

BROCK'S BANTER: People's Choice

By Brock Weir

Perhaps I have become jaded, but there are few things in the world anymore which truly mystify me ? but that has not always been the case.

In hindsight, it seems like small potatoes now, but when I was a tween and into my early teens, one of the things that mystified me was a single part of Hollywood's so-called ?awards season?, which kicks into high gear in January.

The season often gets started by what are seen by many to be some of the less ?prestigious? awards, like the People's Choice Awards. This was the one that had me baffled. After all, I thought to myself, who in their right mind would choose the Adam Sandler film ?Big Daddy? as their favourite comedy in 1999?

Alas, nobody came a-knockin' to ask what I thought ? calling into question the entire idea of the ?people's choice?, of course. Perhaps that sowed some seeds of resentment, so I began looking closer to polls around me. All too often I found myself on the opposite side when pollsters told me what ?Canadians want, think, or believe.? A cursory check of my birth certificate indicated this was not necessarily the case.

In any event, I wanted to make my voice heard and, after the age of 18, marking a simple X on a ballot went a long way to do that, but there was still something missing.

I wanted to be one of these Canadians that could, with a simple tap on their touchtone phone, become one of these vaunted decision-makers, included in the mix to keep the country's collective fingers on the pulse of the nation.

I waited. And waited. But finally the phone rang! It was Ekos research ? and these survey makers may have very well got their most excited response in company history? until it turned out to be a consumer survey on Canada's favourite brand of paper towels and sanitary products.

It was a disappointing start, but a start nonetheless and it turned out to be a watershed moment. Within a few months, calls for surveys were coming in fast and furious, but no one seemed to understand my enthusiasm for giving them the time of day. Such subjects covered in these phone conversations included environmental issues, the past three federal and provincial elections, the performances of Stephen Harper, Stephane Dion, Michael Ignatieff, Dalton McGuinty, Kathleen Wynne, Tim Hudak, and, hitting closer to home, Frank Klees.

Most recently, an Ipsos computer dialled me up to ask me how likely I was to vote for Justin Trudeau in the next Federal election, in the impossible scenario that a Federal election would be held in the next month. The touchpad gave options ranging from ?Highly Likely? to ?Not at All Likely?. I would be lying if I said my response did not reflect my frustration with the Conservative Party's continual sophomoric attack ads on Trudeau which, at the end of the day, merely mock the work he has done for charity.

Nevertheless, it felt good that the vote was counted ? but I should have enjoyed it while it lasted. In the last three calls I have received from various pollsters, there is a curious trend emerging this year. After a few preliminary questions, along comes this one, ?Do you, or a member of your family or household, work in television or print media??

It seems nowadays that an answer in the affirmative shuts down the entire conversation and they allow you to go back to eating your dinner, which seems to be the time most polling companies are in the most urgent need of an answer.

So, I am back to square one ? back in the Siberia that is cut off from polls. I want to reply, ?journalists are people too!?, but now that the People's Choice Awards have moved online, I will have to content myself with that.

With this in mind, in my four-and-a-half years of covering Aurora politics, it has always astounded me that not everyone is as eager to have their voices heard, whether it is attending a meeting, responding to a survey, or even writing a letter on what is on their minds.

As Alison Collins-Mrakas noted last week, there might be a communication at Town Hall, but there also seems to be an environment of people having no desire to become engaged in the process until a decision made by a committee, Council, or Legislature ultimately affects them directly.

The most recent case in point, as was noted last week, is the hullabaloo over the proposed Heritage Conservation District. After it had been discussed countless times by Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee, and hit the Council table for further discussion at least a handful of times, it had to take Council's potential vote on moving forward with the second phase of the plan for residents opposing the plan to come together at the eleventh hour to state their case.

SIT NOW, COMPLAIN LATER

It is, however, a ritual Aurora goes through with a re-assuring degree of regularity and that time of year is upon us. This week, Council is due to formally approve a 3.75 per cent increase to Aurora's portion of your tax bill which, combined with increases from the Region of York as well as what you pay into the education system, translates into an overall impact of 1.99 per cent for the year on your tax bill.

The tax bill covers a myriad of things ranging from cost of living increases to keeping things humming along at Town Hall to the necessities of the Central York Fire Services. Some people will consider it to be a modest increase, while others will be upset that their tax rate is going up by anything but zero.

The curious trend is to sit back and watch it all unfold ? or letting it unfold while putting on a blindfold ? with the intention to simply complain about it later after you really had a chance to make a difference.

This year, I attended, I believe, all but two public Council and Committee meetings related to the budget and, by my count, only three Aurora residents came forward to express their concerns or ideas of what should be included in the 2014 budget, or what should come out to help ease the burden on their fellow taxpayers.

Out of the entire Town of Aurora ? just three, and of these three, one of them was a registered member of Council.

Inevitably, however, if Council signs off on the Budget this week there will eventually, particularly in this, an election year, be complaints over how this could have happened. These complaints will take the form of letters, blog posts, comments on said blogs and, in some cases, at the ballot box in October.

But, before you fire up your computer, pick up your pen, or plan out some strategic voting in your heads, take a moment to ask yourself where you were in the process and if you had solid ideas to put forward on where you could make a difference? They could have been helpful, they might not have been, but throwing them out there when you had the chance could have had an impact.