



Three cheers for CAs

Ah, yes!... conservation authorities, those largely rural agencies legislated more than 60 years ago primarily to manage flooding!

They've become popular whipping boys for the Ontario Landowners and some municipal

councils who believe they're overly powerful, cost too much and infringe on private property rights. A few councils want them abolished.

In some cases, CAs are no doubt guilty of the accusations. But overall, they serve a legitimate purpose which is growing in importance and do so in a reasonable, grassroots consultative way. Ontario's network of watersheds managed by local authorities is the envy of many jurisdictions around the world.

Yes, this is a defense of CAs, not a popular stand in some rural quarters. Before I continue, I must reveal that I'm a past director with South Nation Conservation in Eastern Ontario and still sit on its communication committee. While that opens me up to accusations of conflict, it also gives me an insider's knowledge allowing me to comfortably take this stand.

The notion that CAs are much maligned and deserve to have a few kind words tossed their way came to me while I sat in on South Nation's annual meeting held at its impressive headquarters in Finch, Stormont County, March 24.

SNC moved into this particular building two years ago, recycling a vacant school at a cost of \$2 million into new offices with state-of-the-art meeting rooms available for public functions. It's the second headquarters in the authority's history and the second time it has breathed new life into an abandoned school.

I've been to plenty of SNC meetings and events, I know the staff and directors, and I'm familiar with the programs... but somehow, on this day, it dawned on me just how well organized and well presented everything and everybody was.

It was time to elect a new executive and the considered words of Lawrence Levere, who became chairman for the next two years, certainly accentuated my positive feelings.

Levere just loves SNC and its role in the region, a role which has expanded way beyond flood control to clean water protection as priority number one, to stream, fisheries, forestry and habitat preservation and expansion, well and septic system monitoring, environmental education, and many other related functions.

Do you know how Levere greeted his acclamation? "Yahoo! Here I am!" not even trying to tone down his delight with the new position.

Levere represents the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville on the board. He was quick to point out it's the first time in more than 22 years that the chairmanship has gone to a Grenville resident.

Insisting that SNC must never become "an organization of desk jockeys", he praised it on several fronts, including field work, its connections to schools and municipalities, its ability to attract outside grants - \$4 million last year alone - and even the quality of staff presentations, several of which occurred during the meeting.

Among priorities, he cited continuing to improve the rapport with member municipalities in both "traditional and innovative ways", working with First Nations "whose understanding of the natural world about us is of great benefit", and cooperating with government ministries and organizations to ensure that regulations are applied "consistently, practically and humanely."

SNC is proud, he said, to have contributed to management of natural resources in the watershed, helping to ensure that "our children and grandchildren are able to appreciate our forests and our trails, our rivers, our fresh water and air... all things which we shouldn't take for granted."

And finally, this rallying cry: "We are South Nation Conservation and, in our own small way, we will maintain our corner of the world!"

The tears didn't flow but I've got to say... I was moved.



BY TOM VAN DUSEN

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