

BROCK'S BANTER: A Walk through Ford Nation

By Brock Weir

Every year, I make a mental note never to tempt fate in this space and, like a New Year's resolution, that pledge inevitably folds very quickly.

?Now that winter is in the record books, I can look back on it with some certainty as my own 'winter of discontent': so few cold weather days to enjoy a few of my winter favourite things,? I wrote here last week. ?And snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes are relative child's play.?

I should have known better. After all, fate likes to intervene at regular intervals to show up Brock's Banter. Forecasting goes awry, notable people over a certain age mentioned here often kick the bucket within a week or two of appearing here, and political prognostication can sometimes be turned on its ear.

So, it should have come as no surprise that as soon as we went to press last week, the winter storm watches began ? well into the first week of spring.

By the end of the week, we were encased in glistening ice. A few of my favourite winter things came into full force, along with other elements of the season I don't like quite as much. Well, truth be told, I hate some of these elements and that is not a word I like to use lightly.

Nevertheless, Mother Nature turned over my own personal apple cart, and the carts of a few others as well. But, we're a strong community and we always rise above.

Case in point, Saturday's annual Easter Egg Hunt held in and around the Aurora Seniors' Centre on John West Way.

By Friday night, the success of the next day's event seemed like a bit of a crap shoot. Trees were still down. Sidewalks and, to a lesser extent, roads were still a bit slick and although the weather forecast called for a bit of a warmup by morning, it was unclear whether enough would be melted to entice residents to come out to uncover the Easter Bunny's bounty.

Never underestimate the power of the Easter Bunny.

By the time I arrived on John West Way midmorning, it was clear local families weren't going to let a few icicles get in their way of some holiday magic ? and Town Staff and volunteers weren't going to let it get in their way either.

Sure, they had to reconfigure things a fair bit and help the Easter Bunny find new hiding spots within the Aurora Arboretum, but the uncertainty, the snow and ice falling from trees, conspired to create a sense of adventure ? and a new brand of fun for families that come out to this event year after year.

I would like to send my own kudos to the Easter Bunny, the Town of Aurora Events Staff, and scores of volunteers, who put their collective heads together to find new and creative ways to make sure the annual Easter Egg Hunt was an undisputed success.

So, with my track record, and keeping in mind the date of Easter Saturday next year, I hope April 15, 2017, is plagued by snow, ice, high winds, and at least two horsemen of the apocalypse.

You're welcome!

With Saturday's event in the history book, Sunday gave way to one of the most beautiful days we've had this year, which was a nice antidote to the miserable previous few days.

As usual, our family's Easter Destination was Etobicoke for our traditional dinner at my aunt's house, just on the outskirts of what has become colloquially known as Ford Nation.

Some members of that household veered precariously close to becoming dyed-in-the-wool members of Ford Nation before common sense kicked in, but the Ford Brothers always deliver in providing plenty of dinner table fodder at these Fam Jams.

This year was no exception.

As we pulled off Highway 401 and took Royal York Road to get to our ultimate destination, a crowd of people on the east side of the road caught my eye. They were crouching down with lighters, candles and bouquets of flowers as if they were leaving an offering. Pointing my eyes upward and sporting the now-vintage Rob Ford election signs, it was clear at this park, dedicated in memory of his late father, had become a shrine to the late Mayor of Toronto as well.

Intrigued by the sight, I decided to check it out later after dinner was over.

It too provided a talking point around the dinner table with speculation being bandied about on whether the grief for Rob Ford, a man who died far too young, was genuine or part of the ?need? some people have today to hop on a bandwagon; theories over which, if any, scion of the Ford Family would try to parlay this tide of good will into another tide in the next Municipal Election in 2018; and whether or not people were lionizing his memory, as so many do with controversial figures following untimely deaths,

and overstating his accomplishments within and love for the city to our south while downplaying the fact that his escapades, including his unfortunate demons, made Toronto seem like a three-ring circus.

Following the dinner, I made good on my own pledge to stop by the makeshift shrine to see what was drawing people to it.

Surely, it couldn't have been only members of Ford Nation looking to throw a log jam on the tracks to stop a real or imagined ?gravy train,? or people looking for a bit of stardust.

Approaching the scene well after 10 p.m., the candles and tea lights were still burning bright. There was a sea of flowers, a few stuffed animals, a white piggy bank, handwritten Bristol board placards, and short notes written with varying commands of the English language.

Some were heartfelt, noting quite rightly that Rob Ford was gone too soon.

?Rob Ford is people's mayor of Toronto,? read one typed note.

Perhaps, but certainly not true of all people. No politician ever is.

?You showed sheer passion & went beyond the job of a mayor,? wrote another, on a small piece of canvas propped up on an equally small wooden easel. ?You were Toronto's #1 fan.?

That is a statement easy to debate but hard to refute.

Similar messages followed.

Unsure what to make of it all, I made my way through the messages north to south and the very last message in just a few words encompassed more than the others combined.

?R.I.P. Coach,? it said in black handwritten letters, framed inside a simple white box with Rob Ford in his uniform as football coach at Don Bosco.

That's really what it is all about.

Love him or hate him as a politician, whether or not he was a good or bad influence in the City of Toronto, this is a man who nevertheless had a positive impact on many citizens and will be remembered fondly.