves and they are very candid about the situation. They do not seem to understand the effect this has on their families. The information comes from meetings between Elders and the young people. The big question from the Elders and the families appears to be "What can we do"? The project is designed to come with some answers for that very question and hopefully the statistics to show that a treatment centre is needed in the District so the present alternative of sending the young very far away to get help won't be necessary.

It's our anniversary and we are proud to say we've been serving the Rainy River District for 17 Years!



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We hope you enjoy reading our paper, we really enjoy putting it together. If anyone has wondered where Daisy the newspaper reading raccoon came from, she represents an animal who became a good friend and now resides happily with other animals who were orphaned, caught in traps or just need a safe place to live.

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Sincerely,
Jacquie and Martin Dufresne and our Star reporter, Marlene Deschamps



Dam discussions continue

A cordial and business like meeting was held between the undersigned and the Fort Frances Power Commission representatives - Mr. Rupenstein, CEO, Doug McCaig, Chairman and Mayor Roy Avis. This meeting came about as a result of the correspondence sent to Council and copied to the FFPC in regard to the request by Mr. Bedard, Krukoski and Wihnan seeking Fort Frances overtures to purchase the dam (as a single town initiative or through financial partnerships) from Abitibi-Bowater. This request was made for the following reasons:

1. would secure the long term interest of the 1905 power agreement.
2. would insure the supply of power from the dam to the mill which would protect our mills future viability, sustain jobs if the mill was to be sold, because of company required reorganization, debt load etc.
3. would protect our one industry town, mill employees, local businesses, future economic prospects of the district, our way of life, future job base and standard of living.
4. would generate power at an even greater reduced rate for Fort Frances.
5. If the mill went bankrupt the dam would provide us with a vital electrical asset making the potential of a future mill site attractive. On the other hand, if Abitibi-Bowater (Brookfield) shuts down our mill and sold all the power it could produce for long term profits it would certainly kill any potential for mill reincarnation.

The meeting went well and dealt with many issues. We were advised the FFPC and the Town of Fort Frances were not interested in buying the mill dam. Mr. McCaig advised the Commission felt the overall condition of the dam was such that the costs to upgrade and maintain the dam were prohibitive and would not be profitable for the town. The question was asked - how and who determined the condition of the dam, what firm or report was made available to reach that conclusion. Mr. McCaig stated that Mr. Rupenstein, the FFPC CEO and himself looked at the dam

and it would not, in their estimation be a profitable venture for Fort Frances.

Mr. McCaig advises us that the Ontario government was now frowning upon municipalities buying up utilities, there are over three hundred utilities across Ontario, the governments wants to get that down to around eighty bigger utilities rather than a bunch of small ones. This is further complicated by the fact that the province has a major oversupply of electricity and can't get it out to market without a major redesign in the grid and distribution system. We asked how long the FFPC and Mayor were aware of the pending sale of the dam to Brookfield - we were told approximately four months.

We stated quite clearly (along with Mill Union Reps) our concerns to the Mayor and council plus the FFPC when Abitibi asked to sever the dam from the mill. We made it clear that if council approved severing the dam from the mill it would significantly endanger mill viability, possibly lead to partial or full mill rotating shutdowns, and/or eventually a mill closure by driving up the cost of producing kraft and paper products. This would be further complicated if the American and Canadian dollars equalized in value. The council refused our request and separated the dam and it is now being sold as we predicted. This is now water under the bridge and we have to seek other solutions. Complicating matters is the lack of mill maintenance - if something breaks down there is no money to fix it. We are in serious trouble.

We then asked how the 1905 power agreement was protected in this sale? We were advised that the FFPC was the custodian for this agreement for the residents of Fort Frances and they were prepared to file an intervenor status to negotiate the protection of this agreement.

This generated some serious debate as Mr. Bedard stated that his opinion was once the dam was separated it went to a new company holding called ACH Limited Partnerships. Once ACH took over all energy

produced on the dam was sold into the hydro grid, power was then purchased back from the grid for the mill operations and the Towns portion of the 1905 power agreement. This is critical, because in our view if you understand the 1905 agreement there are just two simple but basic principles - the dam was allowed to be built on an international waterway to produce power to and tied to the mill. In exchange the town would be given a share of the power produced. The heart of the agreement was removed when Fort Frances town council severed the dam from the mill - did this destroy the 1905 agreement?

The answer was - the FFPC would file an intervention and fight for the inclusion of the 1905 agreement if it is not a restriction or a tag on to the sale. The intervention would be filed with the Ontario Energy Board which must approve the sale.

The question was then put forward, (after some discussion) that the company may attempt to by pass the Ontario Energy Board process seeking general approval of the sale without a hearing. Mr. McCaig advised that if this happened the FFPC would then take the matter to court. We were not convinced at the conclusion of this meeting that our 1905 agreement was protected. Time will tell.

Mr. Bedard, Krukoski and Wihnan stated that they wanted this mill, town and district to survive and will continue in their efforts including going after all levels of government to stop these companies from selling off our natural resources, water and timber. We advised that we would want a little time to digest our discussion at this meeting and would be informing the public of our results. If we had any further questions we would be back for another meeting. Mayor Avis thanked us for attending and welcomed any future requests for information. We will keep you posted!

Submitted by
Allan T. Bedard, Nick Wihnan, Bill Krukoski

Students participate in 30 hour famine



From left, Wes Friesen, Robert Kabatay, Marcus Veldhuisen, Nicholas Olsen, Daya Vander-Wekken, Courtney Peters and Jessica Cole.

by Marlene Deschamps

Students from the Emo area were staying at the Baptist Church in Emo for a 30 hour famine they do yearly through World vision. They planned a food drive on Saturday, April 4th and later on were going to

have a beans and rice meal. For one hour during the morning they were doing some trading for "bigger and better". They started out with one birthday candle and by the time they reached the Corner Closet they had a chocolate bar and pen.

Colleen traded them for a very nice cap with the Canada logo. Wes Friesen said they received a really bigger and better item at the end of the hour last year and were hoping for the same this year.



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