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Community says thanks to veteran school trustee

Former public board chair

BY PATRICIA LONERGAN

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Capital and Vanier wards paid tribute to a trustee who gave them over a decade of service.

On Thursday Jan 11 residents in Zone 9 thanked former board chair Lynn Graham for her hard work and dedication.

Christine Wilson, one of the organizers, said the event held at the Glebe Community Centre was just something nice the community could do for their former trustee.

"She gave up so much of her time for us," Wilson said.

Hopewell Public School's stage band and Lisgar's string quartet provided the entertainment while the board accepted donations in Graham's name to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board foundation.

"I'm really quite overwhelmed by the fact that people would have gone to so much trouble to recognize my years at the school board," Graham said in an interview before the event. "But I'm certainly grateful and very much looking forward to it."

First elected in 1964 to the former Ottawa School Board, Graham represented her zone at the board for 12 years before retiring as chair of the board.

She witnessed a lot of ups and downs during those years.

She saw the local boards amalgamate into the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, reducing the number of trustees and increasing their geographic zones.

"That is certainly one of the memories I'll always have," Graham said of the increase to her zone.

Capital ward was joined with Vanier ward to create a larger school district with schools of varying needs. Zone meetings led to community support, with "schools helping schools," Graham said.

Besides the merger, Graham also witnessed the loss of taxing powers at the local level and changes in how school boards were funded by the provincial government.

In 2002, while Graham was vice-chair and

Jim Libby was chair, a provincial supervisor was assigned to the board after trustees refused to cut special education and pass a balanced budget.

Although Graham and her colleagues faced a number of tough situations, there was also cause for celebration.

She got to see communities stand up for their needs, reach out to other schools, and advocate for public education.

A number of schools marked their anniversaries too. Graham said she attended the 50th anniversary of Robert E. Wilson, a 75th at Glebe Collegiate, and 100th bash for Mutchmor, Lady Evelyn, and First Avenue.

"Those were great celebrations," Graham said, adding the graduations were always a highlight.

Now that she's retired, Graham said she is taking some time to reflect and decide how to become involved in the community. Meanwhile, her passion for education still shows through the pastimes she's chosen.

For the past few months she has been working on a local youth leadership committee. Her daughter is a teacher at Vincent Massey, where Graham volunteers to read to the Grade 2 and 3 students each week.

She has also enrolled in a French conversation course for personal interest.

"It's been said many times, but public education is a crucial institution in any democratic country because it levels the playing field for young people and ensures all of them have the opportunity to reach their potential," Graham said. "I've always had a huge commitment to public education and that will always be with me, no matter what I do."

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School board backs out of film talks

Romantic comedy was set to start production

BY TONY LOFARO

An Ottawa film producer says he feels his TV movie, to be shot in Ottawa, has been derailed by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board after board officials pulled out of discussions to lease him one of their surplus buildings.

Producer Neil Bregman had been in talks with the board to lease the maintenance building on Bronson Avenue, near the Queensway, for *Too Young to Marry*, a romantic comedy he was preparing in partnership with a Montreal film company.

It was to begin shooting there Jan. 29.

During negotiations, he said, he was allowed to move some heavy film equipment into the building after his company, Sound Venture, was forced to vacate the former Lees Avenue campus of Algonquin College, which had been used as a soundstage for the past four years. The Lees Avenue building was recently sold to the University of Ottawa for \$7 million.

Yesterday, a board official told Mr. Bregman the Bronson Avenue building could not be leased as the financially strapped board is looking to sell off surplus buildings to

generate funds to cover a projected budget shortfall of nearly \$28 million.

With a looming deadline to start production and no other suitable soundstage available on short notice, Mr. Bregman might have to cancel the TV movie, the first of about a dozen productions expected to shoot in the city and region in the coming year.

"We sort of had the rug pulled out from under our feet," said Mr. Bregman, upset at the recent turn of events.

He said he began discussions in December with the board, visited the site several times with a board official and even moved over equipment from the Lees Avenue location to the property. He understood the deal — no formal papers were signed — was almost a sure thing as the board was interested in generating funds to cover its looming deficit.

"We thought it would be a formality to get this thing approved and they rejected it," said Mr. Bregman.

"It's bureaucracy. We always knew that it had to be approved at another level," said Mr. Bregman. "All the people I had dealt with in good faith said they didn't think it was going to be a problem and that they had discussed it with the administration people."

He said there were still a few details both parties were discussing, but he certainly didn't expect the deal to be "rejected out of hand with no recourse."

Mr. Bregman said he wanted a one-

year lease with the board, with an option for another year at the site. He declined to disclose the amount of the lease.

Board spokeswoman Maggie Melonhorst confirmed the board has decided to put the building up for sale.

"It's unfortunate for Mr. Bregman, but we're in a situation now that we've got to maximize every available dollar that we can get for our board, given our current fiscal reality," said Ms. Melonhorst.

Teaching staff, special education and transportation were singled out

for potential cuts as the board wrestles with making almost \$27.7 million in cuts in the 2007-08 budget. It faces the shortfall, with no reserves left and no new provincial funding expected.

"Staff feels at this time we need to be in a position to have the most flexibility with that building in order to market it. So it would be problematic for us to have a tenant there. We're trying to find him another facility, but we haven't been successful yet."

She said the board and Mr. Bregman were just "in discussions" and there never was a formal, binding contract.

Dawson College killer scouted other schools

Shooter had routes for other sites; called university 'too big'

BY KATHERINE WILTON

MONTREAL · Dawson College shooter Kimveer Gill scouted out the Université de Montréal, Vanier College and a Laval high school as potential targets before settling on the downtown Montreal college for his rampage, a senior Montreal police

officer said yesterday.

Mr. Gill killed one student, 18-year-old Anastasia De Sousa, and injured 20 others before killing himself on Sept. 13.

Police recovered a notepad from his car that contained hand-drawn sketches of routes leading to all four schools, Cmdr. Richard Dupuis said.

On the page with directions to the Université de Montréal, Mr. Gill had scribbled the words "too big."

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Gill: Columbine served as model

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"There are indications he may have considered other schools," Cmdr. Dupuis said. "Did he go inside (them)? We don't know. They were rough plans he had designed, but nothing too detailed. Just what roads to take to get there."

Police may never know why Mr. Gill eventually settled on Dawson, Cmdr. Dupuis said. But it is clear, he added, that Mr. Gill wanted to replicate the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in Colorado, in which 13 students were killed by two students armed with several guns.

Cmdr. Dupuis also revealed yesterday that police feared Mr. Gill might have shot members of his family before beginning his carnage at Dawson.

After police had identified Mr. Gill's body, Cmdr. Dupuis sent two detectives to his Laval home to notify his parents of their son's death and to gather evidence.

But before they rang the bell, the detectives called the house to make sure his parents were there — and that Mr. Gill hadn't killed them.

When a detective finally spoke to Mr. Gill's father, he learned a reporter had already called with the terrible news.

"The parents didn't know that he was dead or that he was responsible. They were shocked," Cmdr. Dupuis said.

The police force's fresh revelations about the day of the Dawson shooting began Tuesday, when an assistant director of the department, Mario Plante, spoke to a conference on emergency preparedness in Ottawa.

Mr. Plante said that for about 45 minutes after Mr. Gill began his rampage, he was afraid the shooting was part of a coordinated terrorist attack on the city.

Police received reports that multiple gunmen were firing shots at Dawson, at the nearby Alexis Nihon Plaza and at two Montreal hospitals. It took police about eight hours to determine that Mr. Gill, who killed himself after being wounded by a Montreal police officer, was the only gunman.

As the shooting began, Cmdr. Dupuis, Mr. Plante and other senior Montreal police officers were wrapping up a monthly meeting at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel downtown.

As senior commanders raced to the scene, some couldn't communicate with each other because their cellphones failed. The hundreds of calls being placed by frantic students and teachers had clogged the circuits of cellular-service providers.

While patrol officers use walkie-talkies, which are not affected by cellular service problems, senior police offi-

cers normally carry only cellphones.

In the chaos of the communication blackout, Mr. Plante had to send a police officer to find Cmdr. Dupuis in the street to inform him he had set up a command post in an Alexis Nihon Plaza office, where police were forced to use land phone lines.

"People were paging me, but I couldn't respond because the phone wasn't working," Cmdr. Dupuis said.

The overload of the cellphone system that day has Montreal police looking to upgrade their communication systems to avoid a repeat of the problems.

The force has asked its technical services department to investigate ways to beef up the communication network.

Cmdr. Dupuis said the force may buy priority service lines from cellular service providers; these lines would allow police phones to work even in a system-overload situation.

Claude Dauphin, chairman of city council's public safety committee, said yesterday the city will soon begin talking to companies about improving communication systems.

"If there is one thing we should work on in the future, it will be in terms of communication," he said.

"The same thing happened on Sept. 11 (2001) in New York City, which is normal. When everyone wants to talk to their parents or their friends at the same time we have a problem."

Colin Belshaw, director of emergency response support for cell-service provider Telus Mobility, said there is no foolproof way to guarantee all police calls will get through in an emergency.

But having a priority service and increasing the network's capacity increase the likelihood calls will get through, he said.

Mr. Plante refused to say yesterday what changes police are considering to improve the communication system.

"There is work to be done and various scenarios are being explored, but we are not ready to release this information at this time," he said.

Cmdr. Dupuis said that despite the pandemonium that followed word of the shooting, he did not share Mr. Plante's concern that a terrorist attack might be afoot.

"I never thought it was that. I thought it was another Polytechnique or another Concordia mass murder," he said, referring to the killings in 1989 of 14 female engineering students at the Ecole Polytechnique, and the slayings of four people at Concordia University's downtown campus in 1992.

THE MONTREAL GAZETTE,
WITH FILES FROM PAUL CHERRY

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Dan Boudria songe à suivre les traces de son père aux Communes

Le Droit

Fort d'une première victoire électorale en novembre dernier en tant que conseiller scolaire pour la région de Cumberland, Dan Boudria pourrait bel et bien suivre les traces de son père, Don Boudria, en faisant le saut en politique fédérale.

« Je ne peux pas dire non, lorsque questionné sur ses intentions par *Le Droit* hier après-midi. J'ai été approché par de bons libéraux de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. »

Officiellement, le fonctionnaire fédéral est incapable d'annoncer sa candidature pour l'heure, compte tenu de son poste actuel. Il dit vouloir obtenir les autorisations nécessaires à l'interne et sonder son appui dans la région avant de se prononcer. Officieusement, son nom sera sur la liste des candidats d'ici la fin janvier ou au début février.

« Avant d'être fonctionnaire, j'ai travaillé en tant qu'adjoint ministériel pour quatre ministres et deux députés. Je regarde à retourner au gouvernement dans un différent rôle », affirme-t-il, nuançant à peine ses propos.

L'intérêt provient non seulement du fait qu'il a grandi dans un milieu politique, mais de la décision de René Berthiaume de se retirer de la course à l'investiture libérale dans la circonscription de l'est.

M. Berthiaume avait perdu l'Est ontarien au candidat conservateur Pierre Lemieux, par 203 voix. La forteresse libérale de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell s'était effondrée après 44 ans de suprématie.

M. Berthiaume a annoncé son départ à ses proches quelques jours avant Noël. L'annonce officielle doit suivre dans les prochains jours. Son implication au sein de son commerce,

qui vient justement de prendre de l'expansion au Québec, est la raison principale de son départ.

Néanmoins, une règle non dite du Parti libéral déclare qu'un candidat défait doit laisser sa place.

DENIS POMMAINVILLE

Le maire de La Nation n'écartere pas l'idée de tenter sa chance de nouveau, mais Denis Pommainville s'est montré évasif hier.

« On verra. Je reste ouvert. Il y a des gens qui m'en parlent », a répondu le candidat défait par M. Berthiaume lors de la course à l'investiture libérale de la région au mois d'août 2005.

L'homme qui a plus de 20 ans d'expérience sous sa ceinture en politique municipale a aussi martelé que le prochain candidat libéral se devait de posséder l'expérience et les capacités nécessaires afin de « reprendre la circonscription. »

Video game makers target pre-school crowd

Cosmic Family game to help popular Wii pick up wee gamers

BY VITO PILIECI

It looks like the demographic for the average video gamer is about to get younger, much younger.

Ubisoft Entertainment will release a game for Nintendo's new Wii gaming system later this year that is targeted at pre-schoolers between three and seven years of age.

The game, called Cosmic Family, is a space adventure that takes children on a journey with a fictional family in their rocketship home.

"Families will enjoy playing this game together, as it unfolds more like an interactive adventure than a traditional video game," said John Parkes, marketing director at Ubisoft.

The game features animated characters such as the Cosmic family's mom and dad, a lazy cat, two small children and lots of colourful monsters. It features games to foster early learning and mini-games to help young children with memory retention, hand-eye co-ordination and imagination.

The game marks one of the rare times that a video game on a mainstream console is specifically being marketed at pre-school children.

Other devices such as the Leap Pad and Little Leaps by Leap Frog Enterprises Inc., and VTech's VSmile device have been successful in providing pre-schoolers with educational video games for years.

The trend of marketing video games to youth is growing quickly.

"All electronic media is being targeted at younger and younger ages," said Cathy Wing, acting director of education for the Media Awareness Network. "The problem with electronic media is that it is so engaging. Kids can't control their use."

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Teaching tolerance

Canadians of different faiths say education will lead to a healthier, happier society

By NELLY ELAYOUBI, OTTAWA SUN

Raghad Ebied vividly remembers the day she put on a hijab.

It was Wednesday during winter and she was living in London, Ont. She was 15 years old and on the morning when she awoke, she decided she couldn't leave the house before covering her hair with a scarf.

No pressure or expectations came from her family.

"It's an act of faith," the now-22-year-old said. "I'm wearing this badge of honour to clearly say to everyone that I am carrying the banner of Islam."

A Sun Media national poll conducted by Leger Marketing found that 37% of Canadians think wearing a veil is a problem.

"I think people think it's a political statement," Ebied said. "And I think that comes from fearing the unfamiliar and from lack of education and awareness."

Ebied said she wears the hijab simply "because it's me."

Shedding stereotypes

A Palestinian-Canadian who holds an undergrad degree in psychology, she's currently studying for a bachelor of education degree at the University of Ottawa. Her goal is to break down stereotypes that Muslim women are passive or uneducated.

"I find being a Muslim woman in Canada to be a challenge, but it's a sweet challenge," Ebied said.

Awareness and understanding of different cultures, she feels, must start at a young age. When she started wearing the scarf she was greeted mostly with respect by her peers.

Lynn Scott, vice-chair of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, said the board works hard to build respectful and culturally accepting school environments for students starting in the early grades.

Scott also sits on a board ethnocultural equity advisory committee to set up initiatives and programs to enhance acceptance of different cultures within schools.

"It is something they are going to carry for the rest of their lives and I think it's very important," Scott said. "If our

society is going to be a good, healthy, functional society, we need to get along well together."

Rideau High School is one of the most culturally diverse high schools in the public board.

All religious holidays are recognized in a holiday assembly. A prayer room is made available for Muslim youth.

Each spring, the school hosts a multicultural potluck dinner that sees Iraqi, Somalian, Spanish and African dishes served.

The students have an opportunity to showcase their traditional wear in a fashion show the same night as well as music and dance.

"That's the beauty of this place," principal Nancy Girozan said of Rideau High.

"That it's a safe, warm, welcoming school that represents and celebrates all sections of Canadian society."

Public board mulls teacher cuts

By LAURA CZEKAJ, OTTAWA SUN

Teaching positions won't be immune to potential cuts during the upcoming budget session at the public school board.

Up to 200 full-time teaching positions have been suggested for possible reduction in the Management Plan released last week by Ottawa-Carleton District School Board staff.

However, that doesn't mean that up to 200 teachers will be handed pink slips, said trustee Riley Brockington.

"It just means that we may have to eliminate up to 200 positions," he said. "That can all be done through retirements, normal course-of-the-year resignations and people moving to other boards."

The board is believed to have more teachers on staff than the province has allocated funding for, Brockington said.

It's an issue separate from the salary gap -- the gap between what the province is giving the board to pay teachers and how much the teachers are actually paid.

The management plan is not an official school board report, but instead is a preliminary framework of potential cost reduction measures for trustees heading into budget discussions. On Feb. 20, the budget committee is expected to make key staffing decisions, particularly to teaching.



ARCHIVES, Presse Canadienne

Classes surchargées: Québec verse 15 millions\$ aux enseignants

La Presse

Le nombre maximal d'élèves par classe est si souvent dépassé que le ministère de l'Éducation a dû verser 15 millions en compensation aux enseignants en 2004-2005, a appris *La Presse*. Plus de 21 000 professeurs ont touché une compensation un record ce qui prouve que les gros groupes sont fréquents.

Le montant versé en compensation est presque deux fois plus élevé qu'il y a 10 ans, soit 15 millions par rapport à 8,4 millions en 1994-1995. Comparée à l'année précédente, la hausse n'est toutefois que de 112650\$, signe que le phénomène tend à se stabiliser.

«C'est trop, c'est toujours trop, a dit hier Johanne Fortier, présidente de la Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement (FSE). Des classes de 35 ou de 36 élèves, ça existe pour vrai. Il n'y a parfois même pas assez de place pour mettre tous les pu pitres!»

Les maximums prévus 27 élèves par classe en troisième année du primaire ou 32 par classe au secondaire sont déjà suffisamment élevés, selon Mme Fortier. «La population pense que nous voulons ces compensations, mais ce n'est pas vrai. On voudrait plutôt avoir des maximums indépassables.»

Or, il est plus économique de donner des compensations aux enseignants que d'ouvrir de nouveaux groupes. Dédommager les profs de 20 classes de première année ayant un élève en trop

coûte 32500\$, selon la FSE. Créer une classe supplémentaire coûte le double, soit 65340\$.

L'ONTARIO RÉDUIT LA TAILLE DES CLASSES

En Ontario, le gouvernement McGuinty promet de réduire le nombre d'élèves à 20 par classe, de la maternelle à la troisième année. Déjà cette année, la moitié des groupes ont atteint l'objectif. Grâce à l'embauche de 3600 enseignants, l'Ontario prévoit que 90% des classes respecteront le maximum de 20 élèves l'an prochain.

Fait à souligner, un site Internet permet de vérifier le nombre d'élèves qu'il y a dans 30 000 classes ontariennes (www.ontario.ca/classsizes). Pendant ce temps au Québec, il y a de 22 à 27 élèves par classe de la première à la troisième année, sauf en milieu défavorisé où il y en a de 20 à 27.

La porte-parole du ministère de l'Éducation, Marie-France Boulay, précise que ce sont les commissions scolaires qui ont la responsabilité «de créer des classes supplémentaires ou d'augmenter le nombre d'élèves dans les classes». Les 100 millions prévus en trois ans pour l'embauche de personnel supplémentaire devraient permettre «de soutenir et de faciliter le travail des enseignants qui se retrouvent dans des situations de dépassement de ratio», a-t-elle ajouté. Il reste que cet argent qui ne servira pas à

engager des enseignants réguliers ne réduira pas les dépassements de maximums.

«BEAUCOUP DE PHÉNOMÈNES INCONTRÔLABLES»

«Il y a beaucoup de phénomènes incontrôlables, a fait valoir Bernard Tremblay, directeur des relations du travail à la Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec. Les élèves ne viennent pas par petits paquets commodes de 24 pour former des classes. Quand arrivent les inscriptions, on organise les groupes de la façon la plus efficace possible.»

Quatre motifs de dépassement sont prévus à la convention collective: un manque de locaux, un nombre restreint de groupes par école, la situation géographique et la carence de personnel qualifié disponible. «Dans un village, les gens vont préférer avoir un élève en plus plutôt que de l'envoyer dans une autre école située à 15 kilomètres», a illustré M. Tremblay.

«Au lieu de faire l'équation qu'il s'agit d'une économie pour la commission scolaire, je pense que c'est lié au phénomène de décroissance dans certaines régions et de croissance ailleurs, a-t-il ajouté. Il y a plus d'élèves dans Lanaudière ou les Laurentides, mais on ne sait pas si ce sera le cas au cours des 40 prochaines années, alors le Ministère n'autorise pas la construction d'écoles.»