

BROCK'S BANTER: Spring fever in full swing

By Brock Weir

We all know the old joke of the ignorant tourist ? usually, in fine Canadian tradition, an American in most retellings ? arriving in Canada with a fur-lined parka, a ski over each shoulder looking to hit the slopes.

A reasonable expectation, one might think, but in this scenario the tourist is invariably arriving in the height of the Canadian summer, unaware that that is the time of year where our igloos melt to keep us hydrated in the sweltering Canadian sun.

It's a tried and true joke, but we're getting closer to losing all the humour in it.

Take this past Monday for instance.

Actually, it is Monday as I write this and I have all my office windows open, the blinds as high as they can go, and I'm basking in the sun and the cross-breeze. It is inching closer and closer to passing the 20 degree mark, unseasonably warm for this time of year, but it is a good idea to enjoy it while it lasts as the mercury is going to make the ascent back down to where it should be just in time for us to have a few days off at Easter Weekend.

If you got out of the office on Monday to enjoy the early blast of late summer, you were probably thinking back just a few days to Friday when you awoke after going to bed on a warm-ish rainy Thursday night to find you were back into the depths of December having to dig out and de-ice before beginning the morning commute.

So, anyone who likes to plan ahead, whether they are brainstorming the best outfit to wear to work the following morning, or what they will need to pack for a little stay-cation somewhere in Southern Ontario, all bets are off. Suddenly, our friend, the American tourist, arriving at Pearson at the end of June looking to try his hand as a downhill racer doesn't seem so far-fetched after all.

Nevertheless, time marches on. Despite the Easter Holiday just a few days away, this is a particularly busy time of year.

Temperatures and weather conditions are, of course, up to Mother Nature to dictate, but there is a springtime energy in the air which kicks most everything up to eleven.

The winter doldrums are shaken off, there is no feeling to postpone plans or activities (outside of a holiday) out of fear of interfering in March Break, and it is full speed ahead on local events, activities, and the evolution of the political scene.

This past Saturday was one more step towards setting the scene for next year's Provincial election campaign as Charity McGrath secured the Progressive Conservative nomination for the riding of Newmarket-Aurora. With no reports yet to indicate otherwise, she will face off against incumbent Chris Ballard for Aurora's northern riding next fall.

Moving south to Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, we are about halfway there. While the nomination process for the Ontario Liberal Party is still underway, the Progressive Conservatives locked things up several months ago, acclaiming Richmond Hill business owner Michael Parsa to carry the party's banner in the newly-created Provincial riding.

Despite the Federal Conservative leadership campaign in the home stretch, the next Canada-wide election will take place in 2019, so let's leave that out of the equation for the moment and continue to look at 2018.

Next year, municipalities across the Province will once again head to the polls to elect their respective 2018 ? 2022 terms of Council. Although the formal nomination period is still a long way off, as the spring settles in, one begins to see the signs of things to come falling into place like Tetris blocks.

As we get closer and closer to election season, renewed focus is being put on older issues and some recent events, such as continued questions over Aurora's Joint Operations Centre, are experiencing renewed and vigorous focus from incumbent Council members, former Council members, and previous hopefuls alike.

More and more, those of us who have the pleasure of sitting through Council week after week are seeing many familiar faces back in the public galleries, some of whom haven't been out since they too first dipped their toes into municipal waters around this time in 2013 just in time to get up to speed ahead of the 2014 Municipal Election.

Such jostling is not limited to the public galleries, or at the podium set up facing our nine Council members. It is apparent around the Council table itself as elected officials appear increasingly exasperated with each other ? whether in actuality or for the tens of viewers watching proceedings from the comforts of their own home ? as they jockey into position and try to break out from the crowd.

A prime example of this can be found over the last three meetings of Council, both Council-proper and the General Committee meeting which precedes each formal session and the thorny issue of Conflicts of Interest.

Last month, Council tackled a notice of motion from Councillor Michael Thompson calling on Council to support efforts to keep the York University GO Station, a station frequented not only by local students but also commuters looking to connect to other transit

routes, open despite threats of closure.

According to a mild brouhaha at the start of the meeting, Councillor John Abel questioned whether Councillor Tom Mrakas had a conflict of interest participating in the discussion as his wife is an employee of the university and thus frequently uses the station. Not having enough time to consult a lawyer over his ?understanding of the Municipal Conflict of Interest act,? he said, Councillor Mrakas left the Council chambers during the debate and vote on the motion.

The scene was set again at last week's General Committee meeting over a request from Music Aurora for \$16,000 of Council money to support their re-launched Aurora Summer Music Festival as a Canada 150 Legacy project, an initiative that was all well and good until Councillors Thompson and Kim questioned whether Councillor Abel had a pecuniary interest in discussing the matter since he sits on Music Aurora's Board of Directors.

After Mayor Dawe told Council it was solely up to Councillors to declare whether they did or did not have a pecuniary interest in the matter, Councillor Abel defended his decision to stay at the table, stating court decisions hold that Council members involved with not-for-profits do not present a conflict and questioned whether or not their respective involvements in bodies such as the Aurora Seniors' Centre and Aurora Sport Hall of Fame, both of which request and receive Council funding, would also constitute conflicts of interest.

Perhaps the issue is that it is up to individual Councillors to decide whether or not they have a conflict of interest. If it was up to the Town Clerk, or even an arm's length body at the Regional level, to settle these issues as soon as they crop up, it would save quite a bit of time and allow elected officials to get on with the business as it stands.

As it stands, spring fever is well underway and the political footballs are already flying.