



## **President's Report 2009**

This is the time to look back with satisfaction on what our association has managed to accomplish to improve and preserve our community.

This is harder than you might imagine. We don't have ready measures to apply to our activity – we cannot really say that our outputs increased by a certain percentage or our productivity soared. For most of us, the Glebe remains a pleasant place to live; maybe that is one indicator.

Of course the GCA is not the prime reason this is a good place to live. In fact it is the efforts of other groups – sports clubs, churches, businesses, schools, and the people living and working here – that make this place.

The role of the community association is to provide a forum at which broad issues can be expressed, and to provide a means through which wider community concerns can be voiced. The folk concerned with noise from the air conditioning at the Lord Lansdowne building came and spoke to the association. Their concern was not only personal, it was cast in terms of an issue for the city's objective of achieving higher density through redevelopment.

When appropriate the association can play a constructive role in bringing disputes into the open for resolution. This past year's discussion about gardening in Memorial Park is a good example of our effort in finding a compromise to bridge the difference between two groups in the neighbourhood.

Occasionally, the association is the vehicle our community uses to take action for some shared goal. For example, our famous Great Glebe Garage Sale is a way to raise money for the Food Bank.

Finally, our association has taken on the role of keeping our community informed. This is our motive in organizing all candidates meetings, in bringing in speakers to discuss property tax and in preparing material for publication in the Glebe Report. This is the reason we stick handbills in your mailbox and come and talk on your doorstep.

What is outside our mandate? That is a tough question. When confronted in the produce department of the supermarket, I have found it difficult to say – “this is not our affair”.

If a group of children think it a good idea to keep hens in the backyard, is this our concern? Some of you would say no, but I could think of no better means by which their concerns could be expressed. Don't think that we will become a prime egg producing region soon, but we have managed to engage some youngsters and have convinced them that they also can affect the development of their community.

One of the greatest strengths of our association is that we try to establish contact with everyone in the community. We have a complicated system of area representative and block representatives which means that everyone who answers his front door can develop contact with our organization.

We try to give everyone a chance to know how they can carry their concerns forward to the association – usually by talking to someone on their block.

For several years, long before I became President, I urged the people operating businesses in the Glebe to organize themselves, possibly taking the step to form a Business Improvement Area. It was gratifying to have the BIA come into existence just about a year ago. An active and convenient business district, or “high street” as the British would say, is one of the most appealing features of the Glebe. By working closely with the merchants and other commercial operations in the Glebe we can preserve this advantage we have, and which other neighbourhoods in the city envy

This past year we have continued to be active on the environment front. Remember when we decided with much hesitation to declare ourselves a pesticide-free zone? We had no authority and could only urge our neighbours to eliminate the cosmetic use of pesticides. Now our tentative steps have gone to the provincial level and cosmetic use of pesticides has been phased out across the province.

Some of our members came up with the strange concept of the urban forest. They were concerned at the loss of trees in the city and wondered if anything could be done. There is active discussion going on now about controls on urban tree cutting. Moreover our colleagues in the distant suburbs – both in Kanata and most recently in Orleans – share our concern.

We have decided to take action in our own part of the urban forest. The first step is an inventory of trees on city property. This will not be an easy task for volunteers but we are working with city staff and I am convinced that we will get useful information – information which will serve our goal of improving our community.

And let’s face it, there are improvements needed. We are probably the most graffiti-infected neighbourhood in the city. This is a pity, not only because our own residents hate it, but also because so many of the visitors to our city come to this neighbourhood and leave with a negative impression of Ottawa.

We need to find a way to lick the graffiti problem. Several weeks ago, our environment committee met with others with an interest in the issue. Representatives from other neighbourhoods were surprised to learn that we had teams of volunteers out cleaning graffiti away. Thanks to the BIA the commercial district is much improved. We need to find willing partners to have the same impact on the side streets where our residents are faced with evidence of vandalism.

I think we also need to consider the question of panhandling. I’m not convinced that giving coins to people soliciting on the street is the appropriate response to wider social issues. There are alternative approaches and we need to look into them.

We should not assume that there are no social issues affecting the Glebe. Ask some of the people involved in the churches, schools, or other social agencies. They will tell you that this is not a problem-free zone.

But one of the difficulties we have is in convincing residents in other parts of the city that we do not live in some sort of bubble of privilege. When I have mentioned that household income in the Glebe is only marginally higher than in Barrhaven and significantly less than in Stittsville, I have been met with disbelief.

The stereotypes of the Glebiter with his Volvo, Birkenstocks and granola seem to colour everything we say in public. It doesn't mean we all need to change our car, our footwear or our breakfast cereal. But it indicates that we must be forceful and clear in our public statements. We need to embrace others' concerns in order to win support for our issues. We must avoid giving any impression that we seek only to preserve advantage for ourselves.

Let me list a few of the issues we must continue to work on.

We have had in process for several years an application for heritage designation for the eastern part of Central Park. We are not asking for much. Other parts of the old city have blanket heritage designations. This application must be moved forward – accept it, modify it, turn it down, but move it forward.

In new parts of town it is accepted practice that utility wires are not strung along major streets. The main street of Ottawa – Bank Street – is about to be totally rebuilt. The wires must be buried in the Glebe. Bring Canada's capital up to the standard of world-class communities or even to that of lesser claimants such as Charlottetown or Port Hope or Brockville.

The reconstruction of Bank Street has been supplanted by other concerns. But reconstruction is imminent. We will have to find the time to return to that issue over the year to come.

And, unavoidably, this brings us to the redevelopment of Lansdowne Park. This question has drawn volunteers like no other. Friends and supporters from other communities have emerged in gratifying numbers. Your association has continuously sought the best possible outcome from the Lansdowne controversy. We seek the best possible result, not just for our community, but for all citizens of Ottawa. I reject absolutely the concept that our views are illegitimate because we live nearby.

I have sometimes been asked to come up with adjectives to describe the public debate about Lansdowne. Where do you begin? Words that spring to mind depend on which role in the debate is to be described but some of them include shallow, manipulated, uninformed, cynical, fearful and dismayed. No doubt we will continue to struggle with this matter for months to come. I hope we can keep in mind that this is not a debating contest in which we win by rhetorical stratagems. This a question of restoring value to our common, neglected asset.

But I do not want to end this report on a pessimistic note. This community has great strength. You see this in the unexpected knowledge, experience and judgement that appears when an issue arises. You see this in the degree of community engagement – the volunteers that offer to help; the overflowing crowds at meetings; the quality of comments made and questions posed.

I have counted on that strength in the past three years. I am confident that the strength will sustain us in the future. I thank you for providing that strength in building our community.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Brocklebank