

Over the Back Fence  
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Approx 640 words

Poison ivy promotion  
By Alva Wood

It wasn't on the agenda for the village Council meeting, but Deirdre Pollacks raised it anyway.

"We need something to put this village on the map," she says.

"We are on the map," retorts Dunc McMahon. "Right there," he says, unfolding a highway map at stabbing it with his finger. "See?"

"I don't mean 'on the map,'" replies Deirdre. "I mean 'on the map' so that people know about us. They drive along the highway out of River City, and they have no idea that it might be worth taking a little detour into our village to see what we have to offer."

"And that's just the way it should be," says Hector Wentz. Hector believes that growth should have stopped right after he moved here.

Deirdre, on the other hand, has an insurance and real estate business. She wants people to move here.

"We need something that makes us special," Deirdre insists, "something that instantly identifies us as a tourist destination."

Meanwhile, Dunc has been tapping keys on his laptop computer. "She's right," he says. "I just Googled 'Schist Creek'. Did you know there are 122,000 of them?"

"That's why we have a web page," interjects Henry Hill, who has been listening to this discussion with growing dismay. He can see that the next step will be to refer it to his staff, who have a lot better things to do than follow up every wild idea that the Council comes up with.

"Yes, I found your page," Dunc agrees. "It was number 109,473, way way down the Google list."

Henry suggests that Council hold an open Public Forum on the subject. That would pretty much guarantee that no one would show up, and the issue would die a normal death.

Council invited the Downtown Business Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Tourism Promotion Board to attend the public forum. But since that was all the same eight people, they didn't have to put out many extra chairs.

"We need something to put our village on the map," says Deirdre again, kicking off the discussion.

Veejay Ramcharan gets to his feet. "We are on the map," he says. "Every day, drivers pull into my gas station and ask, 'Where the hell am I?' and I show them."

"Think how much more gas you could pump if people actually wanted to come here," Deirdre argues.

"People already come miles for my donuts," says Erma Thompson.

Nevertheless, the idea gradually gathers steam.

"Other communities have something unique to identify themselves," explains mayor Jake Bowers. As a former professor, he loves research. "Goderich calls itself the White Squirrel City. Kleinburg has its Bindertwine Festival. Wiarton has a groundhog named Willie, and Vegreville has the world's largest Easter Egg."

"Owls," suggests Rosie Green. "They're cute. And I've read that they're a threatened species."

"Burrowing owls," says Hector.

"Spotted owls," says Tessa Vanderkam.

"We don't have any, anyway," says Dunc.

"What have we got that would make this place attractive?" asks Jake helpfully, prodding the process along.

"Flowers," says Hector. "We could be a community in bloom. We could all plant begonias. Or marigolds."

"We're not all gardeners," Veejay objects.

Jake tries again: "What do we have more of already than anyone else?"

"Potholes," says Dunc.

"Veejay's wrecked cars," Tessa glowers.

"Natural things, that we don't have to create?" Jake persists

Nellie Rinehart raises her hand. "Poison ivy," she says.

There's a long silence.

"We sure got a lot of it," Rosie nods.

"Along the creek and at the lake," Deirdre agrees.

"It turns a spectacular red in autumn," says Tessa.

“We wouldn’t have to do anything to encourage it,” says Tessa.

There’s a long silence.

That how we got our new tourist promotion slogan. We’re going to be the “Poison Ivy Capital of Canada.”