

BROCK'S BANTER: The "Slippery Slope"

Surefooted on a Slippery Slope

By Brock Weir

If you are fortunate enough to have a job that provides you with a few laughs during the day, you've already won half the battle. The odd laugh might make the workday go by just a little bit faster, make the tedious a little less tedious, or the overwhelming just a little bit lighter.

Sometimes, no matter how much one enjoys one's job, it is best to leave the laugh-making and merriment up to the professionals. This particular job is not your standard 9 to 5, Monday to Friday affair. In this line of work, particularly in Aurora, the real action, machinations and fun typically start on a Thursday and carry on through the weekend. As you can see within these pages, this past Saturday in particular was a particularly busy one.

First on my list was the inaugural sale at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, tasked with doing its part to raise money for a new, nifty set of bleachers for its well-used artificial turf field; well used both by the school and a multitude of community sports teams.

Next up was another session with York Region's First Responders after the official launch of First Responders Day on Thursday over at the Real Canadian Superstore. Boots in hand, the firefighters and EMS did a terrific job of recruiting new ?volunteers? for future Habitat For Humanity builds before they were let into the parking lot and, in turn, the store to do their weekend marketing. Following that drizzly event, it was then over to Don Hillock Drive for the very bright and colourful ceremonies to mark Asian Heritage Month, complete with a special Bollywood-style performance led by ?Dolly Bollywood?, a healthy crowd of kids, and some pretty impressive Bollywood dance moves busted out by York Regional Police Chief Eric Jolliffe, Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown and her Richmond Hill colleague, Costas Menegakis, who is vying to be Aurora's next MP south of Wellington Street. Although I enjoyed the event immensely, I was thankful it ended earlier than scheduled so I could whiz across town to catch the last few minutes of the first outdoor Aurora Farmers' Market of the 2014 season, over to Theatre Aurora to take in the last minute rehearsals of young actors preparing their Youth Showcase, and then over to the annual cadet inspection slated to take place at St. Andrew's College but moved to Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex due to rain.

After that? it was just 2 p.m.

I was ready to call it a day, but duty called to start writing everything up for this week, while others I had inadvertently trailed around town for most of the day went onto the next phase of their mission: the beginning stages of knocking on every single door in Aurora and Newmarket before June 12.

Yes, the election is on and two of the riding's three candidates ? Aurora's Chris Ballard and Newmarket's Jane Twinney ? were hitting the pavement in earnest.

It was no surprise Saturday would be one thing after another. The crackerjack people who run these events keep me well apprised of their goings on, so on Thursday night, after finishing up with the First Responders, and a particularly disastrous family dinner (which is going to make one hell of a chapter in my eventual memoirs and provide two or three 11 o'clock numbers in the inevitable posthumous musical based on said memoirs) I settled in front of the DVR to relax.

REST, RELAXATION AND AMALGAMATION

It was time to catch up with Parks and Recreation, that little comedy-that-could that has been an unexpectedly healthy mainstay in NBC and CITY-TV's Thursday night lineup. After covering Aurora Council meetings right to the bitter end, it has always puzzled me why a show about the minutia of small town bureaucracy does the trick. But what can I say, I am a glutton for punishment. In all seriousness, however, it is a wonderful show. What was once a middling show about a plucky Parks worker working hard to fill a hole in its first season has become layered perfection of characters and grander issues like? well, the issues aren't much grander than that first hole they were trying to fill, but somehow it works.

The season that just passed has been dominated amalgamation. Pawnee, the home of our main characters, has had a century-old bitter rivalry with their neighbour, and seemly better-heeled neighbour, Eagleton, until a series of unfortunate events left the towns at each other's mercies.

One can only assume the exaggerated growing pains faced by each town are rooted at least in some tenuous way to reality as they work together to put old battles to bed and come up with common visions and common values. Okay, if that was the focus of the show, it would never have made it beyond the first season, but if you strip everything away those principles are there.

As I got caught up in the last few months of their latest goings-on, I couldn't help but consider the recent tone of particular discussions around the Council table.

Perhaps it is pre-election jitters as October 27 draws ever-nearer, but Councillors seem to be increasingly on their toes about anything which could possibly lead to amalgamation with our neighbours to the north.

At the outset, questions about amalgamation when amalgamation doesn't seem remotely close to the table, have always been percolating on the backburner waiting to be served. Recent examples have included a flirtation with going one step further with the Central York Fire Services, which is jointly governed by Aurora and Newmarket, with a consolidated service for York Region. Over the past month, however, a more immediate concern seems to be stemming from the sharing of resources between the two municipalities. While politicians have been keen to trumpet cost savings that would come to the taxpayers from cost sharing agreements, one wonders if each has a breaking point in mind where togetherness will reach its saturation point.

Take, for instance, recent debates over shared documents and data storage projects being spearheaded by Aurora and Newmarket. Last month at a General Committee meeting chaired by Councillor Gallo, he exclaimed with a mock exasperation, 'It looks like amalgamation is coming sooner or later!'

'Bite your tongue,' replied Councillor Ballard, before suggesting data management solutions should be examined by the Region as a whole.

This week, Councillors are due to sign off on re-envisioning their Information Technology strategy to one which would be shared between the two municipalities and ultimately have the Town's long-gestating elephant of a website hosted on Newmarket's servers. 'I think maybe people will start to wonder why we have two separate towns and administrations when we are turning more and more towards working together and being more efficient with our resources,' opined Councillor Buck last week at Tuesday's General Committee meeting. 'It smells to me like amalgamation.'

But wait!

'I don't see this as a step towards the slippery slope of amalgamation,' said Councillor Ballard. 'I see this as a cost towards tax savings and I think our taxpayers would be happy if we could do that for them.'

On a personal level, I don't see deploying shared resources between the Towns necessarily as one surefooted step on the 'slippery slope of amalgamation', but perhaps it is an inevitability to come a generation or two down the road.

Do either towns have an appetite for it? That is hard to say, but as the first week of the 2014 Provincial Election comes to a close, it looks like either Aurora will get a former Newmarket Councillor as an MPP or Newmarket will get a former Aurora Councillor. If anything, it's a good appetizer for things which could come.