

BROCK'S BANTER: Springing a Leak

By Brock Weir

I hate to break tradition, so I will open my final column of 2014 with the dusty, yellowing opener of, "this time of year always brings a mixed bag of feelings."

This week is a time of celebration; an excuse to throw a good party, spread some holiday cheer, meet up with relatives you have not seen in a while, catch up with old friends, and experience the pleasures of gift giving while perhaps picking up a few nifty things for yourself in the process.

Then, in the post-Christmas turkey haze comes Boxing Day. If you're from a split family, it might be a time to start the whole clambake over again and/or hitting the shops for a great Boxing Day deal on that one elusive item that was on your list.

After that, the merriment continues with the anticipation of New Year's Eve, the celebrations that come with it, and the renewal which, in turn, comes with a fresh start.

That is, a fresh start might be anticipated by those who think with the glass half full. Those on the opposite side of the spectrum might be a bit melancholy to see an otherwise spectacular year be consigned to memory.

Usually, I fall somewhere in the middle.

Up until the middle of last week, my cup nearly runneth over looking forward to a fresh start.

Then, I went to get my hair cut.

On my way to take my seat in the barber's chair I grabbed a magazine at random off the table and began to get comfortable. Oddly enough, it was a coverless copy of Maclean's year-end edition from 2013. A lot happened in that year and when I leafed through pictures of memorable political moments, triumphs on the field, tempered with images of natural disasters and human suffering, I contemplated what would be the lasting images of 2014.

It is relatively easy to imagine this on a national perspective - particularly as most of these year-end editions are out now, having done the legwork for you already! - but I began to wonder what the lasting local images would be here.

2014 did not get off to the best of starts, with the murder of a local woman abroad and remembrances of a long-serving Aurora mayor who died just before the New Year, but visually our eyes were craned upward to the trees, still encased in ice from the pre-Christmas storm.

Colourful images of butterflies were punctuated with smiles and tears as the St. Joseph Catholic School Community came together to raise money for the ongoing treatment of their friend, Laura, who sadly lost her battle this summer. Students rallied in inventive ways, both in video and strutting their stuff down the catwalk in memory of one of their own, who lost his battle with depression on the GO tracks one wintery January morning.

Aurorans celebrated in the lead up to, and during, Sochi 2014, not only cheering on local athletes as they prepared to make the trek, but also gathering in bars across town at dawn to watch the boys bring home hockey gold.

By the time February rolled around, the lasting memories created during 2013's Sesquicentennial celebrations were quite literally capped with the sealing of a time capsule to mark the occasion, while the racy images from the newly re-vamped Mardi Gras at Aw, Shucks kept more than a few of you warm on a cold March night.

March led the way for change as long-time MPP Frank Klees passed the Progressive Conservative baton to Newmarket Councillor Jane Twinney, and local Ontario Liberals picked Chris Ballard to represent them on the campaign trail, setting the stage for a dramatic election ahead.

There is little doubt what the most lasting images from April will be. Every time I delve into that month's archive for a reference, I can still smell the smoke coming through our office as the nearby Aurora United Church erupted into flames.

It is interesting the scents and odours that stick with you for a lifetime. On the welcome end of things, the distinctly different smells of my late grandparents' respective kitchens bring back wonderful memories, as does the smell of a freshly picked tomato stem which is, in my mind, an instant blast of summer. Less welcome, however, was the smell that April day - a smell made extra pungent not by the burning wood and crumbling brick, but of the generations of memories and history that wafted away with each plume.

Each plume and flame that went into the air, and the cascades of water which poured down the thresholds of the building and onto the streets below, are images indelibly etched into Aurora's collective consciousness.

By the time my mind got to the end of April, I was halfway through my haircut when the woman wielding the scissors - the same woman who has been wielding the scissors over my scalp for more than a decade after an unfortunate incident elsewhere - my

thoughts were interrupted by something of an exclamation.

The gist of the exclamation was, thoughtfully, to point out that I am now actually greying on the roof, rather than just the beard which has been taunting me for the better part of the year. After picking out the grey as they arrived, I eventually gave up and decided to let Mother Nature do her worst, but this inventory-taking of my beard's northern white counterparts simply drove home the fact that 2015 will usher me into my thirties and suddenly my glass-half-full spirit started to leak.

So, with that, it was off to hurriedly begin my list of New Year's resolutions before I hit that milestone, which is still ? at press time ?a work in progress.

I'll report back on this ? and on the second quarter of 2014 ? in the New Year.

Have a safe and happy holiday season!