

Jeff Mahoney Wed Apr 24 2013 05:00:00 0 Comments 2 Recommend

Mahoney: Quarry foes set to celebrate holding their ground

Out beyond the last pull of the city, almost at the limits of the known world (just before you fall over the edge into Puslinch), you come to Mountsberg, where LRT stands for Lotsa Room for Trees.

Life was peaceful. From their windows, people could see — I don't know — languid distances of hollyhock and wooded hills, deer on the greenswards and the happy leaping of market value assessments.

Then a big company came in, rolled some soil in its hands and said, "Aggregate!" A thousand trucks a day.

What could the people do? Quarry giant. Roll over, right?

In the beginning, the Mountsberg Three (and the small but growing forces of insurgency with whom they stood) must've felt like the English at Agincourt. Hopelessly out-crossbowed.

The Mountsberg Three. I made that up. But they should have a name. Graham Flint, Mark Rudolph and Jan Whitelaw (the latter two are husband and wife) spread the credit around, as they should; their fight was a community one. But if it had to have a face (or three), it would be theirs.

It began in 2003-2004. Residents started noticing activity around the site. It ended, suddenly, this March; St. Marys Cement announced they were giving up, after spending tens of millions of dollars.

There's still an "it-hasn't-quite-sunk-in-yet" feeling as we talk in Mark and Jan's home.

"We're coming to the slow realization," Graham tells me. "Normally, we'd be gearing up for sign planting."

(The Stop the Quarry signs that popped up every spring like crocuses but bigger.)

"At the April information meeting (about the announcement), there were standing ovations," says Mark. "Not really tears down cheeks, but eyes were wet."

Graham is/was president of FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities Everywhere), and Mark and Jan respectively are its vice-president and policy adviser. (Graham's wife Silke was its accountant.)

At the outset, when these three pooled their impressions, they could feel the makings of a doable fight. They never suspected how it would snowball to Queen's Park. Nor that they'd be the nucleus of the snowball, with the intensity of outside forces compressing their colourful friendship into a tight, atomic bond.

Graham, an international Microsoft executive at the time, got so absorbed he left his job.

"Graham gave so much," says Jan, an Ancaster High grad and former senior policy adviser to Premier Dalton McGuinty.

For Mark and Jan, it strained work-life and child-rearing. But no regrets. Their kids grew up steeped in a wonderful example of commitment.

Both families had, in Graham's words, "skin in the game."

So did others.

FORCE forged alliances, sewing together the community. They got on top of the science, environmental studies, effects on aquifers.

FORCE heeled its way around to every door, methodically got every politician on board (Ted McMeekin proved especially helpful), won over public health departments.

The information campaign was exhaustive, circumspect.

So, too, the money model. They'd need more than bake sales. So they framed the fundraising as a kind of insurance against ensuing property devaluation. They drummed up \$1 million.

Still, St. Marys kept trying to barrel forward.

"An example of presumptive development," says Mark, a top environmental consultant — the idea that extraction is a birthright, opposition to be swatted away.

In 2010, the province halted the quarry. Still no white flag. But now, three years hence, the company's walking away.

When the English strode onto the field at Agincourt, into almost certain defeat, King Henry foretold that one day those would hold their manhoods cheap who hadn't joined them on St. Crispin's Day.

The Mountsberg Three and their FORCE mates will remember March 8 forever, and be remembered.

Tomorrow they celebrate. At a downtown Hamilton restaurant, far from the horse farms, they'll raise toasts at a dinner thrown by friend Paven Bratch. The three will stand with their community, covered in honour. They fought the good fight. They won.

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Graham Flint, Mark Rudolph and Jan Whitelaw fought the creation of a quarry by St Mary's in Flamborough and won.

Cathie Coward/The Hamilton Spectator

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