

Maximizing Summer

by BROCK WEIR

After a long, arduous winter that extended far longer into May than it had any business to, there was a cause for celebration this past weekend when warm weather mercifully coincided with what is, for many, the unofficial start of the Summer Season.

Victoria Day has come and gone, leaving the early foundations of a Canadian summer in its wake, even if the season doesn't technically arrive until the Solstice on Sunday, June 21.

Now, Victoria Day means different things to different people.

Officially, it's an observance of the Sovereign's Official Birthday in Canada, pinned to the third Sunday of each May, a permanent birthday salute to Queen Victoria, the monarch that oversaw the creation of modern Canada and who is often cited as the "Mother of Confederation."

The more history-minded of us might be rather orthodox in celebrating the occasion as it was originally meant to be observed, but Victoria Day isn't necessarily everyone's cup of tea ? it is, after all, National Patriots Day in Quebec.

Thankfully Victoria Day can be a choose-your-own-adventure kind of affair.

To that end, this year I have to say I opted to hop off my historical high horse to embrace the spirit of the new season.

The promise of some much-needed warmth after an unseasonably cold and consistently rainy late April and early May, had so many of us counting down the days ? and looking for ways to maximize the sun and heat while the going was good.

And maximize it we did.

The weekend kicked off with a lovely barbeque hosted by a friend, which was a great opportunity to catch up, as well as meet several new people, from many different parts of the world, in fact, who offered some unique and valuable perspectives on some of the biggest issues facing our world today. All in all, an enlightening evening in the great outdoors with great company.

The outdoorsy theme continued on Sunday with a family trip to an outdoor antique market near Hamilton. An outing that was also something of a do-over for Mother's Day celebrations, it was a wonderful morning and afternoon of treasure hunting ? and, thankfully, there were no shortage of Queen Victoria portraits, busts, commemorative tea cups, and more, to satisfy my history nerdery ? followed by a beautiful patio dinner.

Monday, the first Victoria Day in quite some time in which I had an actual day off, was a leisurely day in the City of Toronto, particularly the waterfront area.

The areas around Harbourfront, the Toronto Islands, and places in between, are always fascinating, and a unique place to unplug and reconnect amid a truly bustling metropolis. It's special ability to allow you to unplug, if only for a little bit, continues unabated, but some of the challenges ahead were never too far from mind.

Walking westward along the boardwalk just behind Harbourfront Centre, for instance, it was hard to miss how exposed the city's landmark Cinesphere, the iconic heart of what was once Ontario Place, has become as work continues to controversially transform the site for generations to come.

It was also hard not to think how much this landscape will change in the coming months, for better or worse, and how so many

unanswered questions surrounding the site and the deal may influence what we see down the road.

The view of the Cinesphere was blotted out from time to time by aircraft landing on and taking off from Billy Bishop Airport.

A vital transportation hub on the island, its future is being questioned as the Province of Ontario flexes its muscles to significantly expand the airport to allow for jets, despite the opposition of the City of Toronto, the residents who live on the island, the majority of residents in the city beyond the waterfront, and advocates who have been sounding significant environmental alarms.

A quick ferry trip across the water only highlights both the environmental significance and the fragility of the island itself as a brief walk along the beach near the airport reveals a shoreline that has been nothing short of decimated by the winter elements, a problem that gets worse with each passing season, and little done to address it.

The start of summer ? officially or unofficially ? was a busy one, and that's a pace that is only set to continue until it, well, doesn't.

As the end of May approaches, it often feels like it is crunch time for so many people in the community to get stuff done, cramming in just about every announcement, gala, school fair, fundraiser, and more into a very short period of time, the idea being that once June wraps up, the entire community either decamps to a cottage or tunes out to enjoy the slower pace of the season and all that comes with it.

While I believe that has long been an outmoded idea as the economic realities of cottage ownership, vacation planning, and even weekend getaways are what they are, it's an idea that persists ? and that's a shame, particularly in an election year.

Whether it's the transformation of Ontario Place, the potential expansion of Billy Bishop Airport, and the environmental precariousness of the island its attached to, all of these decisions, or lack thereof in the case of island restoration, are all three issues that rely and have relied on something that all too many of us take for granted today ? the simple vote. And at all levels of government.

The approach of summer might seem like a time to slow down where you can, take in all the season has to offer, and recharge your batteries. While that's all well and good, it's important in a municipal election year like this to stay engaged, consider your own priorities, the future you want for yourselves and others, and the best possible paths to achieve those goals.

Municipal politics has never been the ?sexiest? politics offered by our three levels of government but, at the end of the day, it's the level of government that has the most immediate impact on your lives.

To that end, it's essential to stay in the loop rather than go into the voting booth uninformed ? or, worse, not at all.

On the other side of the coin, if you're running for a leadership position in our communities, you're gearing up for one heck of a job interview.

Summer might be a great time to attend events, shake some hands, get your faces out there, and gain some new name recognition, but it's also a great time to be used wisely in getting your positions out there, listen to what voters are saying, and show how you'll be able to foster what the community is looking for.

Economic circumstances largely beyond our control will likely make the arguable summer exodus a thing of the past, at least for the time being.

The only thing we can do is make the most of it ? for now and in the future.