

Civic Alert

It might as well be spring!

BY DON WEDGE



Spring in October? It seems a little like that, but not for everyone! Some are “feeling vaguely discontented.”

Certainly Councillor Patrick Martin isn't the only one concerned about Westmount's planning procedures and the right to views, particularly from high on the mountain.

Lower down, the neighbours of the new arena await the opportunity to defend their right to peaceful nights.

It may be fall, but the inspiring Rodgers and Hammerstein song “It Might as Well be Spring” has repeatedly run through my head as I have watched events the last few days.

Work on the new playing fields is nearing completion, as is the renewal of Westmount Ave. – the city's biggest construction job.

There is even going to be a concert of Elizabethan lute songs in Vic Hall.

Mayor Karin Marks was called to chair the agglom council for the first time, approached it with trepidation and carried it through with aplomb!

Marianopolis College said its DG, Françoise Boisvert, will step down next summer and, of course, new DG Duncan Campbell moved into city hall.

First lunch in 15 years!

One beneficiary of the latter move was Eileen St. Louis of Beaconsfield. For the first time since he became Westmount's top civil servant 15 years ago, her husband Bruce took her to lunch on an office day!

The DG-emeritus has relocated his office to another floor of city hall until he leaves at the end of next week. Even then, he will not be finished with municipal affairs. The Association of Suburban Mayors has retained him as a consultant – agglom battles are not over and his knowledge will be needed.

The organization, which Mayor Marks chairs, has for some time wanted to recruit a staff official to research and present its dossiers to the government and others.

Given his vast experience in dealing with Montreal and Quebec City, St. Louis might seem to be the obvious candidate, but such a role is not foreseen.

St. Louis' recruiting mandate

However, the mayors have retained him to define a job description and mandate for the new position. He will begin that task once he has finally left Westmount's staff.

Meantime, St. Louis will continue to provide the mayors with the detailed briefing on the agglom council agenda that he has prepared since the dawn of the agglom system.

This highly confidential document leads the elected officials through the mountainous agenda and points to the suspect items – and there are many – where Big Montreal may be over-ambitiously loading costs onto the suburbs.

He has provided the mayors' group with this guide and many other services as part of his Westmount duties. He was also nominated by the other cities to represent them in the negotiations with the Quebec government and Big Montreal that led to June's three-way agreements (Bill 22) to reform the agglom.

In recognition of his help, the association last year presented him with a wine refrigerator – filled with his favourite wines!

This month, St Louis has spent much of his time with the new DG.

Small problems matter

“It's not the broad issues that take the most time,” St. Louis said. “They are similar in most cities, so Duncan is familiar with them.”

“More important are the cases where, for instance, Mrs. So-and-So has a problem that we have been working on for

years. I want my successor to be briefed so that he can put his own thumbprint on them.”

Meantime, in the main floor DG's office, Campbell has been meeting one-on-one with mayor, councillors and his staff.

For his last week on the Big Montreal staff, Campbell was in Richmond, VA, attending the annual conference of the International City Management Association. Both he and St. Louis are long-term members.

“Besides its educational aspect, Montreal will be hosting the 4,000 delegates next year and we want it to be a very appealing event,” he said.

At this year's conference, Campbell was attracted by evolving computer technology, such as blogs and Facebook, rather than a “static” website. He was impressed by “reverse-911 where, when we have information to disseminate, we can send out phone messages and emails.”

He also understands the need for electronic registration for recreational and other events.

“I suspect we are technologically advanced enough to handle that and I will be talking to the IT staff about it,” he promised.

It's fall and the evenings get dark earlier. But there are new faces, names and thoughts – and, that means changes. It just might as well be spring!

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Lépine recognized as Hudon expert

Westmounter Denis Lépine has accepted an invitation to attend Le Balcon D'Art's upcoming exhibition of Normand Hudon's art and act as “un spécialiste sur place.”

Hudon was a versatile artist best known for his caricatures and cartoons in *La Presse*, *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Devoir*. He was born in Montreal in 1929 and died in 1997.

Lépine is an important collector of Hudon's, with a collection of approximately 200 pieces, including rare books and record covers. The exhibition is a sales-oriented event, so none of Lépine's pieces will be on display.

The exhibition takes place at Le Balcon D'Art (650 Notre Dame in St. Lambert, 450.466.8920) from Sunday, October 19 – starting at 11 am – to Wednesday, October 29. Hours are 9:30 am to 5 pm on weekdays, 10 am to 5 pm on Saturdays and 11 am to 5 pm on Sundays. Lépine will be present on October 19 only.

According to Lépine, a 16-by-20 inch piece went for approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000 only a few years ago. Today's price? \$15,000 to \$16,000.

Other art collectors have good naturedly teased Lépine about publicizing Hudon and driving up the market.

Retorts Lépine wistfully, “It's my own fault I can't buy anymore.”

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