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Provincial welfare officers untangle Port Credit chaos

PORT CREDIT — Two provincial welfare officers have been called in to straighten out the town's confused welfare department after town manager Bill Munden discovered some recipients had not been examined since last December. The normal procedure is to check each case at least once or twice a month.

Donna Stedick and Jerry Marks of the provincial Ministry of Family and Social Services have been in the town for almost four weeks "reorganizing" all existing welfare cases and "reorganizing" the entire department.

Former welfare head Shirley Smith was asked to resign after a staff reorganization initiated by Munden in May. Officials here admit the welfare department, with a 1971 tab that reached \$215,000, was bogged down and hopelessly behind in both its records and checking procedures.

Munden said that under normal circumstances an able-bodied welfare recipient should be checked about twice a month to determine if his needs and qualifications are still valid. There have been instances of people collecting welfare payments without being rechecked for periods exceeding six months.

The two provincial officers will remain in Port Credit until the end of July when all of the 60 people now collecting welfare will have been revisited and redocumented.

Marks and Munden both denied they had found an undue number of individuals who are unqualified to continue receiving aid. "The number we have found is not out of line," Marks said Friday.

Munden reiterated that the major problem is the fact that welfare records are simply out of date. Once again the frequently used term "administrative efficiency" is the official cause of the provincial reorganization.

A new Port Credit welfare department head will start work July 24. Roberta Stevens of Park Street, a former supervisor of welfare services in Metro Toronto, has been hired to take on the job.

Meanwhile Munden's efficiency improvement program has led to the hiring of a special tax supervisor and a new town clerk.

Herb Droogendyck, 33, a former tax collector in Etobicoke, will spend most of the remainder of the year trying to cut down uncollected taxes totalling \$260,000. Munden blames poor administrative judgement as the prime cause of the build-up.

Some ratepayers are as much as three years behind in the taxes. Munden said proceedings will not be brought against the guilty parties if the problem can be largely cleaned up.

"Droogendyck started on June 21 and we can already feel the difference in the efficient administration of our tax department," said Munden.



Rhonda Gerhart, one of 15 students working a farm in Mississauga as part of an Opportunities for Youth Project, hoes weeds that have proved major obstacle to the scheme. (Times photo by Ray Saitz).

Relentless weeds strangle student farming experiment

BY JOHN STEWART

Weeds, unfriendly neighbours, rain and more weeds have made a student-run farm in Mississauga "one hell after another" according to the project's supervisor.

George Oldreive, who directs the Opportunities for Youth Project experiment at a farm north of Eglinton Avenue on the Second Line East, says the 15 students have faced all kinds of obstacles in their bid to make the farm pay for itself.

The most frustrating experience has been the recurrent problem of weeds, complicated by this summer's wet weather and a lack of mechanized equipment. The land, donated rent free by grain operator Ron Todd, has not been worked for seven years.

Oldreive says the next three weeks will be the turning point for the project. A \$10,000 grant from Labatt's brewery for salaries is just running out and the students must span the gap until they can begin to sell substantial amounts of their produce.

"I haven't tried to bluff the kids," says Oldreive, former student council president at Kipling Collegiate in Etobicoke.

"If we can't make it through this three weeks, we may have to pack the whole thing in."

That unfortunate possibility, which George says he doesn't even want to think about, would force a reduction of the present 15-member staff to about five or six who would have to work extra hard to keep the farm out of the red.

Labour difficulties have upset matters even more. All three foremen on the project have quit. "My top foreman quit this week," Oldreive explained. "He's been a friend of mine since we were in Grade 3. He was disillusioned with the money he was making and with the weed problem. That's getting us all down-right now."

The students, who make \$75 a week, received a \$3,500 Opportunities for Youth grant. Oldreive makes \$150 a week. He claims that with the hours he works his salary is about a dollar an hour.

Planned since November, the project started before school was out when the students rose before 5 a.m. each morning to plant for three and a half hours. They often came back to put in more time after classes.

The original target for the project—\$21,000 gross—

has been reduced by the weed plague and by frost to \$15 to 16,000.

The lack of tillage equipment also reduced the venture's potential success. Although many area farmers were quick to lend equipment and advice, some thought the youth grant was for \$20,000 and were upset by the student competition.

"One farmer told me he would be glad to come down and work on our farm so he could get some of his tax money back," George recalls. "I told him that if he farmed as badly as he reads a newspaper, I wouldn't want him on my land."

Oldreive, recently named a director of the Student Enterprises and Assistance League (SEAL), which sponsors all kinds of youth projects, says the farm will return about 60 per cent of the government investment, while most OFY jobs cost 120 per cent for the taxpayer. "The other 20 per cent is lost in bureaucracy and red tape."

Besides the Labatt's loan, the students have planted 13 acres of cucumbers under a contract with Bic's Pickles. They hope to save 10 acres of those.

Onion sets and 13,000 tomato plants, planted on weekends during the school year are also prominent.

If there should be any surplus on the project, each worker will share four per cent of the net profit.

One of the Mississauga representatives among the Etobicoke-dominated work crew is Rhonda Gerhart of 1836 Christopher Rd. in Lorne Park.

She says the farming experience has been "really fantastic. You get to work outside and you're not really pressured. It's hard when it gets really hot but you feel so healthy. When you get to the end of a row and look back, it seems worthwhile. But it's going to be best at the end of the summer. We'll really be able to see what we accomplished then."

As George Oldreive says, with an understandable touch of pride, "Nobody's ever going to forget they worked on this farm for one summer."

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A Citizenship officer will be in attendance to supply information about Canadian Citizenship and to take applications for Canadian Citizenship from 8:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. (lunch hour 12:00 Noon to 12:30 p.m.).

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