

BROCK'S BANTER: Deja Vu -- Coming to a Town Near You

By Brock Weir

I have to hand it to the good people of Newmarket-Aurora.

You belied any conceptions that voters, at least in this area, were either suffering from election fatigue, disengagement of the civic process, or wilful ignorance of the options before you, and turned out in very encouraging numbers to send your preferred candidate to Queen's Park on June 12.

Despite the lack of signs on lawns, chatter on the streets, coffee shops, and bickering in every other avenue imaginable, you sly ones were just biding your time. I have never seen polling stations so consistently busy in any recent election.

It shouldn't be surprising that things turned out the way they did ? after all, if one threatens to cut 100,000 jobs out of the public sector across the province, one can't possibly expect to get any portion of those 100,000 votes on election day ? but the local results are curious.

It wasn't that long ago when Chris Ballard and Jane Twinney each secured their respective nominations through acclamation on two back-to-back evenings in March and here we are. Chris Ballard is going to Queen's Park, Jane Twinney is going back to Newmarket Council, and Frank Klees has wrapped up his extended Farewell Tour before going back to the private sector.

Things can change so quickly. I remember very clearly being pulled aside by Mr. Ballard in November of last year to tell me he had filed his papers to be Newmarket-Aurora's next Liberal candidate. Deed done, that was followed by?nothing. Despite predictions, including predictions from one Auroran columnist who typically can be found on the page to my right, none of the names bandied about as possible challengers for the Newmarket-Aurora Liberal slot came to pass.

As far as action on the electoral front went, following November, one could almost hear the crickets coming out of their slumbers to chirp the chirps of boredom, while frosty sagebrush, eventually encrusted by ice from the bowels of hell by the end of December, rolled leisurely through the scene.

All that changed, however, on January 21.

The Newmarket-Aurora Progressive Conservative Riding Association was due to meet that evening for what was thought to be a routine session. Frank, however, said he was going to use the opportunity to deliver the bombshell that he would not seek re-election as Newmarket-Aurora's MPP.

19 years after he was first elected to the Ontario Legislature, it was a move which surprised many. Locally, however, it was as though the cork on the champagne bottle of our local Provincial race, popped, unleashing a storm of political excitement, chicanery, and head-scratching unseen in the riding since Belinda Stronach crossed the floor in May, 2005.

Suddenly, it seemed, everyone was eager to try on the glass slipper Frank was preparing to leave behind. Newmarket Councillors Maddie di Muccio and Jane Twinney were first out of the gate with their candidacies. Although Councillor di Muccio's efforts quickly went down in a much ballyhooed decision by the party to nix her nomination, Councillor Twinney experienced relatively smooth sailing. After a brief flirtation with a candidacy from Newmarket blogger Darryl Wolk, Aurora started to get a piece of the action in the form of Stephen Somerville (Another Auroran columnist sharing space to the right) putting his name forward as a candidate.

Further attempts were made to join the fray by Dorian Baxter who, once his nomination too was nixed by the party brass, eventually found a home, and a slot on the ballot, as a candidate for the Canadians' Choice Party. The saga, however, continued with Somerville dropping out of the race citing threats to himself and his family, while various other people in the party, whether they were the candidates themselves or their fervent supporters, took to their respective social media corners to lick their wounds.

THAT'S NOT ALL, FOLKS!

If you thought that all of Aurora's excitement would end with Chris Ballard's trip to Toronto, I would wager you would be mistaken. After all, each vote cast for him was one small step closer to creating a vacancy on Council, and we all know how well it turned out the last time Council had a vacancy to fill!

The resignation of Grace Marsh and the subsequent appointment of John Gallo happened before my time at The Auroran, but was something I eagerly read in its pages as a mere bystander. After joining the paper over a year later, it was clear people were still smarting from the debate itself, whether you were for a by-election or an appointment, as it was one of the first things well-meaning people told me to watch out for.

The 60 day clock set to fill Ballard's vacant seat is likely, pending a decision made by Councillors at the Committee level this week,

to begin on Tuesday. Those 60 days could very well be rife with community debate on just who should fill that seat. Aurora will be left with limited options. A by-election, due to such a short time period between now and when municipal polls open on October 27, is legislatively out of the question. An appointment is the only way forward, but the question is how. Will Councillors go out to the community seeking nominations for ? and from ? members of the public at large? Will they look towards Councillors of the past, who would be able to essentially hit the ground running for the remaining few months of the Council term? Or, will some view that the appointment of John Gallo, who finished ninth for eight possible Council seats in 2006, has set a precedent in how a seat should be filled?

In that context, the next five in line for the seat are, in order, Stephen Granger, Al Wilson, Evelina MacEachern, Roy Cohen, and Brian Duff. Of these five, the first three were incumbent councillors seeking re-election who were not returned to their seats, while the other two were first-time candidates in the race. Would any of these people be willing to take the ball and run? Would residents buy into it if they didn't put them into the eight seats in the first place?

Is there any appointment that will satisfy everyone? In short, no, but it will provide for many interesting debates ahead.

ON A FINAL NOTE?

I was saddened to learn of the death of Edward John MacKay. MacKay was a former Aurora business owner who owned Green Books at the southeast corner of Yonge and Wellington in what is now Marketing Garage. Although he later became a friend of the family in other circumstances, I first met him as a very loyal, very young customer at the age of five, who liked nothing better than exploring the mysterious and messy mounds of musty books and magazines that typified that truly unique Aurora store. A collector of the weird and wonderful from a very early age, I found many items I still treasure to this day in that chaotic store, often nudged in the right direction of what I was looking for by Mr. MacKay who, in hindsight, wanted to make sure I had the thrill of finding it ?on my own.?

I credit those early days in that store as fostering a budding love of reading, of old and vintage books and magazines, and a healthy curiosity in the unusual.