

Cobourg's citizens of the year

By Grahame Woods, Northumberland Today
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Who would have thought? A pleasant, spring-like Christmas Day calling for a walk through Victoria Park, around the harbour and along the boardwalk; 7C, the sun spiking through a thin veil of cloud, dogs being walked for their afternoon constitutional, Canada geese enjoying a calm lake; meeting fellow-walkers offering smiles, nods and seasonal greetings. All this surrounded by the care and creativity of the staff of Cobourg's Parks and Recreation who, year-round, look after the town's 29 parks of varying size (yes, 29), Victoria Park being the jewel of them all.

We are so fortunate to have one of the best and most attractive waterfronts on the north shore of Lake Ontario, for which we can thank the vision of previous councils – but, on a day-to-day basis, thanking all of the people who work in Parks and Recreation for taking that vision and, with their own creativity, produce gardens and landscapes of incredible beauty year after year. I would call them Cobourg's Citizens of the Year for 2015 for providing ongoing, year-round displays of art and innovation, culminating with the downtown Christmas Magic lights.

And, of course, in many ways, it would be fitting, as 2015 draws to a close and given the harbour's political prominence this year, to honour another group of Cobourg citizens who changed the face of Cobourg politics, possibly for all time. I'm referring, of course, to the Preserve Our Heritage Harbour coalition created earlier this year to fight the expansion of boat slips into the western harbour.

It was a remarkable coming together of people fighting for a common cause – an example of citizen participation in local municipal affairs perhaps never seen before in Cobourg. It created several highlights; a protest at the western harbour water's edge attended by more than 100 people and well covered by local and out-of-town media and, let us not forget, an unheard-of demonstration in front of Victoria Hall the evening Cobourg Council came to its senses and killed the harbour expansion. The coalition, in a round-about way, also spawned the recently created Cobourg Taxpayers Association (Making Local Government Accountable). So I would call the Preserve Our Heritage Harbour coalition co-winners as Cobourg's Citizens of the Year for 2015.

As for an individual Citizen of the Year, I would nominate Margaret Bain who created and published *The Wildlife of Cobourg Harbour (Through the Seasons)*, a wonderful book that not only brings the harbour to life but showcases some of Cobourg's brilliant photographers. It was a labour of love designed to highlight a remarkable world of nature that needs to be preserved – something that could have been ruined for all time had the proposed harbour expansion taken place.

As we head into 2016 it would be good to see Cobourg Council make it a creative year of decision. As suggested in this space before, perhaps Council should consider forming a panel of citizens to make recommendations for the cleaning up and refurbishing of the east pier, that shabby, shameful, southern gateway to Cobourg that welcomes out-of-town boaters providing them with their first impressions. Hmmm. Speaking of the western harbour, perhaps members of Council should read Margaret Bain's book and discover the remarkable habitat and the wildlife it attracts and, finally, declare it the Western Harbour Wildlife Preserve, an attraction that would draw many visitors to our town.

Oh, and maybe next year the Christmas Magic light display could return to Victoria Park as well as light up the harbour and Rotary Park. The icing on the cake. In the meantime, I wish all the readers of this space a very happy and satisfying 2016.

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