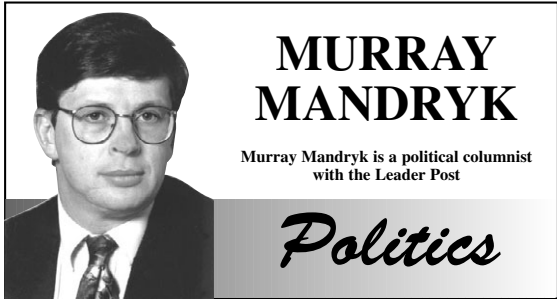


SMA awards show rural Sask.'s vibrancy



MURRAY MANDRYK

Murray Mandryk is a political columnist with the Leader Post

Politics

In some ways, it may not be fair to single out St. Walburg — winner of two Saskatchewan Municipal Awards this year.

St. Walburg truly had a remarkable entry. Even more remarkable was the fact that it had already been judged the most sustainable community in the world at a prestigious United-Nations sponsored event in London, England last year. But what is even more remarkable is the fact that a lot of communities and rural municipalities that entered this year's SMA awards were nearly as good.

Take the rural municipalities of Gull Lake, Carmichael Webb and the Town of Gull Lake that finished second to St. Walburg in the SMA's Community Development Leadership category for their non-profit senior's housing complex.

Or consider the rural municipality of Kindersley that won the Municipal Service Excellence award for its rural water pipeline that's providing safe, potable water to area rural residents. Kindersley beat out six other competitors, including the Town of Carlyle that finished second for creating a special projects co-ordinator to seek out and apply for funding opportunities.

Then there was the village of Buffalo Narrows that became the province's first northern community to win an SMA award in this, the contest's second year of existence. Buffalo Narrows, for its formation of an economic development corporation, won the SMA's Economic Development Leadership Award. It beat out five other entries, including the RM of Britannia that was the runner up in the category for developing an orderly plan to meet the needs of heavy oil exploration.

In the Regional Leadership and Partnership Award category, the joint entry from the towns of Rosthern, Duck Lake, Waldheim and Hague, the village of Laird, the RMs of Rosthern, Laird and Duck Lake and the Beardsy's and Okemasis First Nations won for their joint rescue unit. The entry from the four towns, village, three RMs and two First Nations bested five other entries including the runner up from the RM of Canwood that set up a First Nations relations committee to work co-operatively with the Big River, Mistawasis and Aktahkakoop First Nations on building better access roads.

And in perhaps the most competitive category, the Environmental Stewardship Award, the town of Canora's source water program won for taking steps preserving their municipal water — deemed the best-tasting municipal water in Canada. Aided by strong recommendation from Ducks Unlimited, the Canora beat five other entries including Coronach's recycling program and the runner-up from the Town of Fort Qu'Appelle that underwent a complicated sewer treatment facility relocation.

Coming from every corner of the province and extensively involving RMs, villages, towns and First Nations communities, it was exceedingly difficult for the judges to choose from the quality entries in several categories. This is something I can attest to first-hand. Along with former Regina city manager Bob Linner, successful businesswoman and consultant Holly Hetherington, award-winning Harris RM administrator Jim Angus and a lady you might have heard by the name of Lynda Haverstock, I again had the honour of again serving on this year's judges' panel.)

As strong as all this year's entries were, our panel deemed the St. Walburg entry to be outstanding and awarded it the Judge's Award. Its sustainable community concept gave all 850 residents a voice in the development of the community from its walking path to museum to its economic development initiatives.

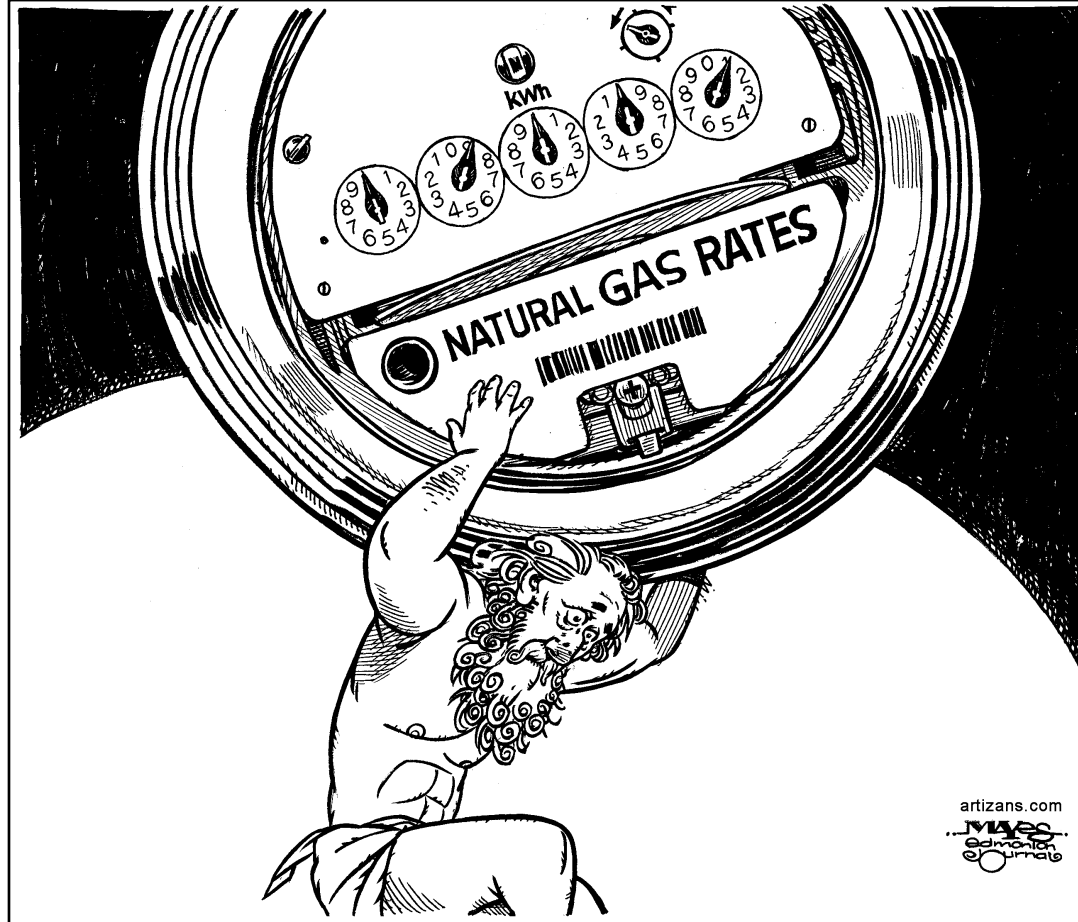
Perhaps St. Walburg councillor Tony Leeson put it best when he told the Leader-Post's Kerry Benjoe after the big win that message we should all get out of this is rural Saskatchewan is anything but a lost cause.

"Rural Saskatchewan is the most under-rated part of Saskatchewan," said Leeson, who was instrumental in the town's entry in the International Awards for Liveable Communities. "We tend to write it off as hopeless, helpless happenings and we're just waiting for little rural communities to die out one by one."

"What I'm trying to prove is that: 'No, it's just as vibrant as anything.'"

Judging by this year's SMA awards, Mr. Leeson appears to be right.

Murray Mandryk has been covering provincial politics for over 15 years.



Atlas burdened by high Natural Gas Rates

◆Editorial◆

Economic growth makes city plan essential

In what seemed to have become an on-again, off-again saga, it was good news for Yorkton and area Friday when James Richardson International (JRI) Friday that its board of directors had voted to proceed immediately with construction of the canola crushing plant initially announced in the fall of 2006 (see story page A1).

The initial announcement in '06 of course created a huge buzz in the city, and in the province, especially because it followed within hours by an announcement Louis Dreyfus Canada that they too would build a canola crushing facility here.

There were of course many who expected the dual announcements might be simply posturing for position, with one company, or the other, eventually deciding to abandon the project, or move on to a different locale.

Considering it took until this spring before Louis Dreyfus had equipment on site, and the fact JRI had taken a step back to reevaluate and re-crunch the dollar numbers, there was a definite time of uncertainty in terms of just what might end up being built here.

So now that both plants are moving forward, the region can look forward to the huge benefits first thought about in 2006.

Up front there will be the construction jobs as the two plants are being built through into 2010.

Then, more importantly will come the permanent jobs, in the neighbourhood of 120-plus between the two facilities, and the spin-off things such as added trucking opportunities. Those are the jobs which will have the long term impact on the community in regards to buying homes, paying property taxes, having children attend school, and buying day-to-day

goods and services in the years ahead.

It will be interesting to see just how the plants impact the city now in the short term. Yorkton is already experiencing an overwhelming demand for residential property, to the point the city is scrambling to bring lots on line to feed the demand.

With 120 new jobs on the not so distant horizon, the current frenzy for property looks like it will continue.

That will put some added pressure on the City in terms of residential development, and overall growth.

Mayor Chris Wyatt has already publicly stated the City is in negotiations with the neighbouring rural municipalities of Orkney and Wallace to annex a significant chunk of property into the city, an area which would for example include the JRI plant location. Those talks are going to be vital to the City's ability to take advantage to the current interest in the area. However, annexation talks are not always smooth, so it will be critical the sides here find common ground quickly, or investment dollars could be lost.

We already see a community like Saltcoats moving to study opening a new subdivision (see story page A1), and while regional growth helps the city, it simply shows Yorkton must respond now, or the dollars to invest in new housing, and the following sales can easily move down the street.

It will now be up to the City to get their plan for development moving on the eve of the canola plant workers needing homes, and with an eye to the continued likelihood of even larger developments such as a potash mine nearby remain a definite possibility.

Experience yields respect

Going to try out the RCMP's training simulators was interesting and fun.

It also makes me feel something rare.

I'm fascinated both by technology and learning about the work that other people do. I guess I like the first because I really enjoy change.

One thing I have appreciated in journalism has been the enormous changes brought by technology. It has provided constant opportunity to learn new things as well as preventing the staleness that sameness generates.

I know, too, that most of the change has been good. If you don't believe me come look in our files and compare the appearance of the newspaper to what it was in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and even 1990s.

Every year newspapers look better. I give the credit to computer pagination and digital photography.

When we placed waxed galleys of type on pages we hoped to get them exactly straight. It didn't always happen.

In computer pagination things are always straight and



ANN HARVEY

Where good things happen!

that gives the newspaper a crisp professional appearance. And, it's easier to wrap type around the photos, making pages more attractive.

In analogue photography we snapped the photos and hoped we got at least one good one. With digital technology we can check and except for the occasional photo that isn't sharp enough, we have the photos we need.

My interest in the work other people do isn't too surprising. Curiosity is (or should be) a job requirement for journalists.

Unfortunately learning how things work tends to generate cynicism and disrespect among journalists.

Policing, firefighting and any aspect of our courts are my favourite beats. I'm not unusual. Check out TV programs. Those occupations always draw audiences.

I anticipated participating in the RCMP training simulators would be fun. It was. The firearms and driving simulators were challenging and interesting.

What surprised me was my reaction to the use of force simulation. This presented scenarios in which officers must assess situations which will require use of force and decide what action is appropriate.

In the 21 years since I first got to cover crime and policing I have tried to understand police work. I have observed them on ride-alongs before Canadian police stopped that practice. But, although I knew that police are the people who go to the danger everyone else would avoid, I never really felt what they feel.

Standing in the simulator, expected to deal with a thuggy looking guy who was swinging a chaining and speaking belligerently, I got it.

The rare thing I feel is profound respect for police.

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