

DREAM NO SMALL DREAMS

Written and delivered by Newman Wallis on the evening of April 16, 2009
To the Annual General Meeting of the Arts Council of Muskoka

ARTS COUNCIL OF MUSKOKA.....APRIL 16, 2009

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. It is my sincere pleasure and honour to be invited to address you at your Annual General Meeting... and I fondly hope that I will neither keep you past your bedtime.....nor have the effect of accelerating it.

I notice how they have started referring to Barak Obama as the “teleprompter president” because he won’t go anywhere without it and has publicly referred to the teleprompter as his “oratorical crutch”..... Well now, look at me...NO teleprompter...just a little music stand made available for me by Tamsen Tillson through the kindness of one Terry Riddoch. Thank you for this, folks. And I think it is probably time for Port Sydney to mobilize its artists for a lectern-building contest.

....Anyway., like any good artist, I have brought my own music.

Whatever I may have to say today, I say in the role and the spirit of a truly objective observer. My wife, Juliana and I just recently moved here from the Big Smoke and have no illusions about having a clear grasp on the history, status and dramatis personae of the cultural community throughout Muskoka. I have attended a few meetings and sort of got the flavour. I have gathered a few impressions...and have a whole lot to learn. However, in my last incarnation, as Dean at Seneca College in Toronto, we had a rule about new employees at the podium. You could only play the “I’m the new boy on the block” card once...then, like Oliver Twist, you had to consider yourself part of the family...promptly.

Permit me, if you will and at the risk of sounding a little pretentious, to open with a quotation from our old friend of the Arts, Johannes Wolfgang von Goethe who counseled us all, way back in 1775, “*Dream no small dreams...for they have no power to move the hearts of men.*”by which, in the parlance of those times, he meant what we more generously refer to nowadays as humankind...men AND women. Numerous visionaries, from then til now, have laid claim to this quotation; but it was Goethe, the great European Renaissance Man - the polymath as they call it – the eclectic man of numerous artistic and intellectual pursuits when he was invited to the court of Carl

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August, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenreich and asked what it would take to transform that sleepy little rural community into a world class cultural destination. That is what he said.....*"Dream no small dreams..."* and, since then everyone from Frank Lloyd Wright to Victor Hugo to Martin Luther King to Winston Churchill have had it attributed to them....because they used it....and they used it to best advantage.

At that time, Saxe-Weimar-Eisenreich was a rural, partially forested area much the size of Muskoka in the heartland of Germany...in the Bundesland of Thuringia to be exact for those of you who are REALLY interested. And the Grand Duke lived right there, much like the federal Minister of Industry lives right here. To this day, Weimar boasts a population of roughly 64,000. Today, Muskoka with its six municipal components, boasts an off-seasonal population of 64,000.....like, that's what it is now. By the summer solstice, last year, it boasted 147,500.....that's an increase at the rate of 233% in one month. That is comparable to the increase in Mecca at the height of its season. Except the population that inflates Muskoka has one abiding and highly relevant characteristic....They can all afford to be here....and that doesn't even take into account the tsunami of tourists....even if their numbers are down.

But then, you all already know all of this. What you don't know is that when Goethe set his shoulder to the cultural wheel in Weimar, at a time when Autobahns were not even a twinkle in Germany's eye, he transformed that little bucolic community into the artistic and intellectual destination of all of Europe in the era after Venice and Florence. It became what demographers refer to as a "cultural hearth"...a pivotal, developmental term in the history and study of central place theory. By the time Weimar had shot its bolt, its residents had come to include everybody from Franz Liszt to Martin Luther, Richard Strauss, Hector Berlioz, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Hummel, Richard Wagner, Friederich Schiller, Marlena Dietrich, Johann Herder, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friederich Neitzsche, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and ultimately Walther Gropius who would found the Bauhaus School in Weimar....the Bauhaus School with its profound influence upon subsequent developments in Modernist art, architecture, graphic design, interior design, industrial design and typography....all at a place that means The House of Building but which came to mean the fount of modernism in every manifestation of the arts and the technologies associated with them. What Goethe had and Weimar had, that Muskoka does not have.....yet.....was Grand Duke Carl August...the appreciative and open-handed patron.

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Well, that was Weimar and that was then. Its greatness and its creativity sparkles through and spans the ages.....but it still has not got- and never had -what **Muskoka** has. Muskoka has everything.....It has...

- a) **the environment**, unrivalled in the western world for its placid lakes and stately forests which we MUST, MUST strive to preserve...God help us all if anyone discovered oil or diamonds under the soil up here! If all the other aspirations of this group are going to be fulfilled, one thing is sure. Muskoka has to be kept, defiantly, clean, green and pristine....like forever. We are in the very richest heartland of the Great Lakes basin which boasts 6 quadrillion gallons of fresh water...over one-fifth of the entire fresh water supply of the world. If this water poured out over the 48 states to the south of us, it would spread out ten feet deep over every inch. 90% of the US water supply comes from this area and we have more fresh water in Muskoka than ALL of Russia. Fresh water sustains all life...and here we are, 64,000 of us, surrounded by it, immersed in it, probably taking it for granted...the most precious commodity there is. No wonder there are so many trees...and bugs...and tourists. Our art, in all its forms, must reflect our environment...and our environment almost defies description. From Couchiching to Georgian Bay to Algonquin Park, Muskoka spans roughly 2,500 square miles. There are 232 independent territories and nations in the world at this time. 174 of them cover more area than Muskoka. Fully one quarter of all those nations are smaller Muskoka. We have a population similar to that of Bermuda which is small....and Greenland which embraces two and half million square kilometres. We are bigger than Prince Edward Island. We are palpably over-endowed and under-populated...and that is a great blessing...but a dangerous one as covetous eyes are set upon us. Muskoka has, as well.....
- b) **the consumer and tourist population base**....in a grand Great Lakes arc from Chicago, through Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, the rest of New York state, Montreal and Ottawa and, within that arc of well over 30 millions, the entire burgeoning Golden Horseshoe...almost 7 million denizens of the GTA, two scenic hours down the road, who look to this place as their cultural, environmental and recreational birthright and their wilderness watershed.....their glorious, accessible, deciduous broadleaf forested outback.....and Muskoka has....
- c) **Artists and artisans**, craftsmen hobbyists, educators and intellectuals, creative thinkers and musicians and practitioners at the avocational and the professional level of some of the most arcane aptitudes and pastimes known to man...and they are all – generically – arts, and they will all soon be counted and identified through

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the process of cultural mapping.....so we will know who's who and who's where. In addition, Muskoka has.....

- d) **The will?** The firm will to become NOW the cultural hearth that it is destined to become sooner or later....Now there's the rub. Does it have the will? Does Muskoka really have the will. Does its cultural community actually have the royal jelly to do what it takes to formulate that dream, agree upon that dream and follow that dream....that no-small dream? It surely has the artisans and the craftspeople, the lovers, appreciators and practitioners of so many of the arts. But.....is the will really here....now? Is this not the question of the day?
- e) **The Plan.** Well, there is no point in having the will, the resolve, the glazed eye of commitment if you haven't got the plan...let me tell you. You might have made all kinds of progress to the point where you are all loaded for bear and poised for the next move...But...What is it that the Cheshire Cat said to Alice in Wonderland ? "It doesn't matter where you are, if you don't know where you are going." And, I do not mean to speak unkindly, but if you have not got the creativity to address this core issue, then you probably have to stop flattering yourselves on your creativity until you do...*because that is what creativity is*....It is acutely sensing the world and all its parts around you, grasping that world by the forelock, re-fashioning the parts and making something different, something better, something durable, something instructive, something inspiring...and something generally consensual. Can you do that? You better know the answer because the time really is now. *And NOW really is when*

- **The fabled G8** is making its plans to arrive here with all of its hoopla and all its media in June of 2010 and the funds to support this are about to be allocated to the swift, the aggressive and the persuasive;
- **The province** is in the mode of designating areas for focused, concentrated, functional purposes...and the same Province is yearning for some uniquely creative answers to the gravest of recessionary dilemmas;
- **Your local political representatives** are seriously seeking to attract industry – of the labour-intensive variety - up to this area with all its fresh water;
- **Developers** – numerous developers I can vouchsafe to you first-hand – are trolling about the sylvan Muskoka heartland with its stunning vistas, looking for property to turn into more neighbourhoods than we probably need in the short range;
- **Your half-finished Red Leaves hotel complex** and embryonic community is foraging around looking for ways to pay for itself...to draw people to its majestic

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location and its breathtaking panorama through any reasonable project, activity or idea;

- **Your artistic communities and associations** are all reviewing their mandates and bumping into each other at an increasing number of arts-related functions...not necessarily vying for supremacy nor surreptitiously competing for scarce resources.....just not unified into one great homogeneous thrust and, let me tell you, in light of what you *could do* up here, fragmentation – or even just loose coalition with separate identities – is your worst enemy if you are really going to formulate an achievable vision
- **Your economy is in arguable tatters**, notwithstanding the comforting words about our rock-solid banking system...and the principal casualties of this world-wide setback are the unemployed. If art...indeed, artistry....in ALL of its magical manifestationsis more than avocation...If it can be shown to employ ordinary folks, to draw crowds, to sell products, to utilize raw materials, to advance culture, to attract tourists, to advance marketing, to educate and train and enhance civility and to truly stimulate a cultural destination...a cultural “hearth”...NOW is the time to do it and HERE is the place where it should be done...Muskoka....ARTLAND!

Ya, sure, newcomer...easy for you to say. But, like, where do you start.?? Don't you suppose we have all given this a ton of serious consideration??/ Maybe

Maybe not enough.

In my rookie year – without benefit of 100 meetings and close association with all the dedicated individuals and organizations – here's what I see from my objective perch .

You must address seven basic areas of strategy that clamour for your attention. You need, in no particular order..., beginning with M for

MONEY.....You need donors, patrons, grants, subsidies etc. all for a variety of purposes not the least of which is a central base of operations and so you need grant-writers (a most artful and cunning skill reposed unto just a few) and fund-raisers and connections and none of these will really suffice without a “case” and the overarching case has yet to be made; You need...

A

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ACCORD.... As they sang in Oklahoma, “the farmer and the cowman should be friends”. So too all of the amicable but separately constituted components of the great cultural mosaic that is artistic Muskoka. You have to not just get together...and I do not mean under a parasol but weld yourself together....You must devise a mechanism for agreeing upon your common, priority goals and objectives and the specific strategies that will carry them forward....soon;

P

PROJECTS....Man oh man do you folks need projects. You have to stop meeting about meeting and find yourselves an arc to build or a Rushmore to carve. Something real...something to work on and to point to when you are done. Some old wag once remarked that the definition of a fanatic is a person who redoubles his efforts as he loses sight of the objective. The objectives...the plans and projects must be clear and unequivocal. More on this shortly.....You need as well..

P

POLITICAL WILL....I benefit from the fact that, as the new kid on the block, I really have no history or interaction with any of your political leaders. My experience – having done my doctoral work in Political Science - is that although they set themselves up for all kinds of abuse simply by the act of throwing their hat into the ring, most political representatives TEND to be at least initially high-minded about what they are mandated to do...IF (and this is the killer) IF they really know what that is beyond repair and maintenance of the status quo. Otherwise, they have to be reminded. It has been my observation up here that the all-consuming interest of the local politicians is NOT on the transformation of this area into Canada’s most prideful cultural hearth. Yet, perhaps it should be. Perhaps that would solve all their other problems. But, without them or at least an activist handful of them, there will be a lot of wheel-spinning in the arts community and not a lot of progress....trust me. You need

I

IDENTIFICATIONof what you already have here. You need names and addresses and e-mails and types and varieties of arts and crafts and allied activities and you need it researched and updated in perpetuity...and it must be accessible. Along those lines and related to this , you need

N

NUMBERS...You need to increase your support cohort. You need many more people buying into your concept once it is clear and presentable. You need not just practitioners of art ...You need appreciators and purchasers of art, drama, music, crafts, culinary skills....anything falling within the broad rubric. You need what they used to refer to when I was in high school as....”popularity”. And you need the great...

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G

GRAND PLAN.....and that is what your meetings should be about. ...what you are going to do about what you have decided to do. You may remember the immortal words from Leacock's "Gertrude and the Governess" where "Lord Ronald flung himself from the room, flung himself upon his horse and rode off madly in all directions at once." That's what you CAN'T do. You have to settle on a manageable number of priority projects and, as Mark Twain said so many moons ago, "put all your eggs in one basket...and WATCH THAT BASKET." Well...maybe a couple of baskets if you can afford them..and if they are synergistic...if they are capable of touching many people and many artistic pursuits.

So....Money, Accord, Projects, Political Will, Identification, Numbers and Grand plan.....the seven pillars of your aborning ARTLAND. M-A-P-P-I-N-G. Mapping...that's where you start. Get your research done...your data together..then you will know who you are. But do it soon.

Now....back to the projects...as promised.

What can you do that will bring you together; that will enhance all of the objects of art for the greatest numbers??? Let me just bounce a few brief ideas off your creative minds. Try to remember that the essential feature of the word "brainstorm" which is so misused, is to bring people together to hatch numerous inventive ideas – no matter how preposterous – on the logic that one or two might actually work...once you have identified the problem.

Idea...**AN ACADEMY OF THE ARTS**....a central place committed to all of the objectives and subsequent projects your imaginations can muster. But to have this you HAVE to have a physical plant.....

Idea...**THE MUSKOKA REGIONAL CENTRE**....now currently abandoned but steeped in over a century of history this former Muskoka "Cottage " Sanatorium for consumptives lies sprawled and empty across over 75 acres of scenic Lake Muskoka north of Gravenhurst and south of Taboo like a great sleeping giant, entirely suited, after some rehab, to accommodate literally hundreds from its commanding heights and parkland surrounded on three sides by the lake and by cottagers. Such a marvellous destination for intellectuals, retreaters, painters and sculptors...and arts administrators and educators...and it is already built....and jaw-dropping to behold from the lake.

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Idea...**A MUSKOKA-WIDE ACADEMY AWARDS FUNCTION**...with all the foreplay and lead-up hype; with all of the auditioning and competing and suspense and no-real-losers final event drawing media from across the province but confined to Muskoka artists. Consider a symbolic award to supplement a generous cash award, much like old Oscar but a stately bronze maple leaf, symbolizing the nine categories for which there would be up to say six nominees...the nine categories?

M-A- P-L-E L- E- A- F

Music from creation to rendition;

Arts and crafts in all their protean forms,

Performance from drama and acting to story-telling and the dance,

Literary from poetry to novels to playwriting to journalism

Entertainment from culinary arts to showbiz

Leadership across this field, to recognize those who made it happen;

Education, for the production of consumers of arts and to encourage the schools, colleges and universities to buy in to the concept

Athletic...never to be left out, so many recreational pursuits overlap the artistic...such as figure skating, synchronized swimming, diving, equestrian, and

F...for the **Founders** and for the **Financial angels** who help to make all this happen

Nine categories forming the acronym “Maple Leaf” and into which endeavour so many could be recruited and, over the years, themselves be winners. And such an opportunity to showcase your work...win, lose or draw...and to invite your near and dear ones to a major event....ideally at such a place as Red Leaves which, whatever else it is suited for, is certainly an optimal venue for an Awards extravaganza...and I’ll just bet that you folks would be welcomed. If you can get over 200 people to a Muskoka Outstanding Business Women’s Awards night, I would guess you could get 2,000 to a Muskoka Academy Awards function...and more with the right host Master of Ceremonies.

Why not a **SISTER CITY** for Muskoka...a sister city that already is a cultural destination...like Chautauqua New York with its 150,000 annual visitors...or Tanglewood or Bayreuth or Banff or Sundance or Poughkeepsie NY or Lunenburg?...with reciprocal visits.

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Why not get the **DUNLAP OBSERVATORY** up here. They are still trying to figure out what to do about it and the last time I looked, Urania, the muse of astronomy, was still one of the nine enduring muses of the arts. It surely would draw crowds and, up here, the stars at night are big and bright.

HOLLYWOOD NORTH is already humming along for a whole lot of reasons. But they don't have live outdoorsy sets like we have up here. Filmport Studios, the newest and largest film and production space in Toronto is already booked to capacity and there is no place to park. At present, more than 35,000 Torontonians are estimated to work in the local film industry...and 2009 is shaping up to be a better year than 2008.....all this during a recession. Several months ago, the New York tax credit program ran out of cash while the Canadian dollar providentially dipped against its American counterpart making Toronto and other Canadian locales ideal sites. We are pre-eminently another Canadian locale....eh?

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY and GEORGIAN COLLEGE could be, I am most confident, urged into a partnership role with the arts community if you got all your ducks in a row. The mandate of colleges includes identifying community wants and needs and responding to them. Less so the universities which are inclined to do their own thing...But why would they fly in the face of opportunity if they were invited to join in on a major project...a big dream – to devise a world-class Academy of the Arts which promised employment for many of their people. Could they not serve as bases of operation, administrative outposts as the grand plan took some shape.?? The best way to address this may be to instal a member on each of their Boards...and they ARE under instructions to have community members on their Boards.....AND they have exclusive rights over that one great, universal motivator..They have the legislated right to confer official academic degrees, diplomas and certificates.

The ideas are plentiful and each has its own core merit with so many spinoff effects. Consider....

A world-class **FRESHWATER MUSEUM**...and centre for Aquaculture

A FOCUS ON OUTDOOR EDUCATION...and all the arts related to it

SUPPORT OF SOME SERIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIGS UP HERE

THE WORLD FIDDLE CHAMPIONSHIP...does it already exist?

THE CREATION OF A MASSIVE CULINARY ARTS INSTITUTE like the one at Hyde Park New York which trains cooks for and to all corners of the world

A contest for the creation of a symphonic **MUSKOKA RHAPSODY**

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A program for the embracing and maintaining of CULTURAL INTERNS from various universities and colleges around Ontario and beyond.

SQUARE-DANCING WITH THE STARS, conducted at Red Leaves or Deerpark and televised across the nation..Who wouldn't watch that?

A MASSIVE HIGHLAND GAMES...what better place? Maybe you have tried it, but, let me tell you... people turn out in droves for Highland Games and the peripheral showings and activities can be quite productive

HOBBY SHOWS FOR KIDS....all summer long..and perhaps not confined to kids

The development of a truly creme-de-la-creme **CHILDREN'S CHOIR**, partly for the many kids who come up during the summer and whose parents worry about what they are up to

The formation, somewhere up here, of a vast **SCULPTURE CITY** (like Stonehenge or Karnak) which would showcase the work of sculptors and draw many visitors, more each year as it expanded

A grand re-think of what might be envisaged as **THE BRACEBRIDGE WATERFRONT**...which could conceivably accommodate, at least for the summer period a virtual Ontario Place

An **IMAX of Muskoka** such as the memorable "North of Superior"

A COMPLETE RE-HAB OF DOWNTOWN BRACEBRIDGE as they so successfully accomplished in Unionville Ontario and so many small communities in New England...Rodeo Drive Muskoka

The commencement of a **CULTURAL FUND for Muskoka** with clear aims and tax receipts...and naming possibilities.

Full support for the formation of a unique new **MUSKOKA SCHOOL OF PAINTING** such as the Group of Seven did for Algonquin...almost inadvertently so many years ago.

Start a new fad in the area of **BOAT PAINTING**. Just consider how many dull old disappearing propeller boats ply these waters each year....dull, bland and hard to see on a foggy morning.

Why not get the landscaping people to co-operate in building the **WORLD'S BIGGEST LABYRINTH** in one of our towns, a challenge for all, and totally doable.

Indeed, why not re-name Bracebridge, **BRIDGE-A-DOON** because that's what it looks like from where I live...and Bracebridge is such a prosaic, boilerplate name.

And on and on into the night...ideas ideas.

But you have to have a project to bring yourselves together and to unify your efforts and to get out there and knock the socks off the public. It is one thing to "be supportive

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to the arts community” that’s going to happen anyway. But – if you are going to be taken seriously, **like the stripper said, “Ya gotta have a gimmick!”**

Fact: A recent study of post-secondary institutions throughout North America arrived at the fiscal conclusion that the **ECONOMIC IMPACT** of a college or university operation in a community reflected a financial factor of 7.2. What that means, in a nutshell, is that for every dollar invested in bankrolling of a post-secondary education site in a community, it generated \$7.20 worth of economic activity...simply stated, return on investment. That’s one of the reasons why everybody wants one. That’s why every province and state builds so many. It employs people in non-polluting, “cultural and office” jobs. It brings in students, bankrolled by their ambitious parents with their needs for rent, food, booze, sports, clothes, music, books, culture, transportation etc. etc. And, outside of Queen’s University, they rarely tear the town apart. WELL...so it is with any kind of cultural facility or institution that you might elect to create up here...or enhance, if you are throwing your lot in with the local college and university. You are creating an economic impact that your senior politicians love to hear about, even if the local ones don’t quite make a crusade about it....at least not yet.

Admittedly, \$30 million is one of the few provincial budget items providing new money for the cultural industry in Ontario...of which \$20 million is earmarked for the Ontario Media Development Corporation to support creative industries. However, provincial officials have indicated that cultural institutions will be allowed to tap into the \$32.5 billion infrastructure fund the province has just set up. And, federally – try to remember our neighbour the Hon. Mr Clement – over \$27 billion is being spent on culture. Why? Because it is good business...especially in depressed times. That’s roughly \$60 billion all told. Wouldn’t just one of those billions go well?

Try to remember old Conn Smyth who built Maple Leaf Gardens with no money right in the middle of the depression...and all the workers got shares and never looked back....and without it there is some question as to whether you'd have the multi-billion dollar National Hockey League at this time...a true boon to the economy.

The time to be creative is NOW.

My parting advice to you is this...I tell you all this as a seasoned grandfather....

Never play cards with a guy named Doc

Never eat a place called Mom’s

Buy low...buy when the market is falling

Stop using the term “collaboration” which means co-operation with the enemy

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Get yourselves together into one strong unified, multipurpose arts machine, then
Go..for..the..gold.....Go..for...ARTLAND..!!!!.....

And *Dream no small dreams.*

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