

News of the arts

Greening of Sudbury

For years Sudbury, Ontario and its rocky environs were the victims of jokes and jibes because of the blackened, barren topography which was the result of decades of exposure to noxious gases from copper and nickel smelting.

Today there is a remarkable visual difference in and around Sudbury. Ground vegetation, new hardwood and softwood growth is showing in increasing degree and effect around this mining centre.

In homeowners' gardens, the tomatoes are fatter and the green beans longer.

Around the broad, landscaped grounds of the new regional government buildings in downtown Sudbury, the flower beds are an effusion of colour in spring and the grass is a rich spread of green. The greening of Sudbury is fact.

Co-ordinated effort

What is behind it all is a successful co-ordination of effort from many fronts — industry, three levels of government and the educational community — to bring back the ground health and vegetation.

In so doing, it's a testament to the fact that environmental objectives and industrial necessities can both be accommodated — and achieved — given effort and patience in an atmosphere of goodwill.

One single factor that has made the whole program work is the existence of International Nickel's superstack — the 600-metre stack, completed in 1972, to lift high and disperse far sulphur dioxide emissions from the Copper Cliff smelter.

The burning effect of smelting emissions over decades, from the early years of the century when smelting was done by enormous "bonfires" over and under the mined ores, has contributed to the stunting of vegetation.

The effort to make the greening work has come from several quarters.

The major mining companies, Inco and Falconbridge Nickel Mines, have had their own vegetation and land reclamation projects under way for a number of years. This work, funded entirely by the companies, is now beginning to show results in marked terms.

More recently, the Regional Municipality of Sudbury formed a vegetation enhancement committee, drawing on suggestions and participation from industry, Laurentian University and Cambrian College, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and local citizens to get the greening program going. This year the Federal Government provided some \$170,000 of Young Canada Works grants.

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Seven projects

Over 160 students worked last summer under the direction of Sudbury region municipal personnel, tackling seven separate projects:

- grass seeding on about 200 acres of land on highway rights-of-way and public lands along major entry corridors into the region;
 - improvement of existing vegetation along several major highway corridors, including removal of dead trees, limbs and slash to be chipped and used for mulch;
 - widespread pH and soil nutrient sampling of barren and semi-barren lands along highways. This determines the amount of treatment necessary for successful greening;
 - collection of native seeds to provide a source of native grasses and trees for future greening projects;
 - application of lime or fertilizer to about 300 acres of land where existing vegetation is sparse or damaged;
 - transplanting of native plant species which have adapted to Sudbury's environmental conditions caused by past pollution;
 - digging composting pits at the site of an area intended for revegetation. This project is largely experimental and provides valuable research for large-scale composting which will result if the region builds a composting plant to treat garbage.
- Efforts to bring back healthier tree growth in the region are tied closely to the work to bring balance back to the soil and revive basic vegetation growth. Both had long been ravaged by sulphur contamination and forest fires in past years.

Old age security improvements

Amendments to the Old Age Security (OAS) Act put forward by Health and Welfare Minister Monique Bégin received Royal Assent on November 20.

The first amendment was part of a package of proposals announced this autumn, designed to realign social programs in Canada, providing money where it is most needed. Under this provision, after the normal cost-of-living increase is made for January, the amount of the Guaranteed Income Supplement and

Spouse's Allowance paid to each household will be increased by \$20 each month.

For a couple where both are receiving benefits, each spouse will receive an extra \$10 each month, while a single pensioner will receive the full \$20-monthly increase. Financial difficulties are particularly acute for unattached elderly people, whose expenses absorb a higher percentage of their incomes than of couples' incomes.

Some 100,000 additional OAS pensioners whose other income was previously too high to qualify, will now be eligible for additional benefits of up to \$20 a month, because of the rise in the ceiling.

The second amendment will relieve the situation faced by the younger spouse when his or her Spouse's Allowance benefit is terminated following the death of the older spouse. The Spouse's Allowance program, introduced in 1975, provides assistance to couples where the older spouse is in receipt of Old Age Security benefits and the younger spouse has not yet reached age 65. Because the allowance is limited to couples where one is an OAS pensioner, the benefit must eventually be discontinued if the OAS pensioner spouse dies. However, it will now be paid for up to six months after the month of the pensioner's death.

Women form greater portion of poor

Women who are the sole support of their families are becoming a growing proportion of Canada's poor, the Economic Council of Canada says in its annual review.

In a discussion of unemployment and financial hardship the Council reports that such women not only lack other sources of income but in most cases earn substantially less than men.

Among other findings in a section on social programs:

- unemployment alone is an "unreliable" indicator of financial hardship and inequity;
- the benefits of social programs such as unemployment insurance, pensions, family allowances and medical care have gone almost as much to middle- and upper-income persons as to the poor.

The report says lower incomes earned by women usually mean their unemployment insurance benefits are lower than those paid to men despite the fact that jobless women face longer periods of un-