

# The Uxbridge Cosmos

Vol. 19 No. 3

TheCosmos.ca

Thursday, January 19, 2023

Online this week • MusicFest celebrates 30 years • Local artist looking for people's choice votes

## Children's library dedicated to former mayor



**THE BIG REVEAL** - Former mayor Gerri Lynn O'Connor, left, unveils the new sign above the entrance to the children's wing at the Uxbridge Public Library. Joining the celebration are, from left: O'Connor's granddaughter, Layla Dubreuil; daughter Logan O'Connor; Library board chair David Phillips; Mayor Dave Barton.

*Photo by Lisha Van Nieuwenhove*

by Roger Varley

As former mayor Gerri Lynn O'Connor said last Wednesday evening, it is not often she is lost for words. But at a gathering to honour her at the Uxbridge Public Library, she said: "For a hard-nosed b\*\*\*\*, I never thought I'd respond like this. I don't know what to say. I'm stunned."

The event was hosted by library board chair David Phillips, who, although friends with the mayor for decades, alluded to the battles he had

with O'Connor at budget times. He did concede, however, that she was always "very persuasive of the good of the people of Uxbridge."

Regional chair John Henry, who succeeded O'Connor in that role, said that if riches were gauged in friends and not money, "today you are the wealthiest person in Uxbridge," referring to the room full of people who worked with O'Connor over the years and came to join her being honoured. Mayor Dave Barton stated the obvious when he told O'Connor: "You've made a huge impact on Uxbridge."

"The newly named Gerri Lynn O'Connor Children's Library is a testament to her many years of public service and her ongoing support of the library, youth and seniors in our community," Barton said.

O'Connor was first elected as Ward 5 councillor in 1980 and then as regional councillor in 1983. In 1985, she was elected mayor of Uxbridge, becoming the first woman mayor in Durham Region, and was re-elected to hold that position until 2006, when she stepped down. But she came back in 2010 to be elected for two more terms. At the end of the second term, she was appointed chair of Durham Region to replace Roger Anderson after his death until she retired six months later.

In numbers, O'Connor was mayor of the Township of Uxbridge for 29 years, a member of regional council for 31 years, and dedicated 34 years of her life to public service.

During the proceedings last week, or party, as Phillips called it, Phillips and Barton unveiled a plaque featuring a photo of the mayor taken on her last day in office. It will be hung in a prominent position in the lower hallway of the library, close to the entrance of the children's section, now named the Gerri Lynn O'Connor Children's Library. O'Connor was joined by her daughter, Logan, and granddaughter, Layla in unveiling the new sign over the entrance.

O'Connor, visibly touched by the tributes, said her years in office had resulted in many missed birthdays and celebrations and time away from Logan and her son, Todd. She said it was "tough on them being the mayor's kids."

Current and former members of council and senior members of staff were on hand, as well as the fire chief and three previous fire chiefs.

Apart from her councillor and mayoral duties, O'Connor sat as a member of the Uxbridge Cottage Hospital Foundation, and the Markham Stouffville Hospital and Uxbridge Hospital boards. She also was a member of the library board and the Uxbridge Minor Hockey Association.

On the conservation front, the former mayor served as a board member with Lake Simcoe Region, Central Lake Ontario and Toronto Region conservation authorities and spent six years as chair of the TRCA.



# Uxbridge at a Glance

The Corporation of The Township of Uxbridge  
51 Toronto Street South, P.O. Box 190  
Uxbridge L9P 1T1  
905-852-9181 info@uxbridge.ca

## The Township of Uxbridge

Trail Capital of Canada



MORE INFO [www.uxbridge.ca](http://www.uxbridge.ca)

### Council & Committee Meetings

#### Meeting Schedule for January 2023

Thursday, January 19, 12:30 p.m.  
COUNCIL MEETING (Special)

Thursday, January 19, 1:00 p.m.  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
(Budget Meeting)

CANCELLED - Monday, January 23,  
1:00 p.m. COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, January 26, 1:00 p.m.  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
(Budget Meeting)

#### Proclamations for January

- January 21 - Lincoln Alexander Day
- January 24 - International Day of Education
- January 25 - Bell Let's Talk Day
- January 27 - International Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust
- January 29 - National Day of Remembrance of the Quebec City Mosque Attack and Action Against Islamophobia

### Road Closures

- Uxbridge East Gwillimbury Townline from north of Durham Reg. Rd. 39/Queensville Sideroad to south of Holborn Road, East Gwillimbury will be closed for bridge repairs, to 2024.
- Uxbridge East Gwillimbury Townline from York St. 500m south of Ravenshoe Road to Zephyr Road will be closed for bridge repairs, to January 2024.

### Attention All Pet Owners!

Please help keep our community clean by picking up after your dogs, and keeping them leashed at all times other than when visiting the off-leash dog park. Not only is it the responsible thing to do, it's also the polite thing to do. Let's continue to keep Uxbridge a clean and safe environment we can all enjoy!



### Employment Opportunities

Complete details and qualifications required for these positions are available at [uxbridge.ca/careers](http://uxbridge.ca/careers)  
Current Opportunities

**Uxbridge Historical Centre - Curator & Manager**  
Closes Friday, January 20, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

**Tourism Coordinator**  
Closes Friday, January 20, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

**Public Works - Operations and Capital Manager**  
Closes Friday, February 3, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.

**Clerk's Dept - Deputy Clerk**  
Closes Friday, February 10, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.

**Community Services - Summer Camp Supervisor**  
Closes Friday, February 10, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.

**Community Services - Summer Camp Program Coordinator**  
Closes Friday, February 10, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.

**Crossing Guards**  
Resumés accepted on an ongoing basis

**Box Office Volunteers - Uxbridge Music Hall**  
Interested parties accepted on an ongoing basis

*The Township of Uxbridge is an equal opportunity employer in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC). The Township of Uxbridge will provide accommodations throughout the recruitment and selection and/or assessment process to applicants with disabilities and/or needs related to the OHRC. Personal information provided is collected under the authority of The Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.*

### Winter Parking Reminder

No overnight parking on Township streets or in Municipal Lots from 2am -7am



November 1st to April 1st

UNDER MAINTENANCE

**Uxpool Closed for maintenance**  
Dec. 10 - Jan. 22

Pool desk and squash court remain open

### Uxbridge Music Hall

Now accepting bookings for July

Check out upcoming shows at [uxbridgemusichall.com](http://uxbridgemusichall.com)

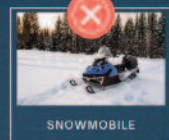
For bookings call 905-852-3081 ext.2



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ATV



SNOWMOBILE

### Did you know...

Off-road vehicles are prohibited on municipal streets, trails, sidewalks or in parks



### 2023 Pet Tags Now Available

Renew your licences on-line at [uxbridge.docupet.com](http://uxbridge.docupet.com)



### INDOOR WALKING TRAIL

January 9th - March 29th  
Mondays & Wednesdays  
Uxbridge Secondary School  
6:00pm-8:00pm

Register on ActiveNet or in-person at the Uxpool

Learn more at [Uxbridge.ca](http://Uxbridge.ca)



Township of Uxbridge documents are available in alternate formats upon request. Please fill out the Request for Alternate Formats Form at [uxbridge.ca/accessibility](http://uxbridge.ca/accessibility)

email: [accessibility@uxbridge.ca](mailto:accessibility@uxbridge.ca)  
phone: 905-852-9181 ext.209

# Skate and pump park need repairs

by Roger Varley

Council received a report Monday stating that the skate park and pump park at the Fields of Uxbridge are both in need of repairs.

The report by Courtney Clarke, manager of parks, trails, and facilities, said the estimated cost of repairs is \$175,000.

Clark said the facilities were inspected recently by the Canadian Ramp Company, which listed a number of items that need attention. It said the pump park needs additional artificial grass around the perimeter to help avoid wash outs and eliminate slippery sur-

faces with sand on the track. It also found that the asphalt surface has small cracks that should be filled to prevent rainwater from entering the base layer and causing damage. The report said the parks department would be able to handle the filling of these cracks internally.

For the skate park, Clarke said there were several concerns, including asphalt undermining, bowl deck undermining and undermining on the quarter pipe. The main safety concern identified in the inspection was the use of the bowl as a "jump box" by BMX users. The inspection recommended blocking the current area they are using with a safety

guardrail and potentially giving users a new ramp in a future phase of the project. The inspection also recommended building a wider top deck that goes around and behind the bowl's extension deck. Clarke said the undermining on the flat surface of the park can be easily fixed.

As per the report's recommendations, the issue will be taken up during budget discussions.

Council meeting moved: Clerk Debbie Leroux informed council that the council meeting scheduled for Next Monday has been cancelled and will be replaced by a special council meeting today (Thursday).

# Bruins stumble into the new year

by Roger Varley

A three-week long layoff, due to a postponed game and the holiday season, does not appear to have been the best scenario for the Uxbridge Bruins Junior C team. In December, the Bruins finished the year with strength, winning four games and losing one. Since returning to the ice Jan. 7, they have won two and lost two, but even the wins were less than satisfying.

The latest win came last Friday night at the arena when the home squad defeated the Little Britain Merchants 4-2, despite the fact the Bruins' passing was terrible. But so was Little Britain's, as two of the Bruins' goals resulted from Matt Gordon intercepting Merchant passes.

After a scoreless first period and with only 30 seconds gone in the second, Gordon made his first interception in the Bruins' zone and raced the length of the ice for a breakaway score while Uxbridge was short-handed. Little Britain responded a couple of minutes later when two Merchant forwards found themselves well behind the Bruins defence and staged a two-man rush on goalie Kyle Groff. Anthony Lamanna regained the lead at the midway point, assisted by Quinn Meek and Peter Kerr and a minute later, Gordon stole another pass for his second breakaway goal. Little Britain narrowed the lead as the period wound down.

In the third, Nic Colangelo combined with Josh Czaliy to finish the scoring on a two-on-one breakaway.

The *Cosmos* selected Gordon as the Bruins' player of the game and gave the nod to Ty Johnston, who scored both goals for the Merchants.

The night before, the Bruins trav-

elled to Clarington to face the league-leading Eagles only to be doubled 4-2. All four Clarington goals were scored on power plays.

The Eagles scored the only goal of the first period. Luke Balkovec tied the game early in the second with an unassisted marker but a couple of minutes later Clarington scored another power-play goal. Kerr, assisted by Czaliy and Lamanna, restored the tie at the midway mark.

However, the Bruins took two penalties within seconds of each other as the period came to a close. That led to Clarington converting two more power-plays in the first minute of the third to round out the scoring. As a result, the Bruins fell six points behind the Eagles in the quest for top spot in the PJHL's Orr Division.

# COSMOS CROSSWORD

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51							52				53		
54							55				56		

- Across**
- 1 Breaks off
  - 5 Boat or car perhaps
  - 8 Cleaning bar
  - 12 Gad about
  - 13 Shoulder \_\_\_
  - 14 Cheer
  - 15 Looking up to
  - 17 Miller, for one
  - 18 For the most time
  - 20 Invited
  - 23 Passe
  - 25 Writer
  - 26 Recesses
  - 30 Couple
  - 31 Sandy hills
  - 32 Mischievous fairy
  - 34 Like some straws
  - 36 Clear the \_\_\_
  - 37 Ocean
  - 38 Papa
  - 40 Capable of being influenced
  - 44 Rough
  - 47 Like some experiments
  - 51 Most populous continent
  - 52 Truck weight measure
  - 53 Facts and figures
  - 54 Face up to
  - 55 Ready, \_\_, go
  - 56 One-dish meal
- Down**
- 1 Victorian, for one
  - 2 Consent
  - 3 Beaver's work
  - 4 Look happy
  - 5 Washer cycle
  - 6 Be undecided
  - 7 Perimeter
  - 8 Devious
  - 9 Profitable rock
  - 10 What you don't ask a woman?
  - 11 For each one
  - 16 "Maggie" singer Stewart
  - 19 Our boys
  - 20 Disposed
  - 21 Stitches
  - 22 Boy Scout training subject
  - 24 Apprehension
  - 26 Vessel
  - 27 It's the loneliest number
  - 28 "Lady in \_\_\_"
  - 29 Glided
  - 31 Screen on a measuring instrument
  - 33 Cooking method
  - 35 Ditto
  - 38 With low light
  - 39 Caustic substances
  - 41 Puts on a show
  - 42 Sole supporter?
  - 43 Camping need
  - 44 Farm butter
  - 45 \_\_\_ and abuse
  - 46 Not live
  - 48 Mouse catcher
  - 49 Wore away
  - 50 "Alfie" star Jude \_\_\_

# Our two cents

## Their lips are sealed - much to our chagrin

In her column on the opposite page, Lisha Van Nieuwenhove addresses the frustrations she felt when trying to find out about threats made against a school that her daughter attends. Last week, we reported on a threat made against Uxbridge Secondary School.

In both cases, reaching out to the Durham Regional Police Service and the schools involved was an exercise in futility. Indeed, as Lisha points out, calls to the two high schools resulted in the Durham District School Board sending the identical email in response to our inquiries. There was absolutely no information included in either email.

We understand that the identity of minors must be protected, but there were (are) questions we believe parents would like to know the answers to. In the case of USS, did police determine whether the youth involved actually did have access to any guns? Was the youth released on bail and, if so, what conditions were placed on him? Is the youth to be allowed back into the school system? What protocols are in place to protect our schools and the students? We don't know - and parents don't know - because neither the DRPS or the DDSB are saying *anything*.

As for the DRPS, it's difficult to get any information out of them. There was absolutely nothing about the school threats on their web page. A few days ago, a reader informed us there was a police incident in Coppins Corners involving about seven police cruisers and a chase of a suspect through the bush. One resident was even told not to leave her house during the incident. But there is nothing on the DRPS web page, we didn't see any public service messages on Facebook or Twitter and, once again, residents are left in the dark about what is happening.

Regional council is currently engaged in putting together a new budget. As part of that budget, DRPS will be receiving about \$245 million, an increase of about 5.4 per cent. Would it be too much to ask that some of that quarter-of-a-billion dollars be spent on an information officer or two who would keep the public informed, who would answer queries from the media and provide updates on matters of continuing interest and *public safety*?

We assume the Durham school boards are also in the throes of budget preparations. Would it be too much to ask the same of them? The DDSB does have a "Communications and Public Relations Department." What are they doing? There should be someone providing real information, considering that the elected trustees, who, presumably are answerable to the electorate, don't seem to be that willing to engage with the public.

We haven't yet reached the horrendous shootings that seem to be a weekly occurrence in the United States, but there have been several incidents in the GTA recently involving guns. Is it fair to ask parents to meekly send their children off to school if those parents can't be assured their kids are safe? In the age of information technology, why are we so woefully uninformed?

Your Universe


## The Uxbridge Cosmos

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Publisher/Editor: Lisha Van Nieuwenhove 905-852-1900  
Advertising/Sales: 905-852-1900

38 Toronto Street North, Unit One, Uxbridge Ontario L9P 1E6  
E-mail: [Lvann@thecosmos.ca](mailto:Lvann@thecosmos.ca) Web site: [Thecosmos.ca](http://Thecosmos.ca)  
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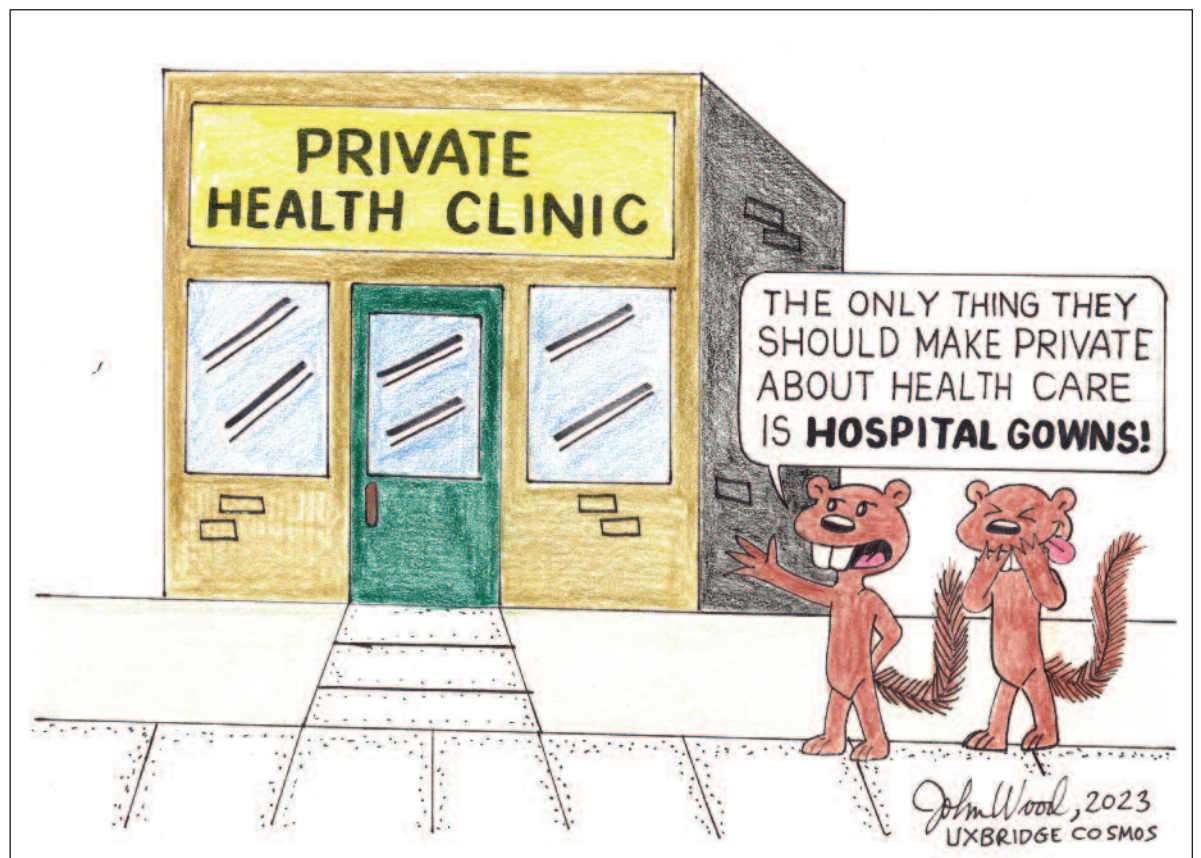
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## Letters to the Editor

Due to the lack of available rentals in Uxbridge, I would like to offer the Salvation Army phone services to all landlords, private homes, (one room or an apartment) or any other place available temporarily or on a long term permanent basis. They are invited to register their phone number, name, location (address), and the expected weekly or monthly rent with Salvation Army so we can assist those less fortunate in our community who need a place to live.

Landlords, private residents - please call 905-852-0090 with your phone number, name, address, rent. We will develop a registry for rentals within the township (urban and rural) to assist those willing to rent out and those who require a place to live.

If you are a person who needs a place to rent, please call leave your name, phone number and the amount of rent you can afford to pay. 905-852-0090.

*Bev Northeast, Chair  
Salvation Army Uxbridge*

My wife and I moved to Uxbridge last August, into a 140-year-old Victorian house. We love this beautiful home in the old part of town.

We fell in love with the entire town as well. We love the downtown, which is two small blocks away, and love the uptown with all the restaurants and stores. We also love the trails and the surrounding area. Both are very picturesque.

But most of all, we love all the people we have met in Uxbridge. Our neighbours are fantastic, the service staff at the stores and restaurants are friendly and caring. When I mention to everybody I meet that we have just moved to Uxbridge they all say, "Welcome!" Then I exclaim to them that everyone in town is so nice, very noticeably nice. What a refreshing change compared to the busy, frantic, stressed-out GTA.

In this paper's editorial last week, it mentioned that a newcomer to town had remarked how friendly the people of Uxbridge are. Well, that's two of us verbalizing how

great you all are.

Two weeks ago, our three grandchildren - Penny, 6, and June and Harvey, 5 (fraternal twins), were over for three days. I walked them to the bookstore on Brock Street. A distinguished-looking gentleman asked if he could have the pleasure of paying for a book for each for my grandkids. All four of us thanked him many times. I re-exclaimed to my grandkids how nice everyone is in Uxbridge.

Now that's two newcomers to Uxbridge that are saying the people are very friendly and very nice!

The distinguished gentleman who graciously paid for the children's books was none other than your very own *Cosmos* columnist Roger Varley.

What a town, and what nice people. Thank you from our hearts.

*Frank and Maggie D'Angelo  
Uxbridge*

## European trip to commemorate D-Day anniversary

Honour Them Well program director Tish MacDonald and author, historian and new Member of the Order of Canada, Ted Barris, invite Uxbridge residents on a trip commemorating the 79th Anniversary of D-Day and honour the service of the Allied troops in their role in the greatest amphibious invasion in history - the June 6, 1944, landing at Normandy.

The trip will include visiting points of interest on the beaches and further in-

land. Visitors will attend a variety of commemorative services, the highlight taking place at Canada's Second World War Museum, the Juno Beach Centre.

The tour then shifts focus to the First World War, visiting sites of Canadian and Allied significance including Second Ypres, The Somme, Vimy Ridge, and Passchendaele, and will include participation in the Last Post Ceremony in Ypres.

The tour ends in Paris, where travellers

will enjoy a guided walking tour, finishing atop the charming village of *Montmartre*, known for its artistic history and the white-domed Basilica of the *Sacre Coeur*.

Travellers can join this Remembrance Tour from May 31 - June 12, 2023. For a detailed itinerary and pricing information, please email Tish MacDonald at [honourthemwell@gmail.com](mailto:honourthemwell@gmail.com) or call 905-649-0180. Current prices are guaranteed until Feb. 10, 2023.



## A Blonde Moment

column by Lisha Van Nieuwenhove

### Don't tell us, we're just the parents

I received these texts from one of my daughters the other day...

“So apparently the school is gonna get shot up today.”

“Some kid in \*\*\*\* class threatened to shoot up the school because of bullying. And he's got a list.”

I'm not including the name of the class because my daughter is in that class, and so is the kid who ostensibly did the threatening. Suffice to know it was at Port Perry High School (and separate from the incident that was recently reported at Uxbridge Secondary School).

Back to the texts. Aren't they just what every parent loves to receive from their child, whom they've sent off to receive an education in what is supposed to be a safe and secure environment?

I'm a pretty chill individual, and tend to ask a lot of questions before reacting to a situation. So after receiving these texts, asking a few questions of my daughter, like “Where are you now, are you ok?”, and learning that this wasn't the first threat received that week, I moseyed on over to the Durham District School Board website to see if there was any information on what was happening there. Nope. Then to the PPHS website - nothing. Durham Region Police Service? Nothing to report there.

I checked my email to see if anything had been distributed from any of the aforementioned institutions. No messages.

From there I skipped on over to Facebook, to see what might be perking there. I checked the PPHS page - its last post was from Dec. 8, 2022. What about the PPHS Parent Group page - surely it would have something?

Zip. Zero. Nada.

Now, I totally get that it wouldn't be cool to inform an entire schoolful of teenagers that there's a potential threat to the school. They'd all get freaked out and likely notify their parents/guardians, who would also get freaked out, resulting in a whole whack of freaked out students and parents texting misinformation, showing up at or calling the school and otherwise disrupting what could be a very real, very tense situation that needs to be dealt with ASAP. I understand the lack of real-time

information dissemination.

What I do *not* understand is the complete and total lack of communication following the incident(s). There has been radio silence from the DDSB, PPHS, DRPS - pick an acronym. They've said *nothing*. A quick call to the school tells me there's “nothing to worry about, everything is safe.” A call to the school principal results in an email from the communications department at DDSB telling me right off the top, “Please know we cannot divulge the identities of minors.” Duh, already knew that. And didn't ask, for that matter.

The email continues: “The safety and well-being of staff and students at Port Perry High School is our top priority. Our school administration, the Durham District School Board and Durham Regional Police Service want to acknowledge the unease among students and families as a result of an online threat to Port Perry High School.”

Well isn't that nice. You've acknowledged my unease. I feel so much better now.

The email I received was EXACTLY the same as the one the *Cosmos* received in response to inquiries about the USS threat. Word for word, except for the school names. A 267-word email that told me nothing.

I know I'm not the only parent who feels more than a little irked at this lack of communication. After the *Cosmos* ran the USS story last week, it received several messages from parents who were less than thrilled about how communication is handled. Everyone was told that “the school was safe, there was no threat, we can't tell you any more,” blah blah blah. Don't tell me there was no threat, I read them - *them* - with my very own eyes! And I'd just really like to know what measures were put in place to *prove* there was no longer any threat. Heck, I'd have been happy just to be told about the whole situation in the first place, even if after the fact, from an official source. Otherwise that ol' rumour mill starts...

The board's email also said “The school and police are working closely together and are in continued communication.” They might want to consider adding us parents to that loop.



## The Barris Beat

column by Ted Barris

### The nurse I want attending

It seemed a wonderful coincidence. But it really wasn't. Back in 1964, my father was admitted to Scarborough General Hospital for surgery to remove kidney stones. Then, for several days he remained in hospital recuperating. One of the nurses attending him turned out to be a neighbour. Registered nurse Claudia Dee, whose family lived up the street from us in Agincourt, seemed to attend Dad's needs 24/7 - making sure that his pain was under control, that he got meals on time and that he got home as soon as possible.

“She was like a guardian angel,” I remember Dad saying.

As Dad continued to convalesce at home, RN Dee made a special point of stopping by the house to help with dressing changes and pain management. I'm sure that sense of commitment came in part from our being neighbours on the same street. But Claudia Dee had trained in Ontario's public health system, served in it, and clearly believed in its principles - serving the greater good. It's my view that Doug Ford's so-called “bold action to reduce wait times for surgeries (by) leveraging community surgical and diagnostic centres,” will not only threaten Ontario's health-care system, it will also dilute or eliminate the ethos of health-care professionals to serve the public good. The premier doesn't like the status quo, but he'll most likely ensure that many of Ontario's 900 independent for-profit health facilities thrive.

The premier announced Monday that his plan will free up time and space for more complex care in Ontario's hospitals. But critics - including doctors, nurses and the provincial opposition parties - believe that moving such procedures as eye, hip, knee surgeries as well as MRI and CT scanning to private clinics, will further debilitate Ontario hospital staffing.

“People will end up paying out of pocket and face longer wait times in our hospitals,” said NDP health critic France Gélinas, “as (Ford's) plan drives health-care workers from our public system to for-profit facilities.”

About 20 years ago, a heart specialist recommended that I receive a pacemaker implant to improve delivery of oxygen to my blood system. I felt rather nervous about the whole process - from the pre-op tests to the trip into the operating room. I don't remember very much about the surgery, except for the nurse (en route to the OR) who chatted me up about my writing career and my interest in history; then she delivered the anesthetic.

She'd distracted me completely from my worry about the procedure. And when I awoke sometime later in a recovery area, she was the first person there to reassure me that all was well, and that I'd “quickly be back writing history with renewed vigor.” It occurred to me then how fortunate I was to have received such genuine care and concern.

In an interview with CBC on Tuesday, Kevin Smith, the president and CEO of University Health Network in Toronto, pointed out that Ontario's health-delivery system has functioned with for-profit facilities since the early 1990s. He noted, for example, that the Kensington Eye Institute has conducted low-risk procedures, such as cataract surgeries, safely and effectively. But he added that the big question mark about expanding private clinics is how will professional staff at public hospitals respond?

“All roads lead to staffing,” he told *The Current*. “There's a fear that (private clinics and higher wages) will bleed hospital staff away from public to private facilities,” and create what some call a two-tiered system of care for Ontarians.

In the middle of 2008, when my mother Kay Barris lived out her final months at Bridgepoint Hospital in Toronto, my sister Kate and I wrote in a bedside diary about our mom's activity, wishes and reflections. The notebook became a daily registry of Kate's and my observations, but on several occasions, we arrived to find Mom's thoughts jotted down too.

“April 13. Tell Kate to bring me a back scratcher,” one entry read.

“July 18. Today is my anniversary. Married in New York ... July 18, 1948.” And following a visit from our infant granddaughter, she wrote, “What a pleasure to hold your great-granddaughter in your arms. She can't imagine how happy that made me. I have a lovely caring family. How lucky I've been.” Mom must have shared some of these thoughts with nurses attending her, because when she was gone, one nurse noted, “Kay Barris was one cool chick.” They had truly connected with a kindred caring spirit and given her appropriate attention right to the end.

Whenever I'm in a hospital, the nurses I want attending me, my loved ones and my friends are those invested in our well-being, not those who might be spurred by our investment in their for-profit clinic owners.

For more Barris Beat columns, go to [www.tedbarris.com](http://www.tedbarris.com)

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# Ukrainian refugee finds solace in Uxbridge stage's spotlights

by Conrad Boyce, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Antonina Laskarzhevskaya is a theatre veteran. When she's under the lights as a member of the ensemble in On-Stage Uxbridge's production of "Rent," currently in its final week at the Uxbridge Music Hall, she's fully in the moment as a homeless person in New York's East Village during the AIDS epidemic of the '80s. As a trained singer, she exults in Jonathan Larson's powerful music. But in the lulls downstairs in the dressing room, her mind inevitably returns to the day, almost a year ago, when she was forced to flee her native country, and her home town of Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine.

"I wish I could go back for just one day," she says. "To hug my parents, sleep in my own bed, walk the streets of the city I love. I know that we will win the war, but how long will it take...? And what will be left when I get back home?"

On the day Russia invaded, Feb. 24, 2022, Laskarzhevskaya was ready.

Her bags were packed. Like most Ukrainians, she knew the war was coming. So that same day, she piled her seven-year-old son and four-year-old daughter into the car and fled west.

"I only cared that they were safe. The Dnieper River divides Kyiv in two, and I was afraid they would blow up the bridges, so I got to the western side as quickly as I could, and then I just kept driving."

Friends had offered her haven in the western city of Lviv, near the border with Poland, but for Laskarzhevskaya, that still wasn't safe enough. She kept going for 36 hours without sleep, and spent six hours in a very long line at the Slovakian border. Once she was across, she could breathe again.

As she tells it, Laskarzhevskaya was born in the Soviet Union, but has lived almost all her life in Ukraine. Her nation regained its independence when she was only three, and maybe it's no coincidence that she began to sing about the same time. Her mother is a nurse, her father a factory worker, but they nurtured their daughter's love of music. She attended a special school for the arts in Kyiv, and continued her studies at college and university. When the Russians invaded, she was singing

with a long-established operetta theatre company in Kyiv, as well as conducting and singing with the choir in one of the city's many churches. But as much as she thrived in that world, she knew it was precarious.

"From the day he took power in Russia, Putin wanted to take back Ukraine. His operations in Crimea, and in the east of Ukraine, were just the start. We knew that. So I made my plans, to take my children away

until it was safe to go home. They're young, they miss their friends, but I think they understand why we had to go."

In Slovakia, Laskarzhevskaya waited. For a while, her parents joined her, but when the Russians retreated from the outskirts of Kyiv, they went back home. Time passed. The war dragged on. Finally, Laskarzhevskaya decided to join the thousands of Ukrainians coming to Canada.

Over the last few years, she had become part of a business sending Maine Coon kittens and other animals to homes in this country and around the world, and one of her clients, after they became close, proposed that Laskarzhevskaya and her children try life here. He too was Ukrainian, though he had been in Canada almost 30 years. She applied for a visa, and early in June of last year, she and her children made the long journey here, to his home not far from Uxbridge. As she puts it, he has become a strong shoulder for her and the kids in a very tough time.

The visa allows her to work here, but so far, she's only taken brief odd jobs in home or child care, focussing on helping her children adjust to a whole new world. She's made some contacts in Toronto's Ukrainian community, and when she saw the audition notice for "Rent" on social media, she leapt eagerly at the

chance to perform again, only a short drive from her new home.

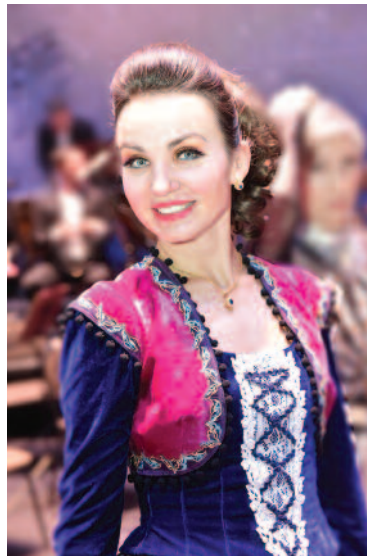
"I am very grateful for the support in Canada," she says. "Not only for the official support to help us fight the war, but the welcome they have shown to me and all the others like me. And it has been hard being so much further away from home. It's a seven hour time difference. Some days I wake up and there's a message from my mother - 'Everything's fine!' - and I know there's been bombing or something terrible."

When the war ends, Laskarzhevskaya will have a difficult decision to make. Her car awaits in Slovakia. After she drives it home, will she rebuild her own life in Kyiv, and join in the long hard struggle to rebuild her nation?

"After 30 years, Ukraine was just beginning to stand on its own legs again. And now we have to start all over."

Or, will she give the car to her father (his was taken by men with guns early in the war), say a more lingering goodbye to her friends and family in Ukraine, and come back to marriage and a new life in Canada?

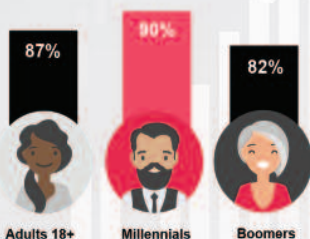
Big questions, for which the answers will have to wait until the fog clears across the ocean. For now, it is enough to know that her children are safe, and that she has the chance to lift her voice in song.



Ukrainian refugee Antonina Laskarzhevskaya in costume for an operetta in Kyiv, Ukraine. Submitted photo

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## ANDREWS, Curtis Ronald

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It is with deepest sorrow that we announce the sudden passing of Curtis Andrews, 36, at his home in Peterborough on December 27, 2022.

Left heartbroken are mom Debbie Andrews (Lockie), step-dad Pete Dunford, sister Carly Annable (Sean), and nephews Blake and Hunter.

Curtis endured many hardships in his life but he always fought through them with a positive attitude.

Curtis will be sadly missed by all his family and friends.

Online condolences may be left at [www.CommunityAlternative.ca](http://www.CommunityAlternative.ca).

## To place a death or in memoriam notice

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