



Photo by Sam Brown

Teachers at Bayside Secondary school stand on the picket line during a day-long strike on Tuesday. For more photos, see page 4.

Teachers hold one-day strike

By Sam Brown

Classrooms of public and separate secondary schools alike were quiet across the Bay of Quinte on Tuesday, as Catholic and Hastings and Prince Edward District high school teachers spent the day on the picket lines.

It was the sixth strike organized by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, or OSSTF, since negotiations stalled with Premier Doug Ford's government back in December.

"We're out here to support public education," said Keith Sled, the vice-president of OSSTF District 29, who was present during the picketing at Centennial High School in Belleville.

Teachers and supporters could be seen marching around the perimeter of

schools wielding re-printed signs that read 'No Cuts to Education', or congregating between walkabouts at the main entrances with hot beverages, space-heaters and sometimes music.

"We're out here to protect public education so the students that come to Centennial or any of our high schools in Ontario today get the same education or better education than people in the past. Not a hollow vision of what it was," Sled said.

The day-long strike by OSSTF teachers on Tuesday represented one part of a rash of rotating strikes by unions across various school boards that began on Monday with the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, or ETFO.

Elementary school strikes continued throughout the week, while the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association,

OECTA, had all school boards across the province closed on Tuesday along with the selection of OSSTF boards.

Some of the major proposals from the provincial government that the unions find problematic are cuts to public education, increasing class sizes and online courses (e-learning). Criticism of the proposals was echoed by teachers across many schools.

"E-learning being mandatory and larger class sizes are not going to help kids learn," commented Paul Clair, a business and history teacher as well as the branch president of Bayside Secondary School.

His colleague, Rich Long, a math teacher at Bayside and treasurer of OSSTF District 29 added. "We want to get these cuts reversed. Actually, we will get these cuts reversed."

"The idea of e-learning and increasing the numbers of students that are actually taking that is not good," English teacher and Eastside Secondary School branch president Cathy Woodley said. "Those are kids without teachers in front of them, helping them through the course content."

Last week, Education Minister Stephen Lecce posted a statement on the planned job action which is available on the Ministry of Education website. Both the minister and the teachers' unions appear to blame each other for ultimately inconveniencing the students.

In the statement, Lecce chastised the OSSTF, claiming that "it is unacceptable that the OSSTF would ramp up strike action at a time when high school students are preparing for exams."

And he added that he would "continue to focus on reaching voluntary agreements with the teachers' unions, so Ontario students stay in class where they belong."

On the other side, teachers have claimed that they would rather be in the classrooms with their students than on strike.

"Every teacher out here, every education worker out here would rather be in that building working with kids," Long said.

The unrest among all four unions is the first time in 20 years that all of Ontario's teacher unions have committed to job action protests simultaneously.

To see more about the strike, go to: <https://vimeo.com/loyalistphotoj/jan21teacherstrike>

Families continue protests of autism cuts

By Jonathan Matthie

Parents from all over Ontario bravely came together in the Bay of Quinte riding to face the harsh nip of winter weather this past Sunday to protest recent cuts to their children's crucially needed autism therapy program last December.

Those at the protest said it was a small price to pay in contrast to negotiating what they call the seemingly cruel and hard-hitting brunt of a provincial government's cold shoulder.

A shivering group of protesters began to warm with momentum at the street corner of Bell Boulevard and North Front Street, chanting that MPP Todd Smith lied about changes to the autism program, as cars streamed by, honking horns in approval.

"Needs Based Therapy! Needs Based Therapy!" a chorus of voices proclaimed, as a procession of protesters split away from the main group to cross the adjoining intersections, carrying homemade signs indicative of their objections to what they say are unkept promises to facilitate an updated and more sustainable needs-based treatment plans for children with autism by April 1 of this year.

Right, left, right, sets of feet plodded together, back and forth and back again, along the snow-covered curbs, unified in a standing march demonstrating their defiance of the odds. In reality, more likely because their feet were already beginning to feel that creeping pinch of below-zero temperatures, and the burn of a 28 km/h rising wind-chill.



Photo by Jonathan Matthie

Tony Stravato leads protesting parents Tina Penelope (far left) and Lisa Devine (holding photo of her sons), with his megaphone in a "Needs-Based Therapy!" chant on Sunday.

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Protest...

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Tony Stravato led Sunday's protest with his bright orange construction jacket and megaphone. "Stop dehumanizing our children!" he emphatically proclaimed through the loudspeaker. According to Stravato, it is no longer a matter of arguing diplomatically. Protestors say there has been a breach of trust and a general lack of respect from the province towards families who require a continuous and ongoing needs-based therapy program for their autistic children. And until these requirements are properly acknowledged and not ignored on a fundamental level, a new strategy is necessary, they say.

"The reason I'm here today is because my children have, up until now, been fortunate enough to receive ABA (Applied Behaviour Analysis) therapy. And they are having amazing gains with it. But the effectiveness of the program is suddenly being wholly understated by the Ford government. And now, not only are new initiatives being delayed, what we have available in the interim is just being taken away. We need an interim strategy in place now, not later."

Protests like Sunday's event began immediately after a devastating announcement last year on Dec. 17 that — rather than extending ABA therapy sessions for another six months as initially promised — previously approved families will immediately no longer have access to regularly scheduled sessions at all after April 1 2020, or their current contracts expire. The news left many families feeling betrayed and in tears, reeling from what they considered unkept promises.

Bay of Quinte MPP Todd Smith, who currently serves as Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, previously assured families last year in mid-August that his office was working hard to develop and inevitably balance all changes under a new transitional program, slated for 2021. The Pioneer contacted Smith's office for comment, but the call was not returned by deadline.

The complete upheaval, then sudden upcoming closure of the ABA therapy program in its current form, has been overshadowed by a lack of progress reports since this announcement. This time, however, it has

fuelled a fire in the hearts of parents and supporters across the province. Barrie, Cobourg, Oakville, Kingston, Oshawa, Whitby, Ottawa, Toronto, Picton and Belleville were just some of the Ontario cities participating in this second Bay of Quinte riding protest hosted by the Ontario Autism Coalition.

The realities of loving and living with someone on the autism spectrum take many shapes and forms. When it comes to finding support, the challenges have likewise continued to involve waiting and negotiation.

But the one thing that never changes

is love, that nurturing commitment that a parent has for their child, that son or daughter, just as special in the case of one diagnosed with autism as it is from any parent with children not affected by similar obstacles.

Stravato is the father of twin boys, Rocky and Roman, both autistic. "I'm here to fight for my children. But also, for all other children with autism because this is a medically necessary therapy that should never be taken away from any of them. We need this fixed. Now."

Stravato also notes that many concerned parents have tried to work alongside their local MPPs, with little success.

"We have the money, and we have the recommendations. We've had the meetings, and the round-tables, we've had all the discussions. There's just no reason this should take until April 2021. It should be now, but they changed the timetable."

"We chose Belleville because the ball was in Todd Smith's court. But he hasn't kept his promises, and he hasn't taken us seriously," says Stravato. "So, we will continue to crash street corners with protests, and gather momentum with local constituents, until he starts listening to us. We'll keep doing it, the same thing, once a month, twice a month, whatever it takes."

"By telling us nothing now, it's just more of the same. I don't want to be out here. None of us do. The last thing I want to do is take time away from my family to be protesting. But this therapy, it has been life-changing for my children."

"I've seen what it's done for them, firsthand. And, if I don't do this..." he trails off for a moment. "I just cannot stand back and see other children not receive it as well. But with all these changes, our time—our children's time — is running out. And that is totally unacceptable."

Parents and advocates say the ABA program in its current state is certainly not a perfect system. It has forced parents and their children to subsist on waiting lists sometimes two to three years long before approval. Some have even waited as long as four years, and they say that these autism therapies are even less effective than if a child begins them at a much younger age.

Despite these problems, the program has assisted over 8,000 children in Ontario — children who not-so-simply depend on such well-structured and intentionally repetitive therapies now, in order to have progressive results within so many aspects of their young lives. These are things most others would take for granted, ranging from behaviour and communication, education and comprehension, to self-confidence levels and generally more balanced lives at home with loved ones. See the parents at the rally at:

<https://vimeo.com/loyalistphotoj/autismrally>



Photo by Jonathan Matthie

Andrea Yagminas travelled all the way from Ottawa to stand in protest with Ontario Autism Coalition protesters in Belleville. "I'm very lucky that my son, who is five years old and on the spectrum, is in therapy service now, and we also have family support all around us," she says. "Other people give up a lot more than I do to be here."

Centre offers warm, comfortable place to go

By Sam Brown

As overnight temperatures dropped severely late this past week and through the weekend, the Victoria Avenue Baptist Church in Belleville was opened as a warming centre for those looking for some respite from the cold.

Once the fire department determines that weather conditions are sufficiently cold, which is a standard for the region set by Environment Canada's extreme cold alerts as below -15 degrees Celsius or -20 with the wind-chill, they make the necessary arrangements to open the centre.

"We monitor the weather, and then we look at the forecast and then we arrange for the security staffing and the supplies that go down, such as the coffee and the water," Fire Chief Mark MacDonald said.

From eight at night to eight in the morning, off of the Pinnacle Street side entrance of the church, a spacious room was set up with folding tables and plenty of chairs for people to get comfortable. Members from the Not Alone Team, a local group that advocates and provides aid to the homeless, were in and out of the shelter all night, bringing copious amounts of food and warm and cold beverages for the clients.

The number of clients who use the shelter varies, said MacDonald, adding they have had as few as four or five people and other nights more than 20.

Two shelter locations were formerly set up in the front foyer of the Belleville Public Library, as well as the transit building. But because of certain problems and circumstances, the city, co-operating with Pastor Richard Smith, announced back in November that the shelter would be run out of the Victoria Baptist Church.

"One reality was that the foyer was becoming quite crowded, and the library was a stop-gap measure, but in the end, it really didn't suit the needs that well and then of course with it closing at eight and then the library opening up at nine, there was this congestion that occurred between the warming centre closing and the library opening," MacDonald said.

"So we felt that it would be better to have a standalone facility that is specifically designed as a warming centre



Photo by Sam Brown

Billy-Joe Woodcock (right), one of two security staff on shift at the warming centre, helps client Jacob Stanzel make some repairs to his bike. In the background her colleague, James Francis (sitting) talks to another client.

and we're certainly very grateful to the Victoria Avenue Baptist Church for offering that."

While the move to the church location was intended to be an improvement over the library, there are still significant considerations that need to be made.

"Our hope is that they would have the warming room be a consistent open resource for people. Eight p.m. to 8 a.m. every day," Debbie Mora, a member of the Not Alone Team, said.

"The problem is with the population we're working with, a lot of them

don't have access to the Internet, so if they're out in the community, how do they know that today the warming room is open? It's trying to get that information to individuals that need it," Mora said. "That's the problem. When it's not consistent, it's difficult."

Two security officials on contract with the city remain at the location all night to sign people in and ensure the shelter runs smoothly.

Including the opening of the centre on Monday, the shelter has been opened 11 times at the church this season, and currently serves as the

only warming centre in Belleville, aside from the Grace Inn Shelter on Church Street.

However, despite the necessary and anticipated opening of the dedicated Grace Inn Shelter, the numbers at the church shelter have not declined.

In fact, according to MacDonald, the numbers have increased, indicating the importance of providing options for people in need.

"Interestingly enough, our numbers elevated after the Grace Inn opened. Our numbers have consistently gone

up and stayed higher since the Grace Inn opened compared to last year and early this year."

MacDonald said that based on talking to some of the clients that have come to the warming centre, they have indicated that they find it too restrictive to be confined inside the building for the duration of the night.

"I would've thought the trend would've gone down, to be honest. It kind of surprised us that the statistics show that the usage of the warming centre has gone up since the Grace Inn Shelter opened."



Photo by Sam Brown

Picket signs are planted in the snowbanks by the front entrance of Centennial Secondary School.



(Above) Tents are set up at the entrance of Bayside Secondary School for the crowd of teachers that gathered for the strike. (Left) Faculty of Eastside Secondary School stand beside a table of posters and signs.

Photos by Sam Brown

Couples come out to plan for big day

By Gagandeep Sarangal

The 14th annual Quinte Wedding Show, which is the largest wedding show in the area, was held at St. Theresa Catholic Secondary School in Belleville on the weekend.

It is the most talked about wedding show in the whole Quinte area. The show is organized by Brooke Miller of Runway Bridal and Amber Hardy of Exclusive Invites, who have been hosting the show for over eight years and doing two shows a year for about four years. This event had 75 vendors from across the Quinte area.

Miller, the owner of Runway Bridal and co-host of Quinte Wedding Show said, "It is a great opportunity for engaged couples to come and meet all of the professionals in the area who can help them plan their wedding. Some they may not have known about otherwise."

The fees for a vendor to attend the show were \$400, which they say was very reasonable. Some of them were even spending over \$800 for props and free food.

"It cost around \$450 to book a stall for this show, but it all pays at the end because I get many customers from here. I have been here five to six times before and it is good," said Faith Payne, manager of Lashes by Faith.

Justin Hazlett is a red seal certified chef for Bustini's Catering and has been a part of this show for five years.

"A lot of people come here. If you go to other wedding shows in Quinte, they are not even half as compared to this show. It is easy to access and is straight off the highway, which makes it easy for vendors to get stuff here," said Hazlett.

This show attracted people from Belleville as well as from outside the Quinte area. Caroline Bingley owns a Floral Design shop called Caroline's Organics & Floral Design in Campbellford, Ont., and been in business for the last 20 years. "I've been doing it from 7 years. More people like to come here because of the better prices of this show that attract more brides. The weather wasn't really good, but you have to pay for this show six months in advance, so I had to make



Photo by Gagandeep Sarangal

Nicole, Lovebirds Bridal boutique vendor, chats with a group of people at the Quinte wedding show at St. Theresa Catholic Secondary School last Sunday.

it," she said.

There was a large list of sponsors for this event, offering many giveaways during the show. Also, Organizers also gave away 100 free bridal swag bags.

All the giveaways were drawn through

a lucky draw at the show. The biggest giveaway was \$1,000 cash to one lucky bride or groom at the end of the fashion show. For that special giveaway, there was a checklist to follow.

"They have to have completed our

show passport by visiting all of the vendors and then we draw five names to compete for the \$1,000. Usually, we do a cake smash to get the winner. It is a lot of fun. People love watching it," said Miller. This year's \$1,000 prize was won by

Harper, who attended the show with her sister who is soon to get married.

"I just can't believe it," said Harper. "I'm just shaking and can't believe that I won \$1,000. I am going to give this money to my sister for her wedding."



Photo by Matthew Syriac Elias

Peter May, founder and president of Research Casting International, conducted the Hastings County Historical Society's first presentation of the year at Maranatha Church. May talked about his company's work in recovering fossils and building prehistoric skeletons for museums all around the world, giving a fascinating insight into paleontological restoration.

Company creates pre-historic exhibits

By Matthew Syriac Elias

The Hastings County Historical Society kicked off 2020 with an enlightening session by Peter May, founder and president of Research Casting International.

May graduated from the University of Guelph, majoring in sculpting. His first job was with the Royal Ontario Museum in 1977, where he worked on restoring dinosaur fossils. During this period, he says, he learned the most about fossil preservation and restoration of skeletons through moulding and casting. Ten years later, May found himself working his spare time doing cast work for museum projects. Eventually, it got so busy that May moved left his position, and delved

into his private venture.

The presentation was given Tuesday evening at the Maranatha Church.

May founded RCI over 33 years ago with a team of four, and has since worked on numerous projects across the globe in every continent, except Antarctica. His company's work includes fossil excavations, skeleton restoration and mounting, life-size pre-historic reproductions and exhibitions.

Since 2007, RCI has been functioning out of their mammoth sized 48,000 square-foot facility in Trenton. RCI's team currently has 40 technicians, and is undoubtedly the largest dinosaur restorer around. The facility has earned its reputation thanks to state of the art scanning machines, fossil preparation and storage

facility and of course, expert craftsmen.

"If it gets quiet, we take a blacksmith and put them along with casting so they learn those skills too. We might take someone from casting and put them in a foundry. I have a great pool of employees," May emphasizes his employees having a can-do attitude, as there's a new challenge every day.

"It's important knowing how good the staff are, and how far you can push them. There is a challenge in it. That's what makes the job so good."

May says the work is very sensitive, and takes meticulous planning and patience throughout the process, from the excavation to presented skeletal piece. The final product has to be assembled with extra care and craftsmanship, because it will be

on exhibition for many years.

"The preparation can be a little bit tricky. You have to have...very soft hands, and skill. Something you might be working on could be one of a kind, the only one discovered."

"Little bit of pressure there," laughs May.

RCI had a hand in almost every pre-historic skeletal presentation showcased in museums around the world, ranging from Dubai to China to London, to right here in Ontario.

The Royal Ontario Museum in Ontario has been and continues to be a long-time collaborator, working on numerous skeletal presentations of dinosaurs and recently, the largest animal to live on Earth, the blue whale.

May says the blue whale project in 2014 was one of a kind, after nine rare blue whales tragically got trapped in ice and died, and then were later found washed up off the coast in Newfoundland. A two-year recovery project was kicked off, with RCI included, and was finally on display at the ROM in 2017.

Although it is not commonly known, May has had his share of influence in pop culture too. Back in 1993, May got in touch with Steven Spielberg during the production of *Jurassic Park*, and end up producing the T-Rex skeleton on exhibit in the movie.

"It's the only time a work of ours has broken down and demolished," May jokes, referring to the climax scene in the movie.

HealthIM will help police in time of crisis

By Matthew Syriac Elias

"What it does... is saves lives."

Belleville Police Chief Ron Gignac addressed media representatives at the Belleville Police Station on Thursday, regarding HealthIM, a recently launched program that is aimed to improve response times for issues regarding mental health.

HealthIM is a software company based in Kitchener, Ontario that supports police interactions with individuals suffering from unmanaged mental health challenges in a state of crisis. Founded by University of Waterloo graduates, the company aims to combine clinical evidence-based instruments to support front-line patrol, such as the police, in providing an informed and empathetic response to crisis calls.

The program is jointly funded by the Government of Ontario and the University of Waterloo along with various incubator programs.

Gignac highlighted that Belleville is the only municipality in Ontario that has implemented HealthIM.

"It's a big deal. We're the only municipality to use it, and purely through funding from the government and not from taxpayers."

The mental health assistance service has been active since Oct. 29 of last year, and its effectiveness was proved immediately.

"Every 15 minutes, if it takes 10-11 police offers to be on a case, there are

only two to three officers that are available for a mental health patient. This means less community safety overall. HealthIM is here to change that."

Gignac said that action is important and the police service's primary objective, rather than talk or thought.

"It's what we're here for. To make a change."

"We're not going to be able to save or help everybody, but there are those who we will be able to make a difference for and change the lives of themselves and their families for good," said Gignac.

Inspector Sherri Meeks has been active in implementing the program.

"The goals at the time of implementing HealthIM were to decrease apprehension, decrease wait times and to increase collaborative referrals through addictions and mental health agencies."

The primary objective was to tackle wait times. In 2017, when ideas to implement the HealthIM service started, data surveillance by the police showed that average wait times were two and a half hours. Bringing down such a high number was planned.

"As of the 16th, the Belleville Police have received over 78 calls utilizing HealthIM, with 26 per cent apprehension rate and an average wait time of one hour and 20 minutes. A smaller apprehension rate of mental health patients meant that the app is more effective in deciding how to handle the situation, rather than



Photo by Matthew Syriac Elias

Belleville Police Chief Ron Gignac talks about Health IM, an online service that can aid police respond to mental health cases in a quicker and more effective manner. "It saves lives," emphasized Gignac. Photo by Matthew Syriac Elias

"Over 14 calls have been referred to Addictions and Mental Health, which proves the effectiveness of the service," Meeks was happy to announce.

Meeks also pointed out that one of

application's best features is that program will assist officers in determining the best environment for the person in crisis.

"If a trip to the hospital is required,

the system will give vital information which can help health care staff prepare better for treatment."

HealthIM was adopted by only 17 municipalities during its launch period in 2015-2016, and since has gone up during past two years. As of last Thursday, it has been adopted by 31 police services in Ontario. The program has been very effective in cutting down wait times, by up to 50 per cent.

So far, Belleville Police have received over 78 calls utilizing HealthIM. Over 14 of those calls have been referred to Addictions and Mental Health, through the referral feature of the service.

The Pioneer asked Meeks how the service would impact students of Loyalist College and teenagers generally, considering the population that attend college.

"Absolutely. If they're dealing with us or if they have a crisis or they're struggling with mental health or any addictions, contacting us using HealthIM will help assess the situation and take them to the appropriate place, be it the hospital or another agency."

Meeks said that children's mental health problems have been identified as a dominant issue too and must be dealt with.

"I have got in contact the executive director of children's mental health, to try get them on the app with us. Having more referrals would surely make the service more effective towards all kinds of cases."



Photo by Jonathan Matthie

Special Const. Mark Chapelle buys baked goods from Jackie Tapp on the farmers' market Thursday morning. Tapp and husband Paul McDonald set up throughout the winter. Tapp has been working at the market for over 30 years, and husband McDonald has been alongside her for 17 of those years.

Market looks to warm future

By Jonathan Matthie

For over 30 years, even during the cold bite of winter, Jackie Tapp has proudly served fresh goods and other wares to both locals and travelers alike visiting the Belleville Farmers' Market.

With her spouse, Paul McDonald, who has worked alongside her for 17 of those years, she tends her tables during every season, serves as market manager on its board of directors, and has, in many ways, become one of the most friendly and recognizable faces in the downtown core.

Over the years, Tapp has seen many people come and go, and certainly a lot of changes. She says some have been beneficial to Belleville, some have not.

"In the past, between the '80s and '90s, for example," she says, "there used to be several 'really big vendors' who would come to the farmers' market. With really big trucks, even bigger than the one I have," Tapp visualizes, spreading her arms wide.

"They used to run around Toronto and get skids of melons, skids of peaches, and skids of...," she trails off, "and just... dump it all on our market—which back then, was where the bus terminal is now—and sell cheaper than the local farmers."

Tapp has long-contended, when such a so-called vendor scavenges products at wholesale cost in such big quantities, they cut into everybody's prices. It is a business strategy that typically does not reinforce positive economic health. And it had that same effect on Belleville at that time.

"When they did that," laments Tapp, referring to what were once called 'terminal'

vendors, "it was really a slap in the face to the grower that is really trying hard, to grow on their own, trying to make a living and make a dollar on their stuff, which benefits both their families and the community, as a whole."

With a bid by company Taskforce Engineering recently approved during a unanimous city council vote, redevelopment changes to the site of the Memorial Arena next door, will soon be underway. Tapp is hoping that the advantages of proposed affordable housing and possibly an indoor merchant environment will add to the trickle-down economics, bringing more people to the area which, in turn, may also benefit the market vendors.

According to Tapp, the Memorial Arena used to share a special connection with the Farmers' Market, and Tapp says she would like to see that again.

Tapp and McDonald share a son together named Anthony, so Tapp is also more-recently invested in the ideal of seeing any new resurgence to the economy that would benefit the market, and a newer, younger generation of vendors, along with visiting families and especially children, teenagers, and students.

"When the Memorial Arena still had hockey tournaments playing there, it brought in a lot of children too, and this played a bigger part in local commerce, you know. Parents and kids, they eat, right?" she queries, knowingly.

"Baskets of apples and potatoes, and many fun things to eat out-of-hand, like cookies and candy. Rain or shine, snow or sleet, children were everywhere, asking for treats from their moms and dads

shopping the market and drinking hot chocolates and coffee. You can still see that, to some degree, on a Saturday afternoon. But it's just not the same. All that stuff, it sold so much better when they were around.

"We do get good spin-off to the market when there are seasonal events happening, of course. Like the upcoming Savour The Chill soup-off festival," says Tapp.

Last year, special event co-ordinator Susan Walsh of Belleville's Chamber of Commerce hired cosplay performers from Fantasy Fables Princess Parties, in Burlington. Dressed-up as Disney's Frozen characters Anna and Elsa, they interacted with onlookers at the local Armouries and also walked through the Farmers' Market. This addition naturally attracted the attention of many residents and children at the event.

"It's nice. On days like that, the community feels alive again," says Tapp. "But there are only so many events in a year, right?"

Tapp typically navigates seasonal obstacles one day at a time. When it comes to warmth throughout the day, she uses portable heaters.

"We have a 'Mr. Heater' — a double-burner, little buddy unit that we got at the local TSC, on Dundas. It's a nice one and really throws out a lot of heat — if you shut the truck right down, it can get quite warm inside the back cabin with the back door closed," Tapp confirms.

"We also have a second heater, for when it's super-cold. It's just one of those top-mount things that connects to a propane tank: a back-up in case you just can't

keep it warm enough with the first. When you're waiting on customers, that door is open a lot, right?" she chuckles.

"You lose a lot of heat during these times, so you have to have sufficient heat coming out of those units. Otherwise, you're not going to be able to keep your truck, and goods consequently, above zero."

During winter, outside of a few better-prepared vendors like herself, it can often be a difficult for Tapp to rally many of the others together during the more disagreeable weather conditions. High wind chill doesn't really lend itself to the most comfortable afternoon of shopping for customers, much less for the vendors who need to stand outdoors, often for up to several hours.

When significant snowfall hit Belleville this past weekend, Tapp regretted that while she is normally prepared for large amounts of snow, even she was not ready for the larger, significant drop in temperatures that blew through Eastern Ontario. The market is normally open all year-round, every week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. However, Tapp opted to cancel this week's run, until Thursday, maybe even Saturday.

"It was past -20 below, early this morning. I tried but I had the worst time keeping my truck from freezing-up, even with two heaters. We need to get the inside of the truck to at least zero again before we start out. Then we have to actually drive to the market, and we're travelling at about 80-100 km/h, same -20 drop, even before the wind-chill is factored in.

"It's worth it on Saturdays, sometimes

on Thursdays. We have a lot of regulars who come for certain items every week," she affirms, "but, on a Tuesday, no. Absolutely not. Unless you have an established customer base, you're not going to make enough money, just sitting out there, freezing your pants off. On top of that, perishable products will also freeze, and waste. I understand how the other vendors feel, during weather like this," Tapp empathizes, concerned. "This morning, even I was scared I'd freeze part of my load before I arrived. It's warmed up a bit now, though. We'll be there Thursday, for sure."

Tapp shifts her thoughts back to the recent development bid and what that means for Belleville. "Regardless of the time of year," she notes, "more indoor businesses surrounding the Market Square, and more people with a roof over their heads in this area of town? That will be a blessing to everyone." Brainstorming openly, she continues, "I think about all the good things I can remember about the Farmers' Market in the past. I believe they would all come back, and more, if we just had more traffic coming through. But they need to visualize the downtown core as a safe, friendly and especially hospitable environment. That will attract more vendors, too, if they see that. Tapp concludes in a prediction that almost seems like a warning: "If a potential vendor shows up and they see the amount of traffic we have, the amount of mainstay vendors here, right now? It's 2020. I've been selling here since 1990. And it does not look good. They would probably just walk away."

New law puts squeeze on snake owners

By Caleb Seguin

A local reptile store owner has banded together with other Ontario pet shop owners to put up a united front and fight a new provincial law which will ban all pythons and Boa constrictors in the region.

Rob Robert and the other shop owners say they will be fined and these reptiles will be euthanized if they have the snakes in their stores once Bill 136 becomes law. Rob Robert is the owner of Tyrannosaurus Pets, which has two locations: one in Belleville and one in Trenton.

The Ontario government presented Bill 136, on Dec. 5, 2019, which is called the Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act.

These new regulations are going to control how the province allows and disallows specific animals in Ontario. Government officials say this bylaw is beneficial because it allows them to respond quickly to any oversights, by modifying the rules, for example, if they have forgotten an animal that they deem to be dangerous. The bill will not have to be amended, because it will be modifiable.

The reptile store owners don't see a problem with that aspect of the new regulations, but they do feel that they are not being represented in the conversation regarding legislation about animals that are allowed and disallowed.

The store owners say the Ontario government has taken a lot of input from animal rights groups in this province, but they neglected to do their due diligence on getting input from pro non-traditional

veterinarians and professionals in the reptile industry. This is a concern of the people who are signing a local petition, which will be sent to the MPP for this region.

Bill 136 will affect a multitude of people in different ways, such as reptile pet store owners who will be forced to stop the sales of snake food and other accessories that people in the community rely on to sustain their animals. It also will have an effect on people who currently have pythons and boa constrictors in the region, because they would essentially be outlawed.

Robert says that 30 to 40 per cent of his sales are for non-traditional pets like snakes. Therefore, the law would really impact the store's livelihood.

Hollywood movies like *Python* and *Snakes on a Plane* have contributed to fears/phobias of snakes, continuing to give these cold-blooded animals a negative reputation. In reality, snakebites on humans are fewer than bites from common, everyday animals.

For comparison, there are about 500,000 dog bites recorded in Canada per year, according to *The Globe and Mail*. In contrast, there are only 100 snakebites recorded per year.

It's not that reptile owners are saying snakes are not dangerous. There was a fatal accident in New Brunswick in August 2013 where two young boys were strangled to death by an African rock python. Although this was Canada's first-recorded snake-related death, it sent shockwaves throughout the country, and created calls for legislation like this, focusing on non-traditional pets and their



Photo by Caleb Seguin

Rob Roberts the owner of Tyrannosaurus Pets in Belleville holding a Boa constrictor that could be outlawed by Bill 136 in Ontario.

owners.

Robert says, "People need to not make decisions on the fact that they might not

like a certain animal, because not everyone likes your cat either. So, the reality is, making a political decision based on what

animals we can and cannot have, based on your fear or dislike of an animal, is unfair to someone else."



For Gerald Bongard, owning the Stephen License bicycle shop, started in 1918, has always been a family affair. Bongard runs the shop with his son Kevin, his grandson John, and their corgi dog Rudy. "I tend to believe that, learning and navigating this experience through a small-town, family environment, 'purchase' is only one element, but it's not the necessary element. People come for the social camaraderie relationship, we still have people who just stop in to shoot the breeze, to see how we are, come to see our dog (Rudy the corgi), they just come in when they're having a poor day, and just want to talk."

Photo by Jonathan Matthie

Small business owners call Belleville home

By Jessica Munro

Follow the stream of the Moira River to the Bay of Quinte. Located east of Toronto and situated halfway between the big city and the nation's capital, Ottawa, is Belleville. The community has approximately 50,000 people who call the small city home.

Belleville is full of entrepreneurs and business owners. In the downtown core, Belleville is home to over 200 shops, restaurants, galleries and other arts and leisure stores, surrounding Front Street, according to the downtown district's website.

Many of the downtown business owners have been there for years.

Lisa Morris, the owner of Artists and Artisans Gallery and Studio has been selling her merchandise at the Belleville Farmers Market for 10 years, before finally deciding to move indoors to her new store just over a year ago on Bridge Street East, next to Funk and Gruven A to Z, which has been around for many years.

"Because I'm an artist and (my partner) Peter Paylor is a playwright, it's important for me to be connected to downtown," Morris says. "We have solo shows in the first room, and we put

chairs in there so people can come and hang out. You can bring your lunch and come hang out."

The Belleville Chamber of Commerce has a strategic plan for businesses in the city. The plan includes a four-step plan to grow membership through a recruitment and retention plan; to role model sound business practice, and to be the voice of business. The fourth and final step of the plan is to demonstrate sound non-profit governance.

The city of Belleville is known for many things, including its business efficiency. The city's website states that Belleville boasts the best combination of business growth and sustainability.

Vasilios (Billy) Argiris and his family own and operate the restaurant Greek Oasis on Bell Boulevard.

Argiris says, "People prefer Ma and Pa's," says Argiris. "They get to know about us, and we get to learn about our customers. It adds a human element that large chains can't provide."

"Meeting new people is always a good thing," says Morris. Every other month the studio hosts a new artist, as well as selling the work of other artists throughout the store.



(Above) Janet Phillips and her husband have owned The Bookstore on North Front Street in Belleville for over 30 years. Janet said, "It's funny how I used to give lollipops to these kids when they came in with their parents to get books. Now those same kids are parents who bring in their kids to get lollipops while they themselves look for books."

Photo by Caleb Seguin



Mike Malachowski pictured in his antique store Funk & Gruven A to Z. Since 1998, Malachowski has been gathering oddities and collectibles for the Belleville community.

Photo by Alex Filipe



(Left) John Irvine, owner of John's Hair Quarters in downtown Belleville, poses for a photo. John has been cutting hair in the heart of Belleville for 35 years.

Photo by Sam Brown



(Above) Aaron Crossen is the owner of Need a Hero? Comics shop in Belleville. He opened this comics shop on March 11, 2011. "I love seeing customers grabbing a new comic that they are so excited for."

Photo by Deepak Sharma

(Left) Vasilios Argiris (Billy) dishes out a gyro pita at Greek Oasis. Billy and his family own and operate the restaurant. "People prefer Ma and Pa, they get to know about us and we get to learn about our customers. It adds a human element that large chains can't provide."

Photo by Damon MacLean