



# A family's long love affair with our harbour

BY BARBARA BROWN

Hamilton Port Authority chair Larry Russell says his father would be gratified by how far the harbour has come from the polluted eyesore it was before his death in 1962.

Peter Russell had grown up on Dundurn Street North. He worked 52 years at Donald Ropes and Wire Cloth Ltd. and he and his wife raised 13 children in his family home, three blocks from the waterfront.

Larry, the youngest child, later bought his own house down the street and so the Russells remained fixtures in the neighbourhood for 115 years.

"We were three blocks from the bay and so it was our backyard and our playground. In the winter time, you'd have people skating on the ice. There would be hockey games and windsailing.

"The big thrill, of course, when you were a kid, was to go down to the Beach Strip by the bridge because they had an amusement park with rides and arcades.

"There was a lot of activity and people did go in the water, did swim."

The recent launch of the Hamilton Harbour Queen, offering afternoon and sunset cruises around the bay, brings Russell back to the 1940s when children clamoured for their parents to take them on a ferry ride to LaSalle Park aboard the old SS Hamiltonian.

Before his death, Peter Russell reminisced with his son about his own childhood when throngs of people enjoyed hot, hazy days on the beaches and Hamilton waterfront.

Larry Russell said his dad deplored the pollution and terrible



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Considerable progress has been made in harbour cleanup but another \$650 million will be needed.

state of his beloved harbour.

"It wasn't too long before he died that he said, 'If people don't get together and do something about this, we're going to lose it. Even if we started tomorrow, it would take 50 years to bring it back.'"

Larry Russell shared this story Saturday with several dozen people who gathered at the new Canada Marine Discovery Centre at Pier 8 to discuss the progress of the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan.

RAP co-ordinator John Hall had invited federal, provincial and municipal officials from the Bay area to an annual meeting to discuss the restoration agenda.

The meeting focused on how cleaning up the harbour — the goal is to have it delisted as one

of 41 hot spots or "Areas of Concern" in the Great Lakes by 2015 — will help remove barriers to attracting the best and brightest minds to the Bay area.

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Dr. Mamdouh Shoukri, vice-president of research at McMaster University, Jane Walker, whose job it is to recruit family physicians and medical specialists to Hamilton and Bill Gair of

Dofasco, all talked about difficulties in recruiting professionals when so many have a negative perception of Hamilton as a dirty, polluted city.

Discussion focused on how the social and economic health of our community is directly linked to the environmental health of our harbour, watershed, fish and wildlife habitats, and the public accessibility of our shoreline.

"People think of Hamilton in terms of smog and pollution and do not perceive its attributes. We need to enhance our environmental image so that we can attract the kind of health professionals this city needs," said Walker.

Restoration of the harbour did not begin until 30 years after the

senior Russell's death.

In 1992, some members of the original RAP believed efforts to bring back the harbour would be futile and delisting the site as an area of concern was an impossible goal.

Over the next decade, \$800 million was spent to begin the cleanup.

It is estimated another \$650 million will be needed, bringing the total to \$1.4 billion.

Hall said two critical components must be completed before Hamilton Harbour can be delisted. First, toxic substances and sediment at Randle Reef must be contained. Next, about \$658 million in upgrades are needed to improve municipal water treatment and stop the flow of sewage into the harbour.

The RAP goals some thought impossible are now about halfway completed, said Hall. Some recent successes include:

■ Royal Botanical Gardens scientists say a growing number (64) of species of fish, including several rare types, have been discovered at the Cootes Paradise fishway since it was installed eight years ago.

■ Hamilton's Waterfront Trail and Bayfront Park have increased public access to shorelines and are enthusiastically embraced by walkers, cyclists and in-line skaters.

■ The new Canada Marine Discovery Centre, located on Pier 8 one block from Parks Canada's HMCS Haida National Historic Site.

■ The Hamilton Waterfront Trust offers cruises aboard the Harbour Queen and Hamiltonian.

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