

points of view

Making hard decisions

WHEN THINGS don't transpire the way we think they should it's frustrating.

When doctors won't come to Haliburton County no matter how much we beg and plead, or when tourists won't embrace new festivals or attractions it's disappointing.

Which is why, despite how much it might hurt, we have to try something new.

This week's paper outlines examples of these types of situations; county council is battling around the idea of offering financial incentives to doctors who relocate to the Highlands, meanwhile we discover that the new regional tourism organization (fortuitously named Ontario's Highlands) may require an additional tax to allow it to function past 2012.

Both of these situations chafe the sensibilities of taxpayers in tight economic times.

How can we, a county with a tiny population and low average income level, be expected to foot the bills for these things?

It seems incredibly unfair that in order to receive adequate health care, we must fork out \$50,000 to pay a physician just to move here.

Just about as unfair as asking "roofed accommodators" (those who run bed and breakfasts, motels and hotels) to charge their customers another three per cent on top of the HST.

These are hard decisions to make.

And perhaps neither of these suggestions will come to pass. We have a new county council coming in December and the tourism levy will only transpire if 51 per cent or more of the region's accommodators vote in favour.

But the sentiment is that if we always do what we've always done, we'll never get ahead, no matter how unreasonable the alternative is.

It is what Bill Kerr and Lisa Stoughton wrangled with in deciding to launch a

free dental clinic due to open in Haliburton in the spring.

Kerr said he was frustrated that the provincial government wouldn't cover dentistry in the same way it covers surgery - not even for low-income adults.

The status quo was to continue to lobby the government for more money, but all the while people were suffering with infected mouths and rotting teeth.

So, as backward as it is for the community to fill the gap that should be covered by the province, the pair stepped up.

The community has subsequently stepped up, too.

This county shouldn't have to accommodate for underfunded programs or service shortages, but the reality is that we have to.

To get what we need sometimes we have to do it ourselves.



Jenn Watt
Editor

Free clinic response has dentist smiling

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Editor

They should have been smiling: he was, after all, fixing their children's teeth.

But many parents who brought their kids in to dentist Dr. Bill Kerr couldn't smile comfortably – their teeth were too decayed. And while the Ontario government provides money for children under 17 from low-income families to have dental work done, there is nothing for adults, leaving many to suffer with pain, infection and social anxiety.

"There is the pain and infection and the inability to think or concentrate when you're in pain or when you're fighting an infection ... but there's also a social component to it; if you don't feel that you can smile because people will see your teeth then it definitely has an impact on how you function in society and also your likelihood of being employed," Kerr said.

The necessity of good dental care was what motivated him and Haliburton dental hygienist Lisa Stoughton to travel to Honduras in 2009 and 2010 to help children with basic procedures and it is what ultimately motivated their plan to open a free dental clinic for Haliburton County.

"On our way coming back from Honduras the

first year we were very excited about what we had done: we had helped more than 300 children over there, but we kind of had the feeling that it's lovely going to another country and ... helping out but our own little community is in desperate need of our help as well," Stoughton said of their first discussion in 2009.

"One thing that we really noticed around here [in Haliburton County] were unhealthy smiles or lack of smiles due to lack of dental care and lack of funds for dental care. It's disappointing to see, especially with the way your oral health affects your overall health. We wanted to give people back some dignity as well, to be able to smile again," said Stoughton, who has her own clinic on Highland Street and has been a dental hygienist for 13 years.

"Now it's just a few months away from being a reality, which is wonderful, and that's what we want to do around here – to have it be a community-oriented clinic – and everybody seems to want to jump on board and help out because this is a great community," she said.

It took only a few phone calls and a few contacts made before the entire social justice community rallied around the plan – something Kerr found surprising.

"Our county is just so awesome; people get excited and there are so many people who vol-

unteer and do so many great things in Haliburton County. I probably should have expected it, but I really didn't, so it's really cool to see," he said. Kerr has been a dentist since 1987 and has spent the last five years volunteering at a free clinic in Scarborough as well as practising commercial dentistry and working Fridays at Dr. Ed Smolen's clinic.

Since initially broaching the idea, everyone from contractors to dental workers to business owners have rallied behind Kerr and Stoughton and an incredible amount of work has already been done in creating what will be called the Haliburton County Volunteer Dental Outreach clinic, though the location is yet to be firmed up.

Most recently, Dr. Bill Ryding of the health unit has used his discretionary fund to donate \$5,000 to the clinic and the Haliburton County Development Corporation has added \$2,500 to hire a consultant for a business plan.

Local entrepreneurs Janis Parker and Maarten Steinkamp have both pledged their support, contractors Alex Roome and Jason Reay have agreed to renovate whatever space is found, Patient News Publishing will add their expertise and contacts from the dental industry, Smolen has donated a dental chair with light, cuspidor and dental unit and an X-ray unit, Dr. David

Butera will be donating extra equipment from his dentistry practice and SIRCH has set up a link on their website to donate to the project.

"I can't fund the whole office out of my real office, so basically we need money," Kerr said. He's unsure of how much money is needed at this point. While all staff will be volunteers there are still the expenses of supplies, rent, administration and accommodation.

The social services of the county are also excited about the clinic, and Kerr has been in regular contact with the 4Cs food bank and SIRCH about how to screen appropriately for those in need.

One of the provincial government's 2007 election promises was to provide dental care to low-income adults, but money was directed to children instead.

According to a recent Health Canada report, 17 per cent of Canadians do not go to the dentist because it is too costly. Thirty two per cent do not have dental coverage.

The dental outreach clinic is supposed to be up and running by the spring and will be free of charge for patients. Those interested in donating should contact Kerr or SIRCH: bill_kerr@sympatico.ca or info@sirch.on.ca.

Free dental clinic in the works

By Mark Arike

Members of the community are pitching in to create Haliburton County's first free dental clinic aimed at serving low income adults.

"This project has taken off," said dentist Dr. William Kerr. "We are planning to open the clinic in the town of Haliburton sometime in the New Year." The new project will be called the Haliburton County Volunteer Dental Outreach. Kerr, a Minden area resident who runs a dental practice in Scarborough, said that he began talking about the concept with local dental hygienist Lisa Stoughton three years ago.

"It's something we were both thinking about," said Kerr in a phone interview, mentioning that the two got to know one another

on dental mission trips to the Honduras.

In recent months, a number of individuals, local organizations and others have taken notice of Kerr and Stoughton's vision. Donations of money, manpower and the formation of partnerships appear to be increasing the project's momentum. "Dr. Ed Smolen has donated a complete dental chair set up with light, cuspidor and dental unit. He has also donated dentist and assistant stools and an x-ray unit," said Kerr.

Another Haliburton dentist, Dr. David Butera, is "very supportive" of the clinic and has agreed to donate any extra equipment that he's not using at his office.

SIRCH Community Services has provided a forum on their web site where people can make monetary donations to the cause. Donations will

be heavily relied upon to make the clinic possible.

"All services (with the possible exception of lab work) will be donated services, but there will be other associated expenses. SIRCH has also offered to help with the screening process and would even consider booking appointments," said Kerr.

Point In Time, The Department of Social Services, the Haliburton Highlands Family Health Team, Haliburton-Kawartha-Pine Ridge District Health Unit (HKPR), members of Haliburton County Food Net and local food banks like the 4Cs in Haliburton and are a number of the supporters on a growing list.

Individuals like Janis Parker of Parker Pad & Printing have offered financial contributions

and printing services. One of the largest private employers in the community, Patient News, has confirmed that they will offer marketing services through their powerful reach into the dental community. And two local contractors, Alex Roome Construction and Jason Reay Construction have both volunteered to help with the renovations to the clinic location.

To ensure that overhead costs are kept to a minimum, Kerr has sought dentists, dental hygienists and other professionals willing to volunteer their services.

"I've spoken to a dentist who talked about doing one Friday per month ... I've also reached a few semi-retired dentists - who haven't said they're in for sure - but want more details," he said.