

Open Editorial Letter to Bancroft Times – June 2019

From Madeleine Marentette, Founder & President

Grail Springs Retreat Centre for Wellbeing Inc - Bay Lake Road, Bancroft, Ontario

Environmental Protection, Healthy Tourism Careers - Left in the Dust

For 25 years Grail Springs Retreat Centre for Wellbeing has operated quietly on Bay Lake Road. We have a solid reputation and are a three-time recipient of 'Canada's Best Wellness Retreat' by the World Travel Awards. Our fourth nomination just received. Letters from The House of Commons recognizes Grail Springs for contributions to tourism and events promoting women in business, women's rights, and women's mental and physical wellbeing. Our summer fairs bring upwards of 250 female vendors, speakers, authors, musicians and attendees. 1600 tourists annually from all over the province, Canada and internationally visit us – more than the entire population of Faraday itself. The overflow spills into local businesses, accommodations, cafes, art galleries, restaurants, gas stations, clothing and gift shops.

75-80% of the career jobs created at Grail Springs are consistently held by women – both at entry level and specialized skills. Meaningful careers for women in the private sector, with benefits, in rural areas that are in the non-resource, non-hydro and non-government sectors are very hard to come by. These are quality year-round jobs with no winter layoffs, contributing almost \$3 million to the local economy. All of this is at risk with a quarry operation of this size in such close proximity – 900 metres from the blast zone. How do we mitigate blasting, drilling and crushing when tourists are hiking trails, participating in classes in meditation and yoga on the lawn, outdoor massage, canoeing, or enjoying one of our many outdoor events?

In 2015, 500+ signed a petition created by the original founder of No Place For A Quarry (NPFAQ), who voiced concern for the impacts ahead: irreversible damage to watersheds, cracked wells and basements, impacts on wildlife, truck traffic and safety, dust-pollution, the distressing 'thunder-clap' of blasting, all-day drilling and crushing, devaluation of property and the economic impact on businesses.

In 2015 Dan and Lou Freymond met with me. What was presented that day was not the full scope of their intentions. Our team learned that Fowler Construction was a partner. This was not disclosed. The proposal was not just extended digging for gravel to create culverts for their own logging roads as was presented. This was a hundred-year fully operational gravel quarry with blasting, drilling and crushing. And now a new significant fact has emerged that gives cause for deeper concern:

At time of press we learned that Capital Paving owns 50% of Fowler Construction.

Who is Capital Paving? Website states: "Capital Paving Inc. is a leader in the heavy civil construction industry in Ontario." Freymond/Fowler have presented that this is a family run operation. It is not. This is big business. What are the chances we will see an application for an onsite recycling asphalt plant. This had been previously proposed and withdrawn. Will this re-emerge?

***"Property values are not a consideration."* ~ Brian Zeman, consultant for applicant**

To quote Brian Zeman, head consultant for the Capital Paving/Fowler Construction/Freymond quarry, "Property values are not a consideration", showing they have a very narrow interest in the economic impact on our community. This is big business moving in to a concentrated area of existing spring-fed lakes, family homes and hobby farms, cottages and recreational tourism. In their own words they simply do not feel responsible for the economic impact on this community.

Noise from the quarry will impact Grail Springs according to both the applicant's experts and the No Place For A Quarry experts

How could an elected official or Freymond/Fowler proceed in good conscience knowing Grail Springs and its job force will be impacted including all of the residences within a 2 km radius, and all the family businesses and jobs that rely on tourism?

Several years ago Grail Springs's representatives attended two presentations held at Fish & Game Club. Based on our research and what we were told, our concerns are valid. The applicant's own noise expert when directly asked about the impact of blasting, drilling and crushing, said that yes, the noise from the operation will impact Grail Springs. The yellow flag came down and the red flag rose. We have shed many tears and experienced much anxiety anticipating this quarry. And to confirm, the NPFAQ experts concur.

Looking back at the many interviews conducted by our team, one that stands out from an elected official who stated, "if there is some reason that comes back from the experts that says that this is the wrong place to put it, then maybe we change our tune at that point." – former MPP Todd Smith

Maybe??

Our trusted systems 'for the people', only relies on checking 'the boxes', and ignores the 'welfare' of the people

Not an utterance concerning the citizens has been expressed by either party – all but one council member Bill Green. The response when it does come is simply, "the boxes have been checked". I challenge that the 'boxes' have been hastily checked by the powers that be even with evidence of the harm this quarry will cause, and some boxes have been checked, absent of research data to support their claims.

Noise: Grail Springs operation will be impacted by the blasting, drilling and crushing according to both sides. This box cannot be checked but has. It is in contradiction.

Traffic: The intersection at Hwy 62 and 28 is a danger. There is no traffic study to date with back up data. This box cannot be checked but has. It is in contradiction.

Economic Impact: There has not been an economic impact study. This is not a 'box' option but should be. It is unethical to proceed with one. Anyone who cares about the community would have insisted on it. But alas we know where the applicant stands on this.

How can this be? The boxes are twenty-years outdated not just in this province but in Canada. That's why. We are dealing with obsolete measures.

The powers that be have shown insufficient interest in what matters in the greater scheme of life and the protection of the environment, animals or people. Just now, on June 6th, the outrageous Doug Ford government shredded the 'Endangered Species Act' in complete opposition of the United Nations report and warning, making way for big business sprawling development. This is a clear example of bad mandate. It's Madness. Gord Miller Chair of Earthroots and former Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. "The alarming patterns of biodiversity loss, outlined in the United Nations report, hold true everywhere, including Ontario, and threaten the very foundations of our well-being and our economies."

Faraday Council not seeking to protect this rich, expanding, tourism career-resource

The overriding subject of the support of the quarry seems to be a lack of jobs in our community. Our Reeve and Councillors - Carl Tinney, Marg Nicholson and Dennis Purcell have managed our community, in Carls' case since 1971. There is over \$11 million dollars in the Faraday coffers, (Grail Springs contribution to property tax is \$27,000 annually) none of which is being used to create jobs in this township. In fact, the population has dropped by 14% since 1996. Where is the leadership to attract new business and jobs to the area?

Grail Springs has proudly been a leader in creating significant jobs in this area. Since 1994, from a modest B & B with seven to ten employees to today, with a million dollar expansion made in 2000 adding thirty more jobs to a thriving staff of forty. We are now at \$1.25 Million dollar payroll annually with sustainable tourism careers paying upwards of \$25 to \$100 per hour for special skills such as chefs, spa therapists, life coaches, yoga instructors and workshop facilitators. We are forward thinking. Grail Springs launched the first ever in Canada – “Winter Spa Fest” - this past February and March bringing record-breaking occupancy levels to 90%.

According to Stats Canada the direct contribution of business tourism to the Canadian GDP in 2017 was 37.4%! That has got to get everyone's attention. Tourism is a dominant industry in Canada including the job market. Tourism created 750,000 jobs in this country from January to September 2018. Tourism is vital and growing with domestic travel increasing. Tourism saves small towns and communities. Leaders have transformed towns from surviving to thriving when they learn how to leverage their unique selling proposition – think Blue Mountain, Niagara and Prince Edward County. This area too is prime to thrive on its rich resources and nature-based experience, but will take rolling up the sleeves, and finding those with passion, creativity and perseverance.

Grail Springs cancels plans for \$1M expansion at the cost of 3 new jobs

2014-2016 Grail Springs hired architects to design a stunning, landscaped outdoor thermal spa circuit of Nordic-influence, a perfect fit for our area, plus a unique artisan duplex cabin. This, to increase winter occupancy, and accommodate 4 to 6 more overnight guests. Projections were 250+ new visitors including day visitors, increased revenue of \$200+K and the creation of a minimum of three new jobs. Once we realized no one had any concern for the threat to our business, we had no choice but to halt the water-analysis project and the site-specific zoning application of which Faraday is well aware.

It has been nothing short of distressing. We have never sought special privilege. What we sought was support from the Ministry of Tourism, Hastings County Tourism, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Ontario Ombudsman, Conservation groups, our elected MP, our local council, and so on. A painful learning lesson it has been. Grail Springs has zero Ministries advocating for us to protect this top-tier tourism business at high-risk.

Precedent: Grail Springs would not exist today if the Spurr Lake Marble Quarry continued its operation

I stood in front of Faraday Council and Freymond/Fowler and their reps at both public meetings and gave testimony, a personal account of having lived beside a quarry. Right here on this same property, in summer of 1993, I was sitting on a lawn chair dreaming with excitement for the development a retreat centre. I hired a great team of contractors from Bancroft Homes to begin building. Suddenly my chair lifted from the ground accompanied by a frightening thunderous roll. We all thought it was an earthquake. And then the horrible shrill of drilling came days later.

The source was the Spurr Lake Marble Quarry located approximately 2 kms from Grail Springs of which no real estate agent disclosed. This was devastating news. Weeks later we discovered a coalition of citizens who were

already in action and the owner abandoned the quarry the following year. Note – Faraday and the applicants remained silent when I finished my story, and no questions were asked of me.

“While in operation our idyllic site becomes almost intolerable.” – Peter Whitehead, former council member for the Town of Bancroft

Janis and Peter Whitehead (Peter a former council member for Town of Bancroft) completed building a house in Nova Scotia that unfortunately is located near a quarry. They wrote of their experience. “The quarry is located 3.33 kilometers away from our home and we thought there was enough distance that it would not adversely affect us. Unfortunately we were wrong. There are two things that affect us:

1. Blasting - Several times a year the company blasts rock. The explosions are not loud but instead a deep, powerful, low rumble. What is most concerning is the vibration that shakes our house. We are very concerned about the effect on our foundation as well as the possibility of affecting our well. We have a deep 300' well. We know, from research, that such blasting can seriously damage wells.
2. Crushing operation - This is by far the most distressing part of the whole operation. The crushers start at 6am and often do not stop until 9pm. Early in the morning the sound overwhelms everything else and continues throughout the day becoming fainter at times and then starts again, almost cyclical. Being over 3 kilometers away we thought the thick forested area would absorb much of the sound but it does little to soften the effect. While in operation our idyllic site becomes almost intolerable.”

“I felt like I had to take a stand and vote against it.” ~ Councillor Bill Green

Councillor Bill Green told ‘My Bancroft Now’ reporter following the Faraday Council vote in February, “I felt like I had to take a stand and vote against it.” He said after speaking with his constituents he would not have been able to live with himself if he went with it. Reeve Dennis Purcell, Deputy Reeve Marg Nicholson and Councillors Murray Bowers and Carl Tinney voted in-favour of the quarry.

Bancroft is exchanging its ‘mining town’ and radon-fearing reputation which has been difficult to shake, to ‘quarry town’ status. Good-bye tourism. Many people have expressed that they will sell their homes and cottages and leave this area if the quarry goes ahead on Bay Lake Road.

“This narrative reads like a dramatic novel. Tourism vs Quarry. There is a powerful, natural beauty at risk here. But the story does not have to end as a tragedy”, says Bill Empey, retired economist, local land owner.

‘Blue Zone Project’ - Bancroft and area has a realistic opportunity to become the first recognized Wellness Destination in Canada and establish itself as a strong contender for Ontario tourism dollars

Anne Dimon, President of the Wellness Tourism Association (global) of which I serve on the board of directors writes, “As wellness tourism advances to become a one trillion dollar global industry, and with Grail Springs the third-time top wellness retreat in Canada, Bancroft has the opportunity to become the first recognize Wellness Destination in Canada. As a fellow resident of Ontario, I implore you to make the right decision.”

Our community had our first chance over a decade ago to rebrand Bancroft. I served on the committee that was to look at the wellness resource component of this region. Our team presented the research on ‘Blue Zones’, people live long, healthy and happy lives around the world because of lifestyle choices including strong community ties and a high-respect for nature. My committee proposed an initiative to make Bancroft the ‘Wellness Capital of Canada’. One week later, a council member’s comments were returned to us saying ‘that was the stupidest idea ever’. The initiative is a challenging one but it is an exciting one which ignites the

imagination! We intuitively knew that every family, home for elderly, youth, school, pet store, farmer, business, institution and organization could get behind this initiative – to be inspired, and inspire! The possibilities are endless. ‘Blue Zone Projects’ are being initiated by regions all over the world now – serving the community and tourism. And it is not too late. We can still stake our flag in the ground.

There is a right place for quarry. But it is not here.

The Leveque Bros., is an experienced, massive, fully operational quarry eight kilometres north of Bancroft with hundreds of years of product. If there is truly a need for more product and jobs, then it would show up as a demand and Levesque will hire those three new personnel. Why is Grail Springs looked upon as having no value and willingly put at risk? This amounts to an unconscionable choice to begin with.

‘Experience’ is a valid barometer that goes beyond what experts can contribute. When you’ve lived in adversity vs wellbeing, when you’ve witness the significant return of wildlife after the closing of a quarry, when you know the distress of others living in communities surrounded by quarries, when your elected officials act against the broader community’s interest, you must stand up for what is right, what is truth, raise awareness and mobilize, regardless of the costs.

The harm done by being distanced from nature however is becoming unmanageable. We at Grail Springs coach every age group, with the younger emerging as the ‘indoor generation’, suffering from all variations of physical, emotional and mental-health issues. And it will only get worse. They are living in a world where they see the disregard for the environment, animals and people, and feel powerless. They see the powers that be CHOOSE to do business as usual. Business as usual is pushing people to the edge of hopelessness, anxiety and depression, destroying species, life-giving resources and our planet.

One citizen stated during the NPFAQ street campaign on May long weekend, “just because the ministries check off all of the boxes, does not make it morally right.” They cited what happened to Canada’s First Nations people. The Ministries ‘checked all of the boxes’ and look at the devastation they afflicted on human life. Though this country is slowly making some restitution through the Reconciliation Program of which I am trying to do my part, there is irreversible damage done to an entire people.

I only wish the powers that be, our future which rests on their conscience, deciding to vote yes or no on June 18th, could appreciate, be proud, and want to passionately protect the forty of us who change lives for the better each and every day. The Grail Springs Team is a group of talented, caring people, proud to help others and add to life, not take away from life. Should this quarry pass, Grail Springs may have no choice but to relocate where people, animals and the environment matter and are protected, taking with it, its significant vision and mission to serve lives, along with its economic contribution to this community.

We will be missed when we are gone.

