

Seasons of Learning

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

A year ago this month, we really didn't know where we stood.

We knew there was something coming but we couldn't have anticipated that the arrival of March would bring down the curtain on one world and herald the dawn of another.

Sometimes you lose perspective when you're in the thick of it, so with some forced downtime over the weekend, I spread out a few pages to get a snapshot of just how much has changed between March 2020 and March 2021. Seeing it all once again in glorious black and white provided no small degree of clarity.

But, where to start? Flipping through these and other pages seemed to be as good a place as any for a refresher course on ?the way we were? and, as far as refresher courses go, it was pretty sobering.

?There is no shortage of events around the world to capture our attention these days,? I wrote in a column 12 officially short, but let's face it, arduous months ago. ?Here at home, much of our focus has been trained on the recent rail blockades which have left many industries struggling with politicians wringing their hands, while affording Indigenous Canadians to get their viewpoints across to anyone who cares to listen. Although it must be said the latter only happens here and there when our leaders refuel from taking up the bulk of the airtime, an opportunity is an opportunity.

?We're also focused on a rise in cases of COVID-19 while significant outbreaks are being continuously monitored in such vital hotspots as Korea and Italy. Elsewhere, we have the United States presidential race shaping up with contenders Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden and dark horse Mike Bloomberg off to the races while candidates like Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobouchar are dropping out to back candidates that have a bigger shot of winning.

?Then, there are the athletes working away to achieve their personal bests while wondering if it will be all for naught as the possible cancellation of the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo looms large due to virus fears.?

So, where are we now? Still without a shortage in sight.

We're still squarely focused on the harsh realities of COVID-19, although the days when hotspots seemed to be isolated to such climes as Korea and Italy seem like a lifetime ago. We're still living with the U.S. Presidential Election, albeit the messy aftermath with Biden rising to the top and one-time dark horse Bloomberg fading into as much obscurity as his vast wealth allows, and the other candidates finding their respective places in the political new normal.

And the Tokyo Olympics? It almost seems laughable in retrospect that anyone was entertaining the idea of the Games continuing last summer.

Another item that caught my eye was the first real influx of new cases of COVID-19 arriving in York Region. It was still an age where we were flitting between whether to call the invisible enemy ?Coronavirus? or ?COVID-19? but, regardless of what we were to call it, the message coming from the Province at the time was clear: risk of contracting the virus was low.

?As a result of the coordinated efforts of our health care and public health system, all individuals who have tested positive at this time have been quickly assessed and isolated,? the Province said. ?At this time, the virus is not circulating locally. However, given the global circumstances, Ontario is actively working with the city and health partners to plan for the potential of local spread. The

Province continues to carefully monitor this situation and encourage residents to stay informed by regularly reviewing credible information sources.?

Okay, so that lack of local transmission didn't last very long, but encouraging everyone to stay informed by reviewing credible information sources is as important now as it was when we had little to no idea of what we were actually dealing with.

But, now we do, and it is still a matter of continuous learning.

As we've learned more, the rules of the game have changed. As information rolled in, the plan to tackle the virus evolved accordingly. When it was determined that cloth masks and face coverings were indeed another layer of protection, we got with the program. Necessity bred invention and, in rapid course, the development of several now-approved vaccines have come together to make the light at the end of the tunnel brighter than it has ever been.

Yet, as much as we know, it can still be overwhelming to keep up with what is required of us.

Take, for instance, the triangle of York Region, Peel Region and Simcoe-Muskoka.

York Region, which is currently in Red (Control) Zone of the Province's re-opening framework is getting back to some earlier volume of a new normal as residents 80 years of age or older are flooding the Region's new system claiming their spot to get vaccinated.

In Peel, lawmakers ? if not necessarily area hospital officials ? are pushing for a return to the Red Zone after some extra time, along with the City of Toronto, living under the cloud of lockdown and stay-at-home orders.

In Simcoe-Muskoka, time back in the Red was suddenly short-lived as, effective Monday, the Province slammed on the so-called ?Emergency Brake? to bring the area back into lockdown. The timing gave business owners and residents alike who had barely settled into a new ?new normal? something of a whiplash after the blocks they were in the process of rebuilding were essentially kicked out from beneath them.

?I have heard from many people who are concerned about the impact on people's livelihood, on their businesses, and physical and mental wellbeing, and I sympathize with them,? said Dr. Charles Gardner, Simcoe-Muskoka's Medical Officer of Health. ?I know that this is incredibly difficult and I sincerely wish we were not in this level of restriction. However, we are seeing increases of cases and outbreaks of the UK B.1.1.7 variant in Simcoe and Muskoka in workplaces, long-term care facilities, a child care centre and an apartment building. Countries that have experienced high numbers of the variants of concern have then experienced a third wave of COVID-19 and we need to act early to prevent that from happening here.?

No doubt about that, but perhaps a silver lining here, if there is indeed any to be found, is at last we have some clarity on what might prompt the Province to begin pumping the breaks after some weeks of outstanding questions on what those criteria can be.

All of us still have much to learn, and we all still have much to do, but if the last twelve months have taught us anything, we're a resilient and adaptable bunch and these lessons learned will inform how we move forward ? into what will undoubtedly be another season of resilience, adaptation and, yes, learning.