

BROCK'S BANTER: Small, but mighty towns

By Brock Weir

There is something to be said for living in a small town ? but just what is it, exactly?

Each individual probably has their own individual definition of what this means, and their perspective might be informed by whether they grew up in a small community or whether they moved to a smaller locale from a bustling metropolis.

Those who are born and bred in tighter-knit areas do, from my perspective, naturally have a greater sense of ownership in the community, a vested interest, and a heightened awareness not only of those around them, but the changes that inevitably come through the passage of time.

That city slickers on the move, however, likely don't have that same sense of ownership ? at least at the outset. Perhaps they are driven to towns and villages further away from the big cities due to rising housing costs and the subsequent cost of living in larger urban centres. Maybe they want to raise their young brood in an area with a quieter pace of life or a neighbourhood whose values, against all odds, somewhat resemble that same set of values they grew up with decades before.

Personally, I don't really fall into either camp. Born in Toronto (well, technically North York, but Passport Canada disagrees) and largely raised in Newmarket until I was about 17, my heart has always belonged in the city. Don't get me wrong, I loved where I grew up ? and I love where I live now ? but I have always felt particularly at home in an urban environment.

Just a few days ago, I was asked by a born and bred Torontonians where I lived and, having told them, this tidbit of information was greeted with no small sense of incredulity.

?Isn't it like living in a fishbowl?? they asked, having, as it turned out, a couple of years under their belt living in an even smaller community.

I had never really thought about it until posed with the question.

Mulling it over for a minute or two, I had to agree in some respects.

The days of the neighbourhood Gladys Kravitz of Bewitched fame ? and every neighbourhood had one at one time or another since the advent of suburbia ? seem to be dying out, but from my perspective, there are still some hangovers.

You'd still be hard-pressed to go shopping, for instance, without bumping into a neighbour. The same with going out for dinner. If you're in this profession, I think you grow a heightened awareness of this reality, and maybe this is projected outward, because rare is the time I go out and about in the town without someone coming up to me with a story idea, sometimes a bit of kudos on a particular piece we've carried, or haranguing me about something they didn't necessarily care for.

Par for the course ? and that is obviously very valuable feedback.

But, until I stopped to think about it, prompted by that question, I didn't realise that with all the pros and cons, there is a tangible sense in a smaller community such as this that, to deploy a couple of clichés that are actually pretty apt, we're all in this together and, more often than not, rowing in the same direction..

HUMBOLDT STRONG

Sadly, we don't have to look too far to see a prime example of this in action.

Canadians from coast to coast to coast have been united in grief since Friday's horrific bus crash saw the death of 15 teammates and support staff from the Humboldt Broncos hockey team, who were en-route to their league's semi-final match, taking on the Nipawan Hawks.

Disbelief rapidly spread across the country as, one by one, we learned the names of the deceased: Tyler Bieber, Logan Boulet, Mark Cross, Glen Doerksen, Darcy Haugan, Adam Herold, Brody Hinz, Logan Hunter, Conner Lukan, Jaxon Joseph, Logan Schatz, Evan Thomas, Stephen Wack, Jacob Leicht, and Parker Tobin.

?I don't want to be here,? said team chaplain Sean Brandow at Sunday night's moving vigil held on home ice. ?I really don't want to be here. But it is good that we are. On Friday, I didn't want to go to the hockey game. My kids begged me to go to the hockey game. We travelled up and arrived at the scene shortly after the bus and walked up on a scene I never want to see again, to sounds I never want to hear again, to greet Chris, I just feel so lost ? and to go to the hospital and walk around and just hear groaning and panic and fear and distress and pain, just nothing but darkness.

?Thousands of texts: 'We're praying for you.' 'We're thinking of you.' 'Be strong.' And we needed those texts. We needed to hear those things that the support was much bigger than me.?

Indeed, he continued, countless messages of support had flooded in since the tragedy, many of which came from the close-knit

community of Humboldt, for whom hometown hockey was a lifeblood, with players from further afield making the town their home. Canadians ? myself included ? were struck at how Humboldt had come together in the aftermath of the tragedy. As is so often the case, the worst situations can bring out the best in people.

While the community rallied together, it was so much more than that. Messages had apparently poured in from across the country, along with nearly \$4 million in donations to impacted families.

It's a safe bet that most of those contributing to the fund or sending in messages of support from outside Saskatchewan probably had probably never heard of Humboldt until, sadly, there was no escaping it.

Since then, there has been a proliferation of people who have donned ribbons in the green of the Broncos and proudly proclaimed their pride in ?Humboldt Strong.?

Suddenly, this small town became exponentially larger. But, at the same time, Canada became a much tighter, closer-knit community in the process.

IN MEMORIAM

In any community served by a community newspaper, it is essential to have eyes and ears on the ground and Caledon was lucky to have that in Bill Rea.

I was shocked and saddened to learn on Sunday that Bill, my colleague at the Caledon Citizen, died suddenly in his sleep overnight, aged just 60.

Having worked with him for many years ? and it was about four years into our working relationship that our own families intersected in an interesting way?there goes that small world theme again ? I was always struck by not only his good humour, but his professionalism and his determination to kick it old school in a modern world.

He was an important stitch in Caledon's tapestry and will be greatly missed.