

Supporting the community

As I think is evident, I am a Valley girl through and through! I have lived all of my life in the same house, and only until recently in the same room! I attended local schools and was fortunate to be able to obtain my post-secondary education at Algonquin College in Pembroke. I was enrolled in the executive secretarial program in January 1984, when I obtained the position of promotions coordinator at the Pembroke Mall.

While I was glad to be able to further my education in Pembroke at Algonquin College, it was not until I had graduated and was invited to be a member of the board of governors that I really came to fully appreciate the value of this institution.

During my six-year term on the board of governors from 1996 to 2002, I began to realize that with provincial budget restraints, and the growth of e-education, our local campus needed to ensure its future by creating programs that were unique to this campus and programs that could not be operated from the Ottawa campus. Further, it was evident that we were losing students due to the facility that we had to work from.

With all due respect to the current campus, it is a former dairy and radio station. To the credit of the management team, there have been some great renovations completed over the last 10 or more years to make the building more conducive to student life, but as the old saying goes 'you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,' and the fact that the facility is land locked has been a huge deterrent to future development.

Under the direction of then dean, Marguerite Donohue, a number of exciting and unique programs were developed, and these continue to flourish to this day. The partnership with Wilderness Tours for the Outdoor Adventure program has been a resounding success, and there are plans for other programs currently under development that are not offered at the Ottawa campus.

In the late 1990s, fellow board member Del O'Brien and I



Community Editorial Board

with
Jayne Brophy

serve as a jail, there would be judge's chambers with a walkway to the courthouse, the provincial government's 'one stop desk' would be relocated from Riverside Drive and Algonquin College and the Ministry of Natural Resources would trade space. At that time, over \$5 million annually was being paid out directly in the way of salaries and purchases in Renfrew County from Algonquin College. This is a significant contribution, and the City of Pembroke quickly realized that it needed to work with the college to ensure its growth.

Del worked diligently with his contact in government – he was from the right party at the time – and he was able to get ministerial support for the project, a huge step in the path to make this a reality. Unfortunately, the bureaucratic level was not as supportive, and at the end of the day, the project died but not the spirit!

To the credit of the new current dean, Karen Davies, and her right hand man, Jamie Bramburger, the dream is still alive and is now moving forward.

I understand that there are those in our community who do not think that the current proposal of building an educational facility on the waterfront is a good idea; however, no one else has stepped up to the plate to develop this real estate, so why not a college? There are currently two seniors facilities located on the waterfront and there was not an objection that I recall about either of these developments!

In 1974, then Mayor George

worked with the Algonquin College management, staff and city officials to find a solution. At that time, the provincial government had announced the closure of the Pembroke Jail, so a plan was put in place. The present college would

Abdallah was running for re-election in the December municipal elections. My father was helping on George's campaign, and the only tape recording we have of Dad's voice is a commercial that he taped. That commercial spoke to the need to develop the waterfront and the proposal was that a hotel complex be built. That was 33 years ago!

The improvements that have been made to our waterfront are wonderful. It is good to see people enjoying the walkway and the crowd for this year's Waterfront Festival was excellent. Adding an education facility will continue to enhance the location and bring new life to the area.

The potential for growth of our city core will be greatly enhanced by having a college located there. College student are not hoodlums, they are young people who want to get an education and become contributing members of our society.

The management and staff of Algonquin College have come up with some excellent ideas to work with the city on partnerships that will enhance the waterfront. Both the city and the college need to 'look outside the box' to continue to grow and prosper.

At a time when we are losing jobs in this region, we as a community need to support those industries that are here and want to grow. The city participated in an extensive Business Retention and Expansion survey a few years ago, yet two major employers have since closed. Algonquin College is a good, clean industry that provides good jobs. The economic spinoff from the students is significant, and helps all sectors of our community... downtown, West End Mall, Pembroke Mall and all businesses in between... and ultimately, each and every taxpayer!

Next week: Fred Blackstein

The opinions expressed in this column are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the opinions of The Daily Observer or its senior editorial staff.