

THE BARRIE EXAMINER

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## comment

## Reviewing a year's worth of progress

With the first year of this council almost complete, it is amazing to look back at all of the things that have been completed and exciting to see those that are just beginning.



Alex Nuttall  
WARD 10

After five years on Barrie city council, I can honestly say this year has easily been the busiest and most invigorating. From the opening of the Mady Centre for the Performing Art, Fire Station One and Eastview Arena, to the beginning of a new wave of development in downtown, the push towards a university for Barrie, and creating a plan for the new southern lands, this year has been busy.

First, we must thank our federal and provincial counterparts for their respective roles in securing funds for the downtown Mady centre, the new fire station and the complete renovation of the aging Eastview Arena. The leadership shown by our respective members of provincial and federal parliament during the recession has helped Barrie reduce the costs that we would have had to incur in future years.

It was truly an honour to lead a delegation to Ottawa and pitch these items to the federal government in 2009, and fantastic to see the results this year due to our close working relationship with MP Patrick Brown.

The future of Barrie is bright with many options and opportunities. However, with these decisions comes great risk. Development in our downtown must be the right type of development. We cannot let developers decide what is best for downtown but must stick to the vision, which was devised by our wise predecessors.

The condos and grocery store development at Collier and Mulcaster is a great example of bringing our vision of downtown to reality. Thank you to former mayors and councillors like Rob Hamilton, who have made our road to success in downtown easier to travel.



We must be ready to receive a university from the provincial government. That may mean investing not only in the future of students and leaders of tomorrow, but in the university itself. A university will help educate our families at home in Barrie, and help to spur on the development of higher paying jobs through partnerships with the city, local businesses, prospective businesses and the university.

With the planning process for our newly annexed lands almost complete, it is exciting to see what will become of our city.

With this growth, our city must hold fast to ensure our employment lands don't become just another 10,000 homes of urban sprawl, as happened in the 1990s. We must be diligent in protecting the rezoning of employment lands to residential and prevent the influx of even more people with no jobs to support them.

As you can see, the challenges going forward are great and require much time and attention. It has been a blessing working with Mayor Jeff Lehman, council, MP Patrick Brown and MPP Rod Jackson this year, but I am sure it will be an even greater blessing next year.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and have a safe time with your family this holiday season.

Alex Nuttall is Barrie's Ward 10 councillor.

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## pointofview

## Let this season's greeting be Merry Christmas

Merry Christmas! There, I said it; and I meant it.

The idea that we, as Canadians, should strip the word "merry" from what is arguably the most religious Christian holiday of the year, and replace it with the safe and benign "season's greetings," "happy holidays" and the like is beyond absurd.

Political correctness continues to trump logic and common sense in too many aspects of Canadian life.

But having no merry Christmas is going one step too far.

Earlier this year, a public school in Ottawa cancelled its Christmas concert, opting instead to hold a generic concert in February.

Meanwhile, two bus drivers from Napanee, Ont., were told they couldn't decorate their school buses with Christmas decorations.

Granted, not everyone in Canada is Christian or subscribes to the faith — only about 77% (the next largest block, about 16%, subscribe to no religion).

But surely we can all get together on "Merry Christmas."

Even the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms references "God," and yet there are those that believe Merry Christmas is

inconsiderate to non-Christians. There are those that believe the majority should cater to the minority who feel their rights are being infringed upon. Really? Too bad. The rights of the majority to wish loved ones and passersby "Merry Christmas" trumps the inconsiderate, out-of-touch minority.

Let's be honest, Christmas, which literally means Christ's mass, is steeped in religious meaning. Hard to get more religious than the birth of Christ.

But outside of the faith-based connotations, today's holiday is a mix and match of folklore, tradition, multiculturalism and commercialism — much of it stemming from pagan beliefs intended to make Christmas accessible to everyone.

Is it any wonder we see advertisements asking us to "put Christ back in Christmas"?

Merry Christmas isn't a bad greeting; it isn't a slur against those whose faith does not follow the teachings of Christ; and it isn't subject to a politically correct debate.

So to everyone everywhere Milad Majid, Kung His Hsin Nien bing Chu Shen Tan, Mele Kalikimaka, Natale hilare et Annum Faustum!, Wesolych Swiat Bozego Narodzenia, Srozhdestvom Kristovym, Merry Christmas — in any language.

— John Chambers

## Honouring the courage and compassion of Arlene McLean

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my long-time staff member and dear friend Arlene McLean, who passed away on Dec. 11.

I first met Arlene about nine years ago at a function held at the MacLaren Art Centre when I was a member of Barrie city council.

Arlene had been a career airline flight attendant who was active in the arts scene and her local church, Collier United.



Patrick Brown  
PARLIAMENT HILL

She possessed an incredible sense of community, a driven determination to get others involved and a deep love of the arts. I instantly liked her very much.

Over the next few years, we kept in regular contact on different local matters and Arlene was ever the dedicated advocate for the arts, local culture and making things better for others.

But I began to notice that Arlene's health was becoming a concern and she shared with me that she had serious circulatory problems in her legs. It was thought that many years of service in the air and the long hours on her feet may have contributed to her struggles.

Her condition continued to worsen, resulting in one of her legs having to be amputated. This would be a serious blow to anyone, let alone someone so fiercely independent and always on the move. But she adjusted, she soldiered on; Arlene kept moving forward.

This was about the same time when I made the transition from municipal to federal politics. Arlene was one the first people to lend her support to me and I will always remember her enthusiastic encouragement with fondness.

She was the consummate organizer and she immersed herself in whatever task was at hand. But sadly, her physical state began to fail her again. This time her other leg needed to be removed as well.

Now confined to a wheelchair and understanding the massive challenge before her, Arlene did what Arlene always did; she focused on helping others to make the adjustment. Arlene came to work for me in my constituency office about a year after I was elected as the Member of Parliament for Barrie in 2006.

She helped constituents with a wide range of issues. She approached her job with enthusiasm, professionalism and most importantly with a sympathetic ear. In spite of having such a 'tough go of it', Arlene was always there to put others first.

Accessibility issues became her very personal mission and she approached it with the same dogged determination that I believe came from deep within her own DNA. To Arlene, 'accessibility' simply meant helping people with disabilities take part in life's activities.

She knew people still had to go to work, to go shopping, to take in a movie or even just ride the bus. She did not want to see obstacles preventing a single person from doing the simple things we all take for granted.

Arlene was instrumental in creating the annual Robert Kerr Accessibility Award, given out to local champions for better accessibility. In my mind, Arlene's legacy will forever be joined in memory with the accessibility pioneer whose name this award bears and their shared courage, compassion and dedication to disabled persons.

Losing Arlene is a terrible loss for her family, friends and co-workers. But it is also a significant loss for the city of Barrie, the community she cared so deeply for.

She is sadly missed.

I hope everyone has a safe holiday season and wish you all a very merry Christmas.

Patrick Brown is Barrie's MP.

## Participatory democracy works on many levels

A recent study indicates that the main reason for the dropping voter turnout is a feeling from non-voters that the political process is unresponsive and doesn't engage them.

One of the solutions I strongly support is electoral reform to a proportional system, where all votes count, instead of creating a class of "losing" votes. But another reform, one which takes place between elections, is participatory democracy. It's something that is already happening effectively in some cases, and should be expanded.

The example I am most familiar with is the Lake Simcoe Protection Act and Plan.

Both the Act and Plan were created through a fantastic process of public consultation and feedback, one I've enjoyed



Erich Jacoby-Hawkins  
ROOTISSUES

being a part of.

In each case, only the barest outline was established before public consultations were held. Under the supervision of outside moderators, various civic organizations came together and brainstormed what the contents should be. Those ideas were then codified into a draft, which went to another series of sessions for revision before finalizing the Act or Plan.

Sometimes public consultation is really just a show, a way to pretend the public is involved

while the lawmakers just do whatever they had in mind in the first place. But, in this case, the regulations truly followed the public input. At the reviews of the drafts, the civil servants who had written the text heard firsthand feedback from the public, and worked with them to achieve clarity or fine-tune the wording to better suit the intent.

It was really an amazing part of the experience to sit face-to-face with the person who had written the phrasing in the draft text, and have that person accept suggested revisions to incorporate into the next version.

At the end of this process, the resulting regulations became law. As a participant, I saw firsthand how the final laws reflected a consensus, where possible, or else a balance of interests. The goals of conservation and sus-

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tainable development were aligned as much as possible, and the regulatory and enforcement mechanisms were based on what the public experts felt would be most effective.

This whole process was government at its finest. Rather than clashing ideologies coming to a head with an ultimate winner and loser, the process was open to all and everyone who took part could claim some victory.

My only complaint is that this process isn't used for all of our

legislation. Too many bills or regulations are one-sided and top-down. I look forward to a day when every major set of laws or regulations, even our annual budgets, are established through this kind of public consultation, with ideological politics left in the dark past.

Erich Jacoby-Hawkins is a director of the Ontario School of Economic Science and Earthsharing Canada. Comment on Root Issues at [www.ErichtheGreen.ca](http://www.ErichtheGreen.ca).

quote  
of the day

The City of Barrie was negotiating in good faith, but we could not come to consensus with the Correct Group Inc. on a number of fronts on the development of the Allandale Station lands."

Barrie Mayor Jeff Lehman