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on-ice action

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Cody Storm Cooper/North Star

A pet for good luck

Two-year-old Olivia McKinnon pets one of the huskies before the opening ceremonies at the 28th annual Seguin Mail Run Saturday in Humphrey. About 100 people gathered at the Humphrey arena to see the sled dogs and watch the opening ceremonies of the annual event. New this year was a demonstration on the dogs' training and the history of sled dogs.

See more photos on page 2.

Parry Sound is growing

Statistic's Canada releases 2011 population results

BY SARAH BISSONETTE

PARRY SOUND – The town's population is growing.

Statistics Canada released a 2011 census count of the country's population on Wednesday. The figures show Parry Sound's population increased by 6.4 per cent, going from 5,818 residents in 2006 to 6,191 last year.

"I think a lot of it's been the positive attitude that we've been putting forward and trying to promote the town as a great place to live, work, play," said Parry Sound Mayor Jamie McGarvey. "We've been encouraging development and that seems to have worked."

The mayor pointed to two examples, including two new condo developments and denser housing, including four bungalows in a subdivision behind Bowes Street.

Population across the West Parry Sound region was evenly split between growth and decline, with three municipalities growing, three shrinking and one staying essentially status quo. Overall,

West Parry Sound grew by 4.1 per cent. Canada's national population jumped by 5.9 per cent between 2006 and 2011, according to the statistics.

McGarvey said he suspected the town's population was rising before Statistic's Canada released the numbers, partly based on what the town looked like in 2006 compared to today, and because of an increase in provincial funding provided to the town to help with social services costs.

"So now that we have the new numbers we say 'okay, we have actually grown,'" he said. "When the census is done again, the hope is with everything we are doing and working on now we'll have even more growth."

With growth comes increased use of infrastructure, social services and need for affordable housing.

The town has spent millions upgrading water and sewer pipes and roads over the last few years with help from upper levels of government but, said McGarvey, there are still pipes in the ground from 1908.

See 'Population' page 3

Man sues local services board

BY KATE MCCAFFREY

BRITT/BYNG INLET – The latest chapter in the Britt/Byng Inlet Local Services Board versus Fred Holmes and Victor Peter suit is now before the courts.

Amended statements of claim and defence were filed with the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in recent weeks over the long-standing feud between board members and the two area residents – Peter lives in Britt while Holmes lives three hours away in Collingwood, Ontario.

The dispute is rooted in conduct and allegations that stretch back to 2008 when Holmes says he volunteered to assist in putting together a building fund grant application.

In their respective statements, Holmes says he kept in contact with the board regarding the status of the application. The board asserts that Holmes submitted the application without getting approval.

From that point on, documents describe and itemize how relations between the two deteriorated and veered wildly off-course in the years that followed this initial falling out.

Between 2009 and 2011, Holmes repeatedly accused the board of mismanaging funds and other improper conduct.

In letters to the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) commissioner, to the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry that oversees local service boards, to the Parry Sound Beacon Star and to the auditing firm responsible for the board's books, lawyers say Holmes repeatedly accused the board and its auditors of improper governance, impropriety and financial mismanagement.

Shawn Rae, the board's secretary at the time and one of the individuals named specifically in Holmes' libel suit, says he needed to resign from the board after volunteering for more than 10 years, and initiate his own personal proceedings against Holmes in an effort to make the accusations stop.

(Rae says Holmes continued to make phone calls to the OPP, Rae's employer, even after ministry auditors cleared the board, saying there was no evidence of the board misappropriating funds.)

According to the statement of defence in this case, ministry officials and the OPP told the board on several occasions that it was operating properly and that no criminal conduct had taken place.

The ministry stated this officially in June 2009 and again in September 2011 following an official audit.

The point at which lawyers became involved appears to have arrived in the summer of 2009.

At that point, according to their statement of claim, Holmes and Peter say a waste water study presented by Rae and entered into the meeting minutes, was vengeful, malicious, defamatory and stated that Holmes acted in ways that were unlawful, fraudulent and threatening.

Holmes says Rae did this to discredit him and hold him up to public ridicule.

Early in the following year, the board discussed at a public meeting the possibility that it might retain legal counsel to commence proceedings against Holmes (who says the board has no civil right to do so).

During the discussion, the board's chair, James Lewis, read a position statement that discussed freedom of speech and its limits: "You cannot cry out fire in a movie theatre when there is no fire," and goes on to say that "people cannot go about repeating falsehoods that they know or reasonably ought to have known are false."

"When the same allegations are repeated over and over and over again, without any foundation and having been fully answered by all government authorities, then the attacks are malicious," Lewis told board members and residents gathered at the meeting.

In its defence, the board says the statement was part of an important public debate about the role of the board and its ability to perform, uninhibited by Holmes' conduct.

Moreover, they say the statement was privileged, a direct response to Holmes' actions, and was made during the ordinary course of proceedings, as part of their duty to communicate information to the local community.

See 'Board' page 3

Long-gun registry shot down in Ottawa

BY ALISON BROWNLEE

Barring a veto by the Senate, the abolition of the long-gun registry is a done deal.

Ending the Long-Gun Registry Act passed its third and final reading in the House on Wednesday night, with a 159-130 vote, and is now sitting with the Senate.

Parry Sound-Muskoka MP Tony Clement voted in favour of abolishing the controversial registry along with rest of the Conservative majority and two New Democrats members.

All other NDP, Liberal, Bloc Quebecois and Green MPs voted against the act.

"This is a moment that I and many Parry Sounders and Muskokans have long waited to see," said Clement. "After doing nothing to reduce crime, wasting taxpayers' dollars, and unfairly targeting law-abiding citizens, the registry is now headed for the scrap heap."

Beth Ward, executive director for YWCA of Muskoka, said her organization is strongly opposed to the abolition of the long-gun registry.

"We were passionately supportive of the gun registry because of our profound knowledge of the dangers and risks that

rifles and shotguns pose to women who experience intimate partner violence," she said. "We are opposed to dismantling the long-gun registry as a safety issue for women and children."

Ward said her organization wholeheartedly agreed with comments made by William Blair, president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, in which he stated that Canadians should not be diverted from the issue, which is one of safety.

Blair said the registry made the country safer and has saved lives. Losing the registry, he said, was at the peril of those who live here.

Ward noted the YWCA made a public statement to the House of Commons standing committee in November that the registry embodied core Canadian values of good governance and peace.

"We are not a nation founded on the right to bear arms, but we are a nation founded on the precepts of peace, order and good governance," she said.

Women are incredibly vulnerable, said Ward.

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Cody Storm Cooper/North Star

Speeding snowmobiles

A snowmobiler tries his luck at the South Seguin Radar Run, a fundraiser for the South Seguin Snowmobile Club at Horseshoe Pines Marina Saturday. About a hundred snowmobilers were on hand to try their luck on the frozen waters of Horseshoe Lake to see how fast they could take their sled down the ice. Some snowmobilers hit 95 miles an hour (about 152 km/hr).

See more photos page 6.

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28th annual Seguin Dog Sled Mail Run



Cody Storm Cooper/North Star

Above, Colleen Heibeen, of Carling Township, is the first musher of 12 to leave from McCarr's Road for Rosseau with the mail Saturday during Seguin Township's annual Dog Sled Mail Run. The starting point was moved from Humphrey this year due to poor snow conditions; above right, Liz Antochin, from Orillia, runs dogs Rambo, left, and Ty, in a demonstration on how the sled dogs do their job in Humphrey that morning; below, Roberta Stave, from Palgrave, ON, received her mail bag during the opening ceremonies in Humphrey; below centre, a dog named Natasha retrieves a dumbbell for owner Pat Pitche, of Sutton West, ON, in a demonstration showing how well-trained the sled dogs are; bottom, a husky receives pets from a spectator.



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