

Editorial/comment

Short takes

By


BERNIE BELLAN

I happen to be in Mexico as I write this week's column. One of the great things about being a newspaper editor is that you don't have to be located in any particular spot on the globe in order to do your job. It's really a matter of keeping in touch – both with the other people who help in putting together this paper each issue, and various individuals to whom I turn for information about particular stories.

I'm lucky in that I have Myron Love to keep me well informed as to which stories we might want to cover while I'm away. As anyone who's been following this paper for any time now would know, Myron covers an amazingly wide gamut of stories for us. His interests are quite diverse and, even though I'm the editor of this paper, if it weren't for my reading Myron's articles about what's happening within Winnipeg's Jewish community – the same as the rest of our readers, I would be much less well informed about goings on in Winnipeg.

This week my wife, older sister, and I were fortunate to be able to attend a large Shabbat dinner hosted by the Chabad in Puerto Villarta (although we're not staying in Puerto Vallarta; we're in Nuevo Vallarta, which we find much quieter and far more beautiful than Puerto – in case anyone reading this should ever think of coming down to Mexico and hasn't been to this part of the country before).

As it was, there were also many Winnipeggers at this particular dinner, which was led by young Rabbi Shneur Hecht and his wife Mushkie, (also joined by their two children, Tzivia and Menachem, who contributed a



Rabbi Shneur Hecht of Puerto Vallarta with his wife Mushkie, and two children, Tzivia and Menachem. Rabbi and Rebbitzin Hecht arrived in Puerto Vallarta only three years ago and built a thriving Chabad movement which regularly attracts large crowds to Friday evening Shabbat dinners. Each Thursday evening you can also find Rabbi Hecht at the Puerto Vallarta Marina selling challahs (and explaining to non-Jewish tourists what a challah is).

delightful singing of a Shabbes song - which was totally incomprehensible).

Rabbi Hecht bears an uncanny resemblance to our own Rabbi Shmuly Altein – both in appearance, and in his charismatic personality. Rabbi Hecht told the some 200 individuals who had gathered in an elegant hotel known as the "Secret" (and for which I was vastly overdressed in my Bermuda shorts... Who knew it was going to be a fancy, shmancy dinner?) that he and his wife had arrived in Puerto Vallarta only three years ago – with instructions to begin a Chabad movement here. Since then, the Hechts have been remarkably successful in attracting Jews from all over the world to their Friday evening

services and dinners, with the highlight of the year apparently being this particular dinner, known as "Shabbat 180" (for the number of people who were expected to attend. In fact, the number, as I noted, was well over 180 – a testament to the success of last year's dinner, the rabbi explained, which attracted 90 individuals.)

At our own table we were joined by former Winnipeggers Evelyn Numerow and Harris Gulko, along with Beverly Gorenstein. Two other of our dinner mates - their name being "Pink", also had a Winnipeg connection, as Mrs. Pink had lived in Transcona, while both Mr. and Mrs. Pink had been married at the Shaarey Zedek in 1952 by the late Rabbi Milton Aaron. (Anyone who travels knows you can bump into former Winnipeggers everywhere. As Beverly Gorenstein conversed with others at our table she quickly established that one other dinner mate and she had a common connection through the Hechter family in Winnipeg. I felt as if I were in the middle of a Gerry Posner column.)

Also at the dinner we ran into other Winnipeg couples: Marvin and Bella Ben Ari, Allan and Gloria Cantor, Barry and Elaine Webber, and Wayne and Carla Vickar. (Who knows? There might have been other Winnipeggers there as well. It seems that Puerto Villarta has become even more popular with Winnipeggers in recent years as the Canadian dollar continues to go very far in Mexico, as opposed to the U.S.)

Still, being the news hound that I am, I haven't strayed very far from keeping in touch with what's happening in the world. There is never a shortage of stories about which to write in this paper, but I do like to keep on top of ongoing stories about which we've written previously.

The one story that has preoccupied me most in recent weeks has been the impending sale of the portion of Town Island that is not owned by BB Camp, but which is owned by the City of Kenora. I am now glad to report that, at least for the time being, the sale of Town Island has been averted – not because the City of Kenora dropped the idea of selling it; rather, it was because Kenora did not receive one single "expression of interest" in buying the island, according to an email I received from Kenora's Manager of Development Service, Adam Smith. (In a previous issue I explained that Kenora was prepared to sell Town Island only to one buyer. Undoubtedly, the thought of having to go through environmental and other regulatory hurdles must have discouraged anyone who had considered putting in a bid for the island.)

While the "stay of execution" that so worried the "Friends of Town Island" must come as a relief to the thousands of individuals who had been waiting anxiously to see what would happen as of the deadline of January 31 for receipt of expressions of interest in Town Island, there has been much confusion surrounding this story.

The most recent element of confusion – and something I wrote about in our last issue, occurred when an online publication known as *Kenora Online* wrote in a headline that the Ontario Minister of Northern Development, someone by the name of Greg Rickford, had told a reporter for that publication that the Ontario government was interested in a land swap that would have seen Kenora hand over Town Island to the provincial government in exchange for Crown owned land either in or adjacent to Kenora. However, when I read that particular story, I concluded that the minister had never said anything about engaging in a land swap. In fact, what he was quoted as having said should have led one to the exact opposite conclusion: that Ontario was interested in developing Town Island, not conserving it.

I asked the reporter for *Kenora Online* how he had come to the conclusion that this particular minister was interested in a land swap when the minister's own words gave no indication that was his intent, but the reporter simply said to me: "Why don't you contact Rickford yourself?"

Subsequently, I did attempt to do that – by email, phone, and Twitter – all to no avail. I tried to enlist the help of other reporters, including from the *Canadian Jewish News* and the CBC, and those two outlets may still follow up my line of inquiry, but at this point it seems that the issue is moot: Unless Kenora reopens the process of putting up Town Island for sale again in the near future, BB Camp is saved from having to worry about the island being opened up for development.

Still, the fact that this Minister Rickford was so consistently unresponsive to my repeated requests for clarification just what his government's position was re Town Island has led

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Correction to story from last week

In our story in the last issue on Jewish friends running for positions on the Winnipeg School Division School Board, we quoted Kevin Freedman in relation to a New Ojibway and Cree bilingual program at Brock Corydon elementary school. The program is actually at Isaac Brock School. We apologize for the error.

THE JEWISH POST & NEWS

Published every second Wednesday.

Funded by the
Government
of Canada

Financé par le
gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

Subscriptions in Canada

\$43.67 per year

Subscriptions outside Canada **\$100.00 per year** in Cdn. funds or **\$75.00 per year** in U.S. funds

Member of Jewish Telegraphic Agency, New York.

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The Jewish Post Ltd.
Publisher

Bernie Bellan
Editor

Directors
Bernie Bellan
Myron Love
Reuben Potash

Office at
1-620 Brock St.
Wpg. MB R3N 0Z4

Publications
Agreement
No. 40047412

Please send all mail
to above address

Phone: **204-694-3332**

Fax: **204-694-3916**

Postage paid at
Winnipeg
ISSN 0836-6063

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