

Doors opened for Chernobyl victims

Two decades after Chernobyl accident, Canada offers a brief break from radiation

By MAGDA KONIECZNA
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GUELPH

Michael Kaye has opened his home to children from the other side of the world.

The last two summers, his family has taken in a young boy from Belarus to get him away from the radiation-soaked atmosphere that was left after the nuclear explosion in Chernobyl, in Ukraine, 20 years ago yesterday.

This year, they're taking in his sister, too.

The explosion released 400 times the radiation of the bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima during the Second World War.

The United Nations has said about 9,300 people are likely to die of cancer caused by radiation. Some groups, including Greenpeace, argue the death

toll could be as much as 10 times higher. But people here are doing what they can to help.

And they see the results of their work almost immediately, as a steady diet, fresh air and medical help mean the children gain some weight and become less pale and more energetic right away, said Brad Scott, the chair of the Elmira-based group called Canadian Friends of Chernobyl's Children.

Scott's family has taken in the same girl for the last ten years.

He said it's important for him to soften the effects of a disaster that happened so far away.

And over the years, Anja, the little girl who was so pale and slim when she first arrived a decade ago, has become part of the family.

"She's like our daughter who lives in Belarus," he said.

The reality of life in Cambridge

with Scott's family is much different from the world she comes from.

"It's like six weeks in Disneyland," he said.

There's no running water in Anja's home, and the village swimming pool has been dry as long as she remembers. When Scott's wife went to visit, she wanted to bake a cake but found no sugar in the grocery store. Instead, she bought the single orange in the shop, which was cut into small pieces and shared for dessert.

When the children come here, they benefit from donated time with doctors, dentists and optometrists. And the families often send them home with suitcases of medical or school supplies. "It's really easy for us to send that stuff," Scott said.

Kaye, who works as a social worker at St. Joseph's Health Centre, was surprised by the things their nine-year-old visitor, Vova, didn't have at home.

"The first time we saw him he was frightened and we were apprehensive," Kaye said.

So they decided to break the ice

with some ice cream from a McDonald's drive-thru.

"He'd never seen a drive-thru or an ice cream," Kaye said.

"We offer them little things we take for granted."

When Kaye heard about the nuclear disaster, he didn't realize its ramifications. But since he's decided to help those most affected by it, he's never looked back.

"So often we give money to charities but don't know where it ends up," he said. "Here, we can see very clearly what it's doing."

Fred Eidlin is a professor at the University of Guelph who's taken a keen interest in Eastern Europe for decades. Just as news was trickling out about the nuclear disaster 20 years ago, he was crossing the border from East to West Germany.

"Police got on the train in white suits with Geiger counters on the border," he said. "I'd heard something vaguely, but I didn't see how an explo-

sion would make me radioactive."

It took many years to realize just how serious the disaster was, he said.

Part of the problem was the Soviet government's secrecy. It took days before news of what had happened got out, and much longer than it should have for the area to be evacuated.

The disaster focused attention on the failings of the Soviet system, he said.

And the area will continue to be radioactive for centuries to come. When Eidlin was recently considering taking a job in Ukraine, his wife warned him not to because of ever-present radiation in the atmosphere.

For people in that part of the world, living with that risk is routine, he said.

"It's like people who live in San Francisco, like my two sons," he said. "They know there's going to be an earthquake, but what are they going to do?"

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LOCAL BRIEFS

GUELPH

SIU wraps up 50 interviews in sex assault allegation

The Special Investigations Unit has completed about 50 interviews in an ongoing investigation into allegations of sexual assault by Guelph Police.

The allegations came from a demonstrator and member of the Guelph Union of Tenants and Supporters who was arrested during a protest at a hearing of the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal on March 8.

Investigators are now writing reports about the interviews, and including information like photographs of the site and police reports from that day. They'll prepare one final report for the unit's director, who will review it and make a decision, said SIU spokesperson Rose Bliss.

GUELPH

Cops find seven cab meters inaccurate but not by much

There's a chance you wouldn't have been charged the right fare if you took a taxi in Guelph last week.

Seven cabs were found to have inaccurate meters during an annual taxi meter check put on by Guelph Police last Thursday and Friday. That's out of 95 taxis checked over the two days.

Sergeant Ron Lord said the cabs weren't out a significant amount, and the difference likely came from something like a change in tire pressure.

MAPLETON TOWNSHIP

Smoke inhalation cases result from mattress fire

Flames were coming out of an upstairs window when firefighters arrived on the scene of what started as a mattress fire between Drayton and Moorefield around 9 p.m. Tuesday.

A few people suffered from smoke inhalation, said Mapleton fire Chief Rick Richardson. The fire started from improper use of a source of ignition, like a lighter or matches, Richardson said. Firefighters were on the scene overnight in case of flare-ups.

•Mercury staff

Trades: 'Treated like one of the guys,' she says

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"It was the (skilled trades) program that made it possible," Ferenc said yesterday at the announcement.

Since graduating, she's worked as a carpenter with Lan-Cam Inc., a Guelph renovations company.

She loves the work — and the four raises she's received to date. Though she's the only female carpenter with the firm, there's been no backlash from staff. "I got really lucky. The guys are great. I'm just treated like one of the guys," said Ferenc, 33.

Still, she conceded with so few women in the trades, "I do have something to prove out there."

From an employer's perspective, Guelph-based Reno Diva renovations company president Lise Anne Janis welcomed women into the skilled trades. "Non-traditional occupations tend to pay better," she advised.

Janis added there's a satisfaction at the end of the day seeing a renovated kitchen or new addition to a house take shape in the hands of tradespeople like her. "When I leave at the end of the day, I feel I'm leaving behind something tangible," Janis said.

Skilled tradespeople are as important to society as people with college or university educations, Tibbits said, adding the continued shortage of tradespeople affects Canada.

"It is a big issue in our society," Tibbits said.

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UP, UP AND AWAY

Six-year-old Liam Bentley and his stepmom, Natalie Deebank, use some legwork to fly their kites on a windy afternoon in Sunny Acres Park yesterday

NICKI CORRIGALL, GUELPH MERCURY

Scientists must network for poor: African Union speaker

By THANA DHARMARAJAH
MERCURY STAFF

GUELPH

Elisabeth Tankeu is frustrated by the inability of governments in African countries to support research and development, leaving people struggling with insufficient resources.

The African Union's commissioner of trade and industry was among the leading international experts at the University of Guelph's Making Poverty History symposium yesterday, which focused on eradicating global poverty.

"We need to build a strong network to link the research and the scientific community . . . to bring this community to tackle Africa's concerns," Tankeu said in an interview.

She hoped the symposium would inspire the University of Guelph's agriculture department to create a research program to address several problems on the African continent such as water contamination, food insecurity and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Tankeu said one sixth of sub-Saharan Africa's entire population, or more than 100 million people, are chronically poor. Forty million children don't attend school and four million children under the age of five die every year.

Famine kills more than all infectious diseases put together.

Agnes Wakesho Mwang'ombe, principal of the College of Agricultural and Veterinary Science at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, said the continent's food insecurity continues to deter economic growth and limits progress in reducing poverty.

However, she said not enough attention has been paid to nutrition issues in development strategies.

There are also other challenges such as the deterioration of natural resources through deforestation, over-harvesting of indigenous medicinal plants and a lack of infrastructure connecting farmers to markets.

She said governments within Africa are slowly realizing that without investments in science and technology, the continent will remain on the periphery.

Manish Raizada, a University of Guelph plant agriculture professor, said academics can help to create cheaper technology for many of these developing countries.

"Take what they're working on and just tweak it a little bit to make it cheaper," he said.

Raizada said information technology can also be used to communicate across nations.

He has just launched CropLink Global Initiative, a website that connects researchers from developing and developed countries.

When surfing the Internet, it's not that easy to stumble across researchers from some of the poorest countries because although many of them may have e-mail addresses, they don't always have websites.

"We're trying to be the Google for agricultural researchers," Raizada said.

He added the website also has a link where people can donate books and trade lab equipment.

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Students from first class returning for Ross reunion

By ALAN FERRIS
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GUELPH

Ross Royals love their white and double blue.

John F. Ross Collegiate Vocational Institute's colours were in place before classroom doors, lockers and even sidewalks around the new school were in place as it opened in 1956.

"We were given three swatches of wool fabric and three plaids," said Donna Speers, one of the students who made the move from Guelph Collegiate to John F. Ross in 1956.

"We looked at a lot of combinations. I remember one combination was red, green and purple. We looked at the yellow and red in the (Guelph founder John) Galt's tartan. Another choice was yellow, black and a red or orange stripe.

"We put it to a vote to the C11A and

C11B classes at GCVI and the double-blue and white won.

"Christine McEwan said she was surprised to learn many Ross students still haven't heard about the reunion and may be thinking it is too late to register.

"Lots of people have misread the initial flyers," said McEwan, a member of the reunion committee.

"They may have thought they had to register by April 6, but that was only if you wanted to order Ross Reunion clothing items delivered on the day of the reunion.

"We are hearing on the phone and on the website that people think it is too late. We are still encountering Royals here in Guelph who don't know a thing about the reunion.

Registration forms are available online at www.rossreunion.ca and at the school.

Speers has fond memories of both

JOHN F. ROSS SCHOOL SONG

'Tis time to stand and sing to praise our school,
We'll cheer the gallant name John Ross,
Hold up our colours high for they must still be kept aloft in victory or loss.
Lift up our spirits, for the fray's not won,
Toil on and up with all hearts true,
For there are heights to win today,
Hail to the fame of the white and double blue.

GCVI and John F. Ross and is even more excited that 15 students in that first class plan to attend the reunion.

"I remember Mrs. Margaret Stephens because she was the one who had to teach us about the birds and the bees and every time she had to do that, her face went red," Speers said.

"Actually, there is a bit of a mystery," she added.

"Our report card from first term said there were 21 students. In the last term, there were 20, but there were only 19 of us in the class picture. We'll have to see if anyone can clear that up."

The school colours became part of the school song. The words were written by history teacher Rae Stuart and the music was composed by the school's first music teacher, Ted Denver. It was amended by Martin Bauer when he became a music teacher in 1960.

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