

Making it Count

by BROCK WEIR

We all know today's world is as fast-paced as it's ever been.

I don't know about the rest of you, but it feels though that as fast-paced as things are, they're getting ever-faster.

It was hard enough to keep up with the rapid clip before the darkest days of the Global Pandemic set in, but that series of extremely unfortunate events ? and, indeed, some continuing associated events ? trebled things even more.

Perhaps the times we spent in lockdown, and in various degrees of ?unlock? along the way, skewed our collective sense of time, but as the trend continues unabated, despite many treating the pandemic as a distant memory, I'm not so convinced.

Many of us these days struggle to find a decent chunk of downtime in which to disconnect, unplug, mentally re-calibrate, or whatever you're ultimately looking for.

Perhaps doing so requires a vacation to a distant land, somewhere you've never been before, in which you can fully immerse yourself in ?different?, making a true break from the everyday. Those opportunities, of course, are now more cost-prohibitive than ever, so maybe it's a staycation at home, or just a short distance away that offers something new, or a different pace. Maybe it's simpler than that, and the most accessible brain tonic is turning off your phone, finding a comfy chair and a cozy blanket in an equally comfy and cozy corner and getting swept away to a different world through the pages of a book.

Even still, as engrossing as the book might be, there's always that temptation to reach out for that unlikely appendage that our smart phones have become, to keep just a foothold in the ?outside world.? Heck, in the current news cycle, if you're disconnected even for ten minutes, chances are high you've missed at least one game-changer, for better or worse.

Doomscrolling? Maybe. Wanting to be prepared, or at least a few steps ahead? Perhaps. Healthy? Doubtful.

That's why it's kind of refreshing when you have some unexpected downtime due to issues beyond our control.

Over the Christmas holidays, I was lucky to get a decent chunk of time off. It took some very hard work ahead of time to make that happen, and the very thought of that time off filled me with more than a couple of shots of excitement about all the possibilities that lay ahead. Well, truth be told, after I clocked out for 2024, it took less than 48 hours for a degree of boredom to set in ? well, maybe not boredom specifically, but the feeling I could use my time in a much more productive way.

Yet, this past weekend, being pretty well snowed in after Wednesday's first blast of snow, which was followed in short order by further blasts over the weekend, for the first time in a while I felt no compelling need to be anywhere specific, or accomplish much more than what you see in the pages of this week's paper. Maybe through a deluge of the white stuff, nature ? and circadian rhythms ? were healing themselves!

Yet, have to commend the brave souls that kept calm and carried on throughout the significant snow dumps.

Despite the challenges the snow and roads conspired to provide, I was heartened by the number of people who made the effort to take in all the wonderful activities our communities had to offer on Family Day ? as well as, of course, the activities Mother Nature helped facilitate, like tobogganing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, or simply providing the raw materials to make families and armies of snowpeople.

What was even more heartening, however, were the number of people who bundled up and did what they needed to do to flex their

civic muscles, despite the meteorological barriers.

This includes both the candidates who gave their boots, hats and earmuffs a workout knocking on as many doors as they could before a deep chill set in, as well as residents at large who made the effort to door-knock on behalf of their candidates of choice or trek to wherever they needed to trek to cast their vote ahead of the February 27 Provincial election.

Kudos also go to the dozens of people who came out to a Newmarket-Aurora All-Candidates meeting on Wednesday night, just as Arctic conditions began to descend on the Greater Toronto Area.

With calls from the weather authorities to go home early from work (if you had to go out at all) and avoid unnecessary travel, dozens of hardy souls filled Newmarket's Old Town Hall to hear what their local candidates had to say and how they hoped to represent them at Queen's Park.

What's a shame, however, was the less-than-hardy turnout from said candidates looking to gain or retain support from the electorate.

Just two candidates ? representing the Liberals and the NDP, and surprisingly not the Green Party considering this was an all-candidates meeting largely focused on the environment and climate change ? showed up to share their views with the assembled company, with the others sending their regrets.

It wasn't all that long ago when debates and all-candidates meetings were seen as an essential part of the campaign, regardless of whether the election in question was taking place in the winter, spring, summer or fall.

At the end of the day, an election is a 30-odd-day job application process and talking to someone at their door, or a collective of voters at meetings like these, equally important as the job interview component of the process. After all, if one's being asked to lend a candidate their vote, it shouldn't be a vote taken for granted; rather, a candidate should offer what they believe to be a compelling reason why they deserve an X next to their name.

Across Ontario, there have been multiple reports of Progressive Conservative candidates being no-shows at set debates, or all-candidates' meetings being cancelled altogether as candidates from the incumbent governing party have either declined invitations or had previous commitments keeping them from the table.

This shouldn't be the case.

As we have seen in recent years, months and weeks, democracy can be a fragile thing and it's only as strong as we want it to be. Key in our democratic process is a healthy exchange between candidates and electors, with candidates presenting their respective visions for the future and electors staying engaged and using their vote to advance what their own vision is for tomorrow.

We can't have that with empty seats at the table, and if voters are willing to show up despite whatever calamities nature throws at them, candidates should be willing ? and eager ? to do the same.

Despite the pause the winter blast afforded us over the last week, an election is no time to let snow accumulate around our feet. Let's all of us make the last week count.