

our two cents

A great agrarian tradition

It's unfortunate that after the last municipal election, Uxbridge suddenly had a council with no representation from the farming community. Probably for the first time in its two centuries. For most of those years, the mayor's chair was occupied by a farmer. In the previous council to this one, we had two farmers: organic vegetable grower Ted Eng and dairyman Howie Herrema. Mr. Herrema, who probably would have won if he'd gone for the mayoralty, instead chose to rededicate himself to farm and family, at least for now. Mr. Eng, after many long years battling in Ward 2, gave up that seat after only one term to try for Regional Councillor. He lost to Jack Ballinger, and we lost our rural contingent on council. Heck, even Pat Mikuse lives in the middle of beautiful downtown Roseville.

It was probably inevitable. After all, Uxbridge has been urbanizing ever since Joseph Gould came down from Quaker Hill and built his first mill in the valley. Before that, Uxbridge was all farmers (at least, there's no concrete evidence that First Nations people did anything but camp in these parts on their way through). But despite the fact that the vast majority of the township's population lives in the hamlets, villages and the bustling capital town, Uxbridge's farmers (as demonstrated by our cover picture and the accompanying story on page 6) are as good at what they do as they've ever been.

Many times in the brief history of this newspaper, we've reported that, like Paul and Kelly Brooks, Uxbridge farmers have been selected as top-of-class by their peers across Ontario and Canada. Only a couple of years ago, Lisa and Steve Cooper, who live just a ways down Ashworth Road from the Brooks family, were named the top young farmers in Canada. Ashworth Road obviously has some of the best soil in the country.

In fact, as we delve back into the *Cosmos* archives, we're reminded that our first two issues, in September of '05, had horticulturalists on the cover, and they lived almost next door in Uxbridge - Cosmos Queen Sharon Bognar and Garlic King Bryan Mailey.

Since then, we've talked about just every possible farm product you can imagine - from asparagus to apples to strawberries, from horses to emus to alpacas. There's even a farmer west of Sandford who raises exotic birds. Uxbridge farmers have tried, and continue to succeed, in growing or raising everything except pineapples or kangaroos, and if global warming continues, we might even see those.

What makes the Brooks' and Coopers special is that they revel in telling people about how wonderful farming is, and proving it through the marvellous things they sell in their farm markets. Through the marvels of social media, hundreds, even thousands of urbanites across Ontario are being attracted to Uxbridge because of its farms. The initial pull might be something like the Cooper's corn maze or the famous pumpkin cannon at Brooks Farms, but what stays with them is the quality of our honey, or maple syrup, or apple cider.

And as much as our historic attractions, or our artistic community, or our trails, are important cogs in our future as a tourist destination, the foundation is Uxbridge's first and proudest industry - agriculture.

The Uxbridge COSMOS

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WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

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Stemp's Stew column by Harry Stemp

To many Canadians the Senate is a cozy haven for people who have worked for the political party in power, or good friends of a politician and a complete waste of tax dollars. For one thing, few Canadians even know what the Senate does. Oh sure, Senators will tell you they work very hard, and I'm sure a small number do, but others often don't bother to show up for sessions and they still get paid a large salary as if they have perfect attendance. Besides the large salary, they have huge fringe benefits. Travel all over the world on our tax dollars even if they aren't conducting Senate business. I recall many years ago chatting with a Senator on a flight to Barbados and while I was in the long lineup with the commoners he was going through the short lineup designated for residents and diplomats. He told me he was on official business but I also knew the Canadian High Commissioner and when I mentioned this to him he laughed and said, "What a joke".

On my recent travels to South Africa there was a retired Senator from Manitoba travelling with us. I enquired about his retirement package. Besides a nice fat pension for life he still enjoys his travel perks so, folks, you and I were paying for his travel and, I can tell you, it is not cheap to travel that far.

Now we have Senator Mike Duffy grabbing headlines by gathering at the already crowded Senate money trough. But you gotta hand it to Mike. He is a fairly new Senator, but it didn't take long for him to realize that he had just won the lottery without buying a ticket. Although he has lived in Ottawa for years, he claimed that his principal residence was in an Atlantic province which meant he could charge for living expenses in Ottawa. A bit of investigative reporting by a member of the press who chatted with folks in that community revealed that they hadn't seen Duffy there for years.

When interviewed, Duffy said that Canadians knew his record and how he respected their tax dollars. So much so that I hear he has sent a cheque to the Senate finance committee paying back about \$42,000 he had received illegally. Bet there was a large tear in his eye. But Duffy is not the only one. Two other Senators are coming under the gun as well. Newly appointed Mac Harb, who lives not too far from the Parliament

Buildings, was charging a residence in Quebec which, I understand, belongs to his son. Then we have Pamela Wallin who racked up so many travel expense dollars one wonders how she ever had time to attend any of the sessions.

Pressure has caused the Senate to take action and call for a review of the expenses of all Senators - they never thought of this procedure that is common in private business - and guess what. They will be audited by a member of the Senate. Now don't get me wrong. This could be a completely legitimate audit. But wouldn't Canadians feel better if an independent accounting firm was called in to look at the books rather than one of their Senate cronies.

So is it any wonder that PM Harper has strong support with Canadians as he tries to get away from Senate appointments being given to party hacks and have all Senators elected instead of appointed. And also they would have to run for re-election the same as Members of Parliament, provincial members and those who take seats on our municipal council.

But all is not lost. Recently the *Toronto Star* published a brilliant web site which contains photos of all the members of the Senate. Just place your cursor on a photo and up pops info on that Senator, especially their expenses. You may want to share it with friends across Canada. Here is the web site. It may be advisable to have a few cold ones before doing this so you will be relaxed and won't blow your top. http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/02/15/senate_finance_data.html

Important that we be fair. When you go through the list of Senators you will notice that Senators who were appointed because of their interest in the environment and other important social issues are among the lowest in using travel and other perks they are entitled to. That should tell you something about those who want to make a difference and those who see a Senate appointment as a lifetime of financial security.

Appreciated the response I received from my report on a wonderful trip through Africa and mentioning that, like me, it was top of their bucket list. Over the years I have written about my many travel experiences that I have been fortunate

to enjoy, and it is good to know readers enjoy sharing in my travels. Many asked about photos and the best I can offer is a wonderful website that I use called Picture Trail. For those interested, just go to <http://www.picturetrail.com/hstemp> and go through the 'African - 2013' albums. There are more to be added when I get time.

Back to the trip, and something I noticed on one of our bus tours was that none of the vehicle windshields were splattered with bugs as we suffer here in Ontario. However, along the medians on the divided highway was a continuous line of beautiful flowers. The bus driver explained that they plant Oleander which are dangerous to flying insects thus no bugs flying around the highway means no splatters on the windshields. Clever, I thought, but with our climate it would never work in Ontario.

Another was the lack of solar panels in a country that has more days of strong sunshine than most countries in the world. The guide explained that they have very cheap electrical power so no need to go to that expense and also the country experiences very strong winds that also contribute to the power grid.

Before travelling to Africa I realized that, besides the beautiful scenery, we would be exposed to what are commonly known as 'shanty towns'. These are large areas of shabby steel shacks which house thousands of Africans who have no incomes and unfortunately the children have no hope of ever getting away from the 'shanty town' slums in their lifetime. What I wasn't prepared for was the vastness of these 'shanty towns'. I expected small pockets but was shocked to see them run about a half mile from the rail tracks and as we travelled along go on for miles and miles. Very depressing. Life is the roll of the dice and I thought there, but for the grace of God, go I. It certainly made me feel very thankful to be born Canadian in Uxbridge.

