

BROCK'S BANTER: Turning the Page

By Brock Weir

When 'token gestures' are made to the public it is a sure sign of one of two things.

Either someone is genuinely concerned with righting a wrong but limited in the number of viable avenues available to them, or they are grasping at straws.

The latter example can be seen courtesy of our friends in France.

The CBC reported Wednesday that in an effort to help combat the austerity measures the country had put in place get their economy back on track after the mounting Euro disasters, President Francois Hollande decided to auction off over 1,000 of the very best labels in the presidential wine cellar. Trying to be a man of the people? Perhaps. But the proceeds from the sale will largely go back to stocking the vaults of the Elysee Palace with far cheaper plonk for entertaining his guests.

So much for that.

Certain segments of our own population ? and four individuals at the very least ? will likely be vehement in their arguments that the gesture made by Council last week, following a motion from Councillor Thompson, which falls into the first category.

As can be seen on Page 7 this week, the gesture was to issue a formal apology to the three bloggers at the centre of former mayor Phyllis Morris' discontinued \$6 million defamation lawsuit, which named them, among others.

I would be inclined to agree with them, but take a gander at this week's advertisement and judge for yourself.

Obviously there are many people in this community who believe Ms. Morris was justified in her lawsuit. While the issue of whether or not the words, however vulgar, disgusting and over-the-top, were indeed defamatory will likely always go undetermined by the court of law, still there are others who believe the three individuals suffered greatly as a result of the suit.

No matter how you slice it, I'm confident that whichever side of the debate you're on, or even if you're simply a curious bystander in the creamy centre, everyone can agree that it is now time to turn the page.

Since the now infamous late night Council session which ultimately led to the lawsuit, the issue has pitted resident against resident, residents who occasionally have switched allegiances in this whole debacle, or simply sitting by, popcorn in hand, waiting for the latest installment in the saga about to unfold.

This sea of negativity was evident on the campaign trail during the last municipal election, through George Hervey's ultimately failed lawsuit alleging Ms. Morris breached the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act in the lead-up to the lawsuit, all the way through nearly the first three quarters of the incumbent four year Council.

As someone who was fully prepared to throw up his hands and say, 'Enough already!' months ago, I knew this would be a futile plea as the virus that is the aftermath of the lawsuit was left untreated.

Such symptoms of this virus include a tendency to make illogical arguments, vomiting of conjecture and, of course, dry mouth.

There were arguments that Council was somehow skating on 'thin ice' if it veered anywhere close to touching this alleged Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) litigation, even if it was something benign like writing to the province to ask for tougher anti-SLAPP measures.

Perhaps it is just me, but I don't view this as skating on thin ice at all. If a municipality such as Aurora, which has lived in the aftermath of Master Thomas Hawkins ruling that Ms. Morris' lawsuit was indeed a SLAPP, what other municipality's word on the matter would carry as much weight?

Then there was handwringing that proceeding with a letter would somehow put the Town in a position of liability. This was ventured in a notice of motion from Councillor Chris Ballard, which was later withdrawn. Before he withdrew it, however, he declined to elaborate publically on what these issues might be.

Following that, there were arguments about ambiguity in the case, information that Justice Gilmore, the decision-maker in Mr. Hervey's lawsuit, had before her that was not before Master Hawkins, discrepancies between judicial rulings (or lack thereof).

Speaking as someone who sat through nearly each and every court hearing in this whole sorry affair, ambiguity was the only certainty when lawyers for Ms. Morris in the Hogg and Johnson matter argued it was not a municipally-driven lawsuit but a lawsuit by Ms. Morris to protect her reputation, while a few months later, lawyers on the same side, but in a different case, argued it was a lawsuit driven by the municipality with Ms. Morris' name simply attached to it because, well, somebody had to bite the bullet and put their name on it, whether mayor or municipal staffer.

At the end of the day, whether you agree with Master Hawkins, or the armchair lawyers, it is best to get off your respective soapboxes, put your sabres back into their holsters and save them for another day. What is important, and what is best for all concerned, is that this sorry chapter in Aurora's history is finally closed and people on both sides can move on with their lives and onto bigger and better things.

If it's still a bitter pill to swallow, just consider it a Sesquicentennial Present to Aurora.

She's suffered enough over the last 32 months. The old girl needs a break.