

## LETTERS

## Thanking the science table

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Science Advisory Table, including Dr. Peter Juni.

This committed group of doctors and scientists served with honesty and integrity. They provided reliable evidence-based information that Ontarians could trust. The protection of the people of Ontario was paramount. The group spoke truth to power and did not bend to the wishes of Doug Ford to keep Ontario open for business. The Science Advisory Table refused to deny the facts of COVID-19. As a result, hundreds of lives were saved.

The Conservative government has stated that the Science Advisory Table has not been dissolved. It has been brought in-house under the Department of Public Health. Whereas, previously, it functioned independently within the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, it will now be under Ford's thumb. It remains to be seen how the new Science Advisory Table will function if and when we are confronted with another wave of COVID. Will their recommendations be based on science? Will we be able to trust that this new team will place our protection above the wishes of the premier?

All Ontarians owe a debt of gratitude to the dedicated and hard-working members of the Science Advisory Table.

Hinda Levine, Hamilton

## Voters, remember this

As someone with a lot of affection for the Beasley neighbourhood, I read Mr. Van Dongen's article about delays to the Cannon Knitting Mills project with frustration. Something that ought to be top of mind before heading to the polls on the 24th is how much more patience we are prepared to extend to an increasing number of troubled developments while the need for housing only grows.

Scott Fairley, Hamilton

## Dredging must go ahead

I am in favour of cleaning up pollution. That includes both our land and water. I would paddle a canoe up Chedoke Creek if it meant getting the attention of the city to start a cleanup.

But wait a minute. The city has already agreed to start dredging and remove tons of pollution from the creek before winter sets in. The fact that members of a Haudenosaunee group constantly impede the startup of this project is counterproductive. If this is a political play or a power play, it is not the right place or the right time. We need this pollution cleaned up and are on a strict deadline. If the project is delayed due to daily visitors it may end up costing the people of Hamilton dearly in provincial fines. That is money that could be spent in better areas. The city is also overly defensive by saying it cannot start dredging. Put up "Enter at your own risk" signs and start the dredging.

Andy Price, Ancaster

## 'Pickles' comic strip hits home

You would swear Brian Crane resided in our home. Both my husband, Bob (Earl) and I comment daily on who he is writing about. It's usually Bob. Love it!

Janice Funay, Beamsville

## Listen to hospital workers

Composing a letter to recognize excellent care in a local hospital should be simple, right? However, I've debated for several weeks and why? Certainly not because of a bad experience. On the contrary, I must commend all the medical professionals who cared for me before, during and after a serious surgery last month. Each and every one went above and beyond to support my recovery. Yet in this fraught political climate, I hesitate to promote a "business as usual" viewpoint when the hospital system is so clearly threatened. During my short stay, I saw nurses called upon to work in unfamiliar situations because of staff shortages. I heard of measures being implemented to sanitize because of COVID outbreaks. I learned that surgeries were cancelled because there were no beds. It is past time to listen to those who have kept the hospitals operating in the face of cutbacks, wage freezes and inadequate staffing.

Susan Nelan, Dundas

## Spare us the tax cut drivell

Haven't Franco Terrazzano and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation heard about recent events in the U.K. where the new prime minister and her government were lambasted for putting forth big tax cuts when its financial regulators are trying to rein in high inflation? One observer likened that to simultaneously stepping on the brake and the gas. The federation seems to have gotten so caught up in its never-ending campaign to prevent government from spending on any public need that it has gotten lost in some looney-vibe of its own imagination. Might not The Spectator give us all a break from such drivell?

Roy J. Adams, Hamilton

## But he'll take the money

Parti Québécois Leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon wants to sit in the National Assembly, but is refusing to swear allegiance to the King. I'm confused — he has no problem accepting \$128,000 with the Queen's face on it.

Gary Johnson, Hamilton



HAMILTON BIKE SHARE

Hamilton's bike sharing program works at ensuring that equitable access is a priority.

## Expanding bike sharing access in Hamilton

JULIA HAMILL  
AND SONJA MACDONALD

By now, most of us are familiar with the Hamilton Bike Share system. We see the stands of blue or white bikes parked throughout the city, and see neighbours enjoying them along streets, trails and bike lanes.

Bike Share came to Hamilton in 2015 and surveys of early riders noted that their main use was for commuting and running errands. As the system grows, it has proven to be an integral part of Hamilton's public transportation system.

One of the challenges of the Bike Share system, like all forms of public transportation, is encouraging and ensuring that a broad diversity of people, ages, genders, cultural and racial backgrounds, as well as physical abilities and incomes can access this public resource.

In that vein, the Everyone Rides Initiative (ERI) has been Hamilton Bike Share's equity program ever since bike share launched in Hamilton in 2015, with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation between 2019 and 2022. ERI is dedicated to making bike share more equitable by removing the barriers that prevent people from accessing bikes, which can include cost, access, language, and education.

To measure the program's success, ERI conducts annual rider surveys to better understand who is using the program, what they gain from it, and what can be improved. Civicplan worked with ERI to ana-

lyze and report back on three years' worth of survey data from the program (2019-2021), the results of which highlight some interesting trends that emphasize the importance of this program.

In terms of ERI riders, there was a relatively balanced spread of ages identified among respondents between the ages of 19 and 55. The majority of riders identified as male (58 per cent), with close to 40 per cent identifying as female. In 2021, 26 per cent of survey respondents identified as Black, Indigenous or a person of colour (BIPOC).

Some of the most promising trends that emerged from the surveys were the changes in riders' behaviours and perceptions from the introductory survey to the follow up survey, six months later. For example, 81 per cent of respondents indicated that after six months of using ERI, cycling was their primary mode of transportation.

Additionally, after six months, 46 per cent of respondents indicated they cycled weekly, while another 30 per cent indicated they cycled daily.

As the study period occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, ERI riders were asked a series of questions specific to their preferences and uses of Bike Share in light of physical distancing restrictions. The majority of respondents in both 2020 (64 per cent) and 2021 (68 per cent) indicated that their need for Bike Share increased due to the pandemic. Respondents

shared that the value of ERI — particularly during the pandemic — supported better mental health, contributed to their physical well-being and ability to renew and maintain social connections, and allowed them to get around the city safely.

While those who currently use ERI demonstrated the importance of Bike Share and access to this public transportation infrastructure, 63 per cent of respondents in 2020 also noted that without the ERI program, they would not be able to continue to use the Bike Share network.

Hamilton Bike Share has become a central part of the public transportation network throughout the city. While there is still more to be done to expand the service to more areas, one important element of the Bike Share system has been the Everyone Rides Initiative, which has allowed a greater diversity of residents to access this means of transportation.

Without the support of ERI, this community of committed riders would not be able to continue to use the system that offers them so much in terms of safe mobility, as well as physical and mental health benefits.

JULIA HAMILL IS PROGRAM MANAGER OF THE EVERYONE RIDES INITIATIVE OF HAMILTON BIKE SHARE. SONJA MACDONALD IS PRINCIPAL WITH CIVICPLAN, A HAMILTON BASED COMMUNITY PLANNING AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FIRM.

## Imagining your own funeral



THOMAS  
FROESE  
OPINION

"Be well." This is what I said to my students.

It was after a recent class. Then they left for the various corners of their lives. We'd just unpacked "Cathedral," a story by Raymond Carver. He often wrote about broken characters, broken in ways that Carver himself was broken. "Be well." Then they were gone.

Be well like those people who imagine their own funerals. No, really. They're out there. I just learned of a woman who took the time to also write her own obituary. Two actually. One fantasy obituary. One not. She was looking at her life honestly to make changes.

It's on my mind like Thanksgiving leftovers or something for Halloween. Since spring, I've attended four funerals. Two friends are now also in end-of-life care. So, when I've had nothing better to do, I've now done it. I'm now one of them, an imaginer of my own funeral. There's my pine box. People gather. The wind blows.

Providing you're not overwhelmed by such thoughts, the exercise is essentially a good one. It

can help change your direction. Your future. It can also help ground you in today, giving context to your life. It's not a distraction from reality. It roots you deeper in reality. It's completely humbling. This is what the science of thanatology, the study of death, shows.

No, there's nothing like your own impending death to wake you up. One friend who's in chemo-palliative care, my wife's best childhood friend, Beth, said as much at a recent wedding. She spoke on the miracle of birth (that tiny pencil-dot of life, a fertilized egg later emerging, somehow, as a fully-developed baby), then the miracle of love, then the miracle of, yes, death.

"I live alongside a rather bleak prognosis, and can attest to the fact that the idea of dying 100 per cent improves my experience of living," she told us wedding guests. "I'm overwhelmed by the daily luxury of ordinary events. My breakfast, for example. This is seriously the best toast I ever ate. And don't even get me started on people."

This was her tribute to the bride and groom. Thank you, Beth. This is what death's miracle does. It opens a certain splendour into your days. Studies show that if you take a minute to jot down even a few things you're thankful for, daily, your neuropathways will rewire. You're awakened to the truth of it,

that all moments are key moments.

You may not leave a relationship, move to Peru, become green, or set world records rowing solo across the oceans. Or maybe you will. The woman who wrote those two obituaries? She's Roz Savage, a Brit, who did these things. Did that bring her life upheaval? Of course.

Then again, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Universities can especially be reminded of this because it's easy for students to believe the creeping untruth that what doesn't kill you somehow makes you weaker, that you should avoid anything uncomfortable, any pain, even perceived pain, (good luck with that) at all costs. Studies on resilience show the opposite is needed, some life pushback. With World Mental Health Day recently coinciding with Thanksgiving, it's a good season to consider it all. Any season is.

Getting back to Carver, his work is one reminder that we're all broken in one way or another. Cracked pots, really. So if any light is going to shine through us, it will only shine through the broken places. This understanding is another sort of death, a laying down, to help live a more authentic life.

One day in Washington State, near the ocean, I stood at Carver's gravesite. After a long road of alcoholism and other troubles, he'd turned his final years around. Then his tombstone epitaph: "And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so? I did. And what did you want? To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth."

This too is something.  
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