

Tall Pines rally extension upsets some residents

By Tony Pearson

The Tall Pines race rally is a big event in the Bancroft area. According to Mayor Bernice Jenkins, it is a major driver of economic development - a spur to tourism, which is a mainspring of the area's economy.

But a recently approved extension of the rally route to Lower Turriff Road has drawn fire from some of its residents, notably Ian and Julie Hoeksema. Owner of Ian's Firearms Repair, Hoeksema contends that the new rally route will force him to close his business for three days during what is normally a very busy period, and thus lose money. He is also worried about clean-up of extensive garbage from spectators after the race weekend is over, as well as damage caused to local roads and facilities.

Most of all, Hoeksema is objecting to the way that the new route was approved. He says that he was informed last month in a visit by township works manager Perry Kelly and rally organizer Ross Wood. The Turriff Road closure was presented not as a possibility but as a done deal.

However, Rally coordinator Ian Wright claims that the overwhelming majority of Turriff Road residents are rally fans. He stressed the provisions made to minimize problems, such as the enforcement of speed limits on public roads, the establishment of minimum noise "quiet zones" where no spectators are allowed, and the complete pick-up of all litter once day is over.

Both he and Mayor Jenkins emphasized the economic benefits of the Rally. "It is an important off-season event," Jenkins said, "which brings in outside revenue for B & B's, gas stations, restaurants, and many other local businesses. Accommodation is booked solid, even for hunt camps, right up to Barry's Bay." Wright noted that the Rally has a "Buy Local" policy, which includes trophies, signs, and the awards dinner at the Fish and Game Club.

The economic benefit claim arises from the survey done by the Rally Association, who surveyed 44 participants in last year's event and developed a report given to Town Council last February. From this survey, they obtained an average spending figure of about \$1,600 per competitor, \$145 per volunteer, and close to \$100 per spectator. This was multiplied by the numbers: 35 competitors, nearly 200 volunteers, and an estimated 3,500 spectators, to produce a total of \$409,000. In addition, the survey said that more than three quarters of the spectators made multiple visits to the Bancroft area for other events and purposes.

Hoeksema countered that he wasn't opposed to the Rally as such, but to the use of township roads and consequent township spending for repairs. He noted that it wasn't just racers, but visitors who were encouraged to test-drive the course the day before the actual race. Ian Wright replied that this was limited to ten cars, all of whom would have to follow area speed limits. He further stated that he will personally verify that all race commitments have been met, including clean-up.

Perry Kelly gave the cost to the township as about \$7,000. Five thousand was for sponsorship rights, which get the town name on all advertising (Mayor Jenkins referred to the large number of mentions on broadcaster TSN). In addition, Kelly estimated that between \$500 and \$2,000 was spent on road repair, and on the set-up and take-down of the rally's staging area. He further stated that road repairs done were just the normal operations of township road crew taking care of area roads.

Mayor Jenkins promised that the new Bancroft municipal council will take a close look at all the information following the race, and make sure all residents' concerns are heard, including those involving the course route. "Is the race an inconvenience to some? Certainly," she admitted. "But it is well managed by the organizers and volunteers, and I don't believe the Township wants to lose it." She stated that township personnel will follow up post-race to ensure that the roads and venues are restored to pre-race condition.

Incoming Dungannon Councillor Bill Kilpatrick added that the township had to check all the numbers concerning costs and benefits, and consult with all residents who could be affected, including groups like the Bancroft soccer club whose field is used during the race, and then see if any alternative measures such as course changes should be considered.