

Bill Rea ? Second cleanest catch basin

The nice thing about attending council meetings is I occasionally actually learn something.

Such was the case at last Tuesday's session at Caledon Town Hall.

Not only have we come through a hell of a mess this winter, with the ice storm in December, followed by the other dumpings of snow we've had to deal with and the frigid temperatures that kept it all on the ground, but there are more complications to come. As the temperatures start getting warmer (and we have a certain amount of assurance that they will) and the weather starts heating up, all that ice and snow is going to melt, with the resulting water having to flow somewhere. Indeed, one of the points made at last week's meeting was we're going to have to wait until the coming thaw to see just how bad things really are.

Among the many points Public Works Director David Loveridge made involved the need to make sure catch basins are clear. A catch basin that's plugged with snow or ice, or any other debris that might have been stirred up over the last couple of months, is going to keep the water from going where we want it to go, meaning it's likely to go places we don't want it to go. He also urged people to keep an eye on the basins by their homes, suggesting they might take the initiative to clear them themselves, since Town staff can't get everywhere simultaneously.

That made me think of the catch basin in front of my house. I haven't seen it in a couple of months with all the snow, not that it's something that occupies my thoughts a lot. But Loveridge's words did strike a chime, and I resolved to look into the matter as soon as possible.

The problem was the basin in front of my house was buried under a great big windrow, and I was disinclined to try and take it apart in freezing weather.

A windrow, for the benefit of those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, is that great big mountain . . . excuse me . . . I meant to say that bloody-annoying great big mountain of snow that plows churn up when they clear your street and end up blocking your driveway. I first heard the word used about 15 years ago when I was working in Toronto, from the one and only Mel Lastman (feel free to call me a name-dropper).

I knew they were calling for the temperatures to get above the freezing mark Friday, so I resolved to do some basin clearing that night when I got home, figuring the task would be about as easy as I could hope for.

It was still fairly warm upon my arrival, so I parked my car and grabbed an ice chopper from the garage. I took a guess where the basin would be under the snow, and actually guessed very well. But it is a fact that despite the warm temperatures of the day, that big pile of windrow was basically a solid pile of ice, meaning it took some pretty serious chopping to take it apart. Since I had been waiting several days for this moment, I wasn't fazed by the prospect, so achoppin' I went.

I had to administer some very authoritative whacks, but was able to break off some large chunks of frozen material. After a couple of minutes of hard work, I had an adequately cleared catch basin. I think Loveridge would have been proud of me. I certainly was proud of me. At the risk of sounding like a braggart, I figured I had the clearest catch basin on my block.

My wife and I went out a couple of minutes later, and I naturally paused to admire my handiwork ? it was a true work of art and I figured I had every right to be boastful. But after driving past a couple of hundred metres of windrows, to my horror, I saw a catch basin that was much clearer than mine. It was far superior workmanship; the result of much more exacting work with a chopper. My efforts looked amateurish in comparison. Introduce me to the man who aspires to have the second clearest catch basin on the block? On the other hand, there was no school Friday, so whoever was responsible might have got his or her kids to clear their catch basin (having been a kid once, with a father in the house, I was introduced early in life to the reality of forced labour). Thus there's a logical and reasonable explanation for being usurped (I keep telling myself).

I admit I have been somewhat flippant about these issues. On the other hand, I am very well aware that all of this snow that has accumulated this winter is eventually going to melt, resulting in flowing water. That means it could end up in basements; like mine, or yours. Neither prospect fills me with delight.

I pretended to grow up in a house that was susceptible to flooding, and I well remember the bad temper tantrums such events put my father into. Granted, those were the days when fathers were able to get away with such antics. But I remember them all too well, meaning I don't envision my basement as a locale for aquatic sports.

There are other concerns too, apart from my catch basin, and us newspaper guys have been receiving information about them. In particular, the conservation authorities are worried about the local rivers; namely the Humber and the Credit. Kids are being warned to stay well away from them, and for good reason too.

In the weeks to come, we're going to hear more of them.

The ice storm in December put a lot of excess weight on a number of trees lining the banks of these rivers. Some of the trees have

ended up in the drink, and that's going to mean some problems in the days to come, as these trees cause blockages and possibly forcing the streams to overflow. We're already getting the media releases from various authorities, warning people to keep away from such rivers and especially warning them to keep their children away.

It seems a little strange that parents would need such a warning. On the other hand, kids are curious creatures, and can be intrigued watching where the water from melting snow flows. Anyone familiar with the story Paddle-to-the-Sea knows it essentially started with a spring thaw.

I always liked watching the spring thaw as a kid.

I attended school in Toronto, taking a route to and from that I'm sure they would not let children take today. It involved traversing a ravine, what had previously been a municipal garbage dump and a large playing field. The ravine also had a creek running into a rather large pond, where people skate and fish to this day, depending on the season. Kids were actually encouraged to use this route through what was essentially a City park. I guess those were the days when people assumed there was no such thing as lurking perverts and the like, but I did get the occasional earful from my parents if I hung around the creek too much. The flow of the water was intriguing to a little boy like myself ? still is, for that matter.

And what we're talking about was just a creek. But it was filled with fast moving water that was very, very cold, emptying into a pond that was more than big enough for people to drown in. The creek was a dwarf when put up against the Humber or Credit Rivers, with flows that could easily sweep people away if they got too close to the banks.

So the message is very simple. Keep your kids away from the streams, especially the fast-flowing ones. If they are interested in seeing the flows of spring thaws, let them check out catch basins. I happen to know of a good one to observe ? second clearest on that particular block!