

# The Townships

## Benoit joins fight to save Massawippi trail

By Rita Legault

**NORTH HATLEY** — Orford MNA Robert Benoit is trying to save the Sentiers Massawippi Trails project which would turn the abandoned CP tracks between Lennoxville and Beebe into a recreational path. Benoit vowed Wednesday he will do everything he can to resurrect the project, which died

this summer after Ayer's Cliff, Stanstead East and Ogden gave it a thumbs down.

Benoit said he hopes to convince opposing municipalities of the project's merits. Both say Ayer's Cliff and Ogden oppose the project on the grounds of public safety and upkeep costs.

Benoit said there are ques-

tions and "incredible myths" surrounding the project which he will try to address.

A feasibility study is underway and Benoit said he has been in touch with Memphremagog Regional Municipality warden Roger Nicolet to get the municipalities together to talk.

Benoit made the promise at a press conference Wednesday where he gave a mid-term round-up of what he's done in the riding since he was elected two years ago.

### MOST IMPORTANT

The Orford MNA also made a series of new promises on what he plans to do in the next two years of his mandate in the National Assembly. He said the li-

near park was his "most important dossier".

"This is a public treasure of incredible beauty," he said, adding that he wants to try to "keep it in the hands of people."

Benoit said he can't understand why businesses in Ayer's Cliff oppose the project. He said the economic spinoffs of the path have been clearly demonstrated elsewhere. In the Waterloo-Granby area a bike path has brought lots of business to local restaurateurs, he said.

The local MNA said he finds the opposition of businessmen "absolutely incomprehensible".

"They encourage big trucks to drive through there at 60 ki-

lometers an hour because they buy french fries there," he said. "And they don't even buy their gas there. They go to the States."

While he personally supports the projects, Benoit said that if further studies show its a "terrible idea", he'll withdraw.

### ANGLOPHONES

Benoit also re-iterated his commitment to the conservation and promotion of small anglophone institutions.

He said he will fight to get accreditation for the Stevens Home, a badly-needed 13-bed seniors residence in the Three Villages area.

"There are people there who are dying in French and they are anglophones," he said.

Benoit said it's also important to keep young anglophone youths, who offer support for the elderly, from leaving the province.

At the press conference Benoit told reporters he has succeeded in coming through on most of his electoral promises.

Since he was elected more than \$43 million has been spent in the riding, he said. But Benoit admits he wasn't always the main mover and shaker. "I can't take credit for it all,"

he said, adding that he's discovered political power is diffused and decisions are made by committees, meetings and study groups.

### ROADBLOCKS

But some of his promises were more difficult to realize, he said, particularly those having to do with roads.

Benoit promised he would provide direct access to Autoroute 55 for Coaticook and an overpass at the intersection of Route 143 and the 55. Transport Quebec has said no to both.

"Just taking care of roads could be a full-time job in a rural riding like ours," he said, adding that there are 800 kilometers of dirt roads in Orford and a day doesn't go by that he doesn't get a petition or a request to do something about roads.

Over the past two years Benoit participated in numerous parliamentary commissions, including those studying opening hours and public finances. He also sat on the Bélanger-Campeau commission looking into the constitutional future of Quebec. He was the permanent replacement for Premier Robert Bourassa, to whom Benoit is parliamentary secretary.



RECORD/GRANT SIMON

Robert Benoit says a lot was accomplished during his first two years in power, but he says he can't take credit for it all.

## Cookie Monster crumbles

**NORTH HATLEY (RL)** — The Cookie Monster is dead, Robert Benoit promised Wednesday.

Benoit was referring to a provincial public health law which stops people from selling homemade cookies and other goodies at public events like fairs and fundraisers.

The law angered many locals when it was applied at Ayer's Cliff Fair two years ago.

Since the incident Benoit has fought for changes to regulations which prevent the sale of food not made in kitchens inspected by the health board.

Benoit said the regulations are being amended so they don't hurt community and volunteer organizations, stopping them from undertaking essential fundraising activities.

## Liberals' have been big flop in ET, PQ says

By Steve Meurice

**SHERBROOKE** — The Parti Québécois drew an ugly picture Wednesday of the provincial Liberals' performance in the Eastern Townships over the past two years.

From the economy to the environment, from municipal affairs to social services, the Liberals have been one big flop, local PQ officials said.

"The people decided to give them another chance" in the last election, said regional PQ president Henri Bourassa at a news conference.

"Two years later, where are we? At the same point. This government doesn't govern, it lets things go or else makes the situation worse itself."

On the economic front, Bourassa pointed to an unemployment rate of 14 per cent in the Sherbrooke area and the bankruptcy of 45 businesses in the last two years, causing a loss of 3000 jobs.

### MEANS NOTHING

"There are three ministers in the region and it doesn't seem to mean anything," added Johnson MNA Carmen Juneau, the only PQ candidate elected in the Townships in 1989.

Orford MNA Robert Benoit came in for some especially harsh criticism. Bourassa called him "the architect of the biggest economic catastrophe" in the region, referring to the sale of the Groupe Commune to a Swiss firm.

"We've seen what Robert Benoit has done in two years. He's done absolutely nothing," Bourassa said.

Environment Minister Pierre Paradis was criticized over the death of thousands of fish in Pike River because of heavy pollution. The river is in Paradis' riding of Bromemissisquoi.

"Paradis knew about the problem for four years and did absolutely nothing."

### CANDIDATES

On the municipal scene, the PQ accused Liberal MNAs of picking candidates for upcoming municipal elections who are favorable to the Ryan reforms. The reforms would see a

transfer of responsibilities to the municipalities that could cost them up to \$500 million across the province.

"It's normal for a political party to establish its pyramid of power, so that it has more contacts with lower levels of government," said PQ executive Jacques Blanchette. "But taking only people who support their policies, that's called managing democracy."

The PQ officials also spent some time dismissing the constitutional proposals put forth by Ottawa Tuesday. They rejected them as unacceptable to Quebec and called on Premier Robert Bourassa to call a referendum as soon as possible.

"The text (of the constitutional proposals) conforms to the expectations of Clyde Wells," said René Turcotte, who spoke for the PQ on the constitutional question.

Turcotte said the economic union proposed by Ottawa is in fact a huge power grab and could strip Quebec of economic tools like the *Caisse de dépôts et placements* and the *Caisses Populaires*.

"What do we get in return? Nothing," Turcotte said.

The distinct society also came in for some criticism. Turcotte said it would force Quebec to promote anglophone rights, something he said is unacceptable.

"We'll be a distinct society like Louisiana is a distinct society," he said.



Regional PQ President Henri Bourassa... 'Benoit did nothing.'

## Save Winter Street Jail, heritage group urges

**SHERBROOKE (DH)** — The abandoned Winter Street Jail in Sherbrooke is a historical monument which should be preserved as an art gallery and summer tourist attraction, says the head of a group which wants to save the pre-Confederation building.

"It was a terrible prison," said Christian Chazel, spokesman for *Société de sauvegarde de la vieille prison de Sherbrooke*.

Nevertheless, "For a city to be attractive, you have to preserve these sites, like Quebec City," Chazel said Tuesday.

"The ideal would be to conserve it as is."

The group submitted its conservation proposal to City of Sherbrooke officials this week. The plan calls for a small section of the prison, built between 1865 and 1870, to be preserved to show what life was like inside its greystone walls.

### ART EXHIBITS

According to the plan the majority of the former provincial prison will be available for temporary exhibits by artists.

The prison courtyard would be used for open-air shows.

"The most realistic option would be a joint venture with the City of Sherbrooke," the plan reads.

"It'll be easier if the city takes on the project," Chazel said, adding that the city is considering the plan. "We'd like other interested groups to take part."

The group also wants the prison linked to a proposed extension of the walking path along the Magog Gorge. To do that, a set of stairs would need to be built, Chazel said.

A restaurant or café-terrace has also been proposed.

The prison, at one time the oldest in operation in Quebec, has been the object of much discussion.

### CONDOS?

Suggested uses have inclu-

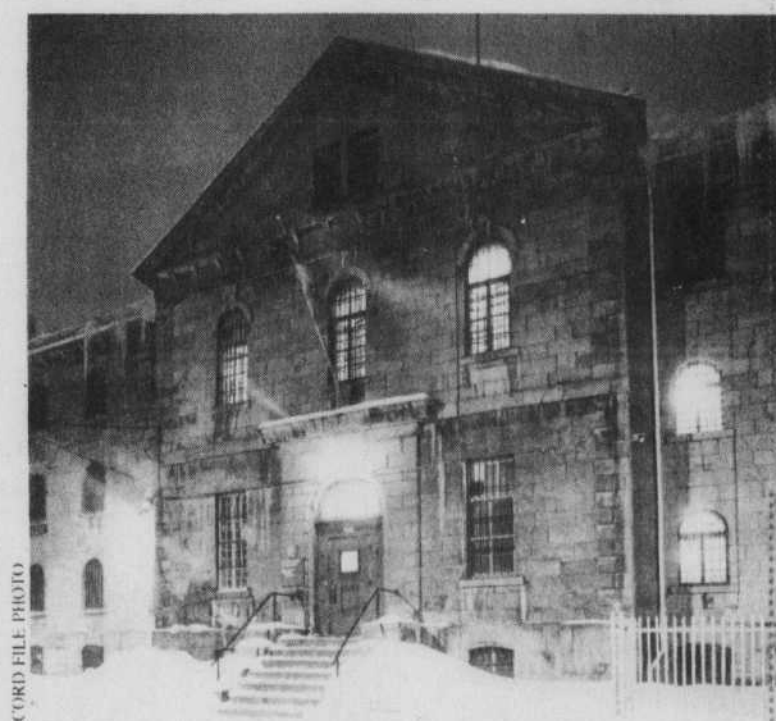
ded turning the building into office space — an option now abandoned, Chazel said. Another group suggested it be renovated into condominiums, but warned a weak real estate market made the project too risky.

The *Société de sauvegarde's* plan is clear about how group members feel about such ideas.

"If the most celebrated historical monuments in the world and in Quebec could only survive by being converted into condominiums or offices, there would be very few left," the plan reads.

In May 1990 the *Société de sauvegarde* asked the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to classify the prison as a historical monument. But Chazel said he doesn't know when a decision will be taken.

"We don't really have any information on that," he said. "We're told the file is following its course."



Winter Street Jail in the wintertime: Group plans to preserve part of its inside to remind people what prison conditions were really like.

## Graniteville: Contract signed Friday, no ifs, ands, or buts

**SHERBROOKE (DH)** — Opponents in the bitter strike at the Granite Centre agreed Wednesday that only one of four strikers will be rehired.

Granite Centre boss Robert Sheldon met with union representative Denis Belleville in Granby Wednesday morning to sign a back-to-work agreement.

Under the deal only Gary Rolleston, with five years of seniority, will start work Monday. The remaining strikers — Mark Bryant, Norman Dupré and Roy Marotte — won't be re-hired unless business improves at the shop in Graniteville, near Beebe.

"We're re-hiring one now and if work picks up we'll re-hire

the others," Sheldon said Wednesday.

The back-to-work protocol also has both sides agreeing that criminal charges against each will be dropped.

However, it is not yet clear whether all charges stemming from confrontations between strikers and management can be shelved. The decision rests with the Crown prosecutor.

"It's not certain" what can be done, said Belleville, president of Local 7550 of the United Steelworkers of America.

### AGREEMENT

Last Friday both sides in the dispute reached a tentative agreement which gives employees fixed work hours, im-

proved safety and 5-per-cent wage increases in the second and third year of the three-year contract. Wages are frozen for the first year of the agreement. The deal was approved 3-1 by the four strikers in a secret ballot Sunday.

Both Sheldon and Belleville said the contract will be signed on Friday — no ifs, ands, or buts.

"We're signing Friday morning," Sheldon said without hesitation.

"No doubt. It will be signed," Belleville said.

Both were pleased to see the strike end.

"I'm glad it's over with," Sheldon said.

"A big relief on both sides," Belleville said. "A big relief."

## 'Adolescent adventure' ends as police find lost teenagers

**SHERBROOKE (DH)** — Police found two soaking wet and cold teenagers Wednesday after the boys went missing in Cowansville on Monday.

Vincent Proteau, 16, of Cowansville, and Louis-Philippe Cloutier, 15, of Granby were found walking on Route 241, near Range Hallé in Cowansville. Two Quebec Police Force constables picked them up after a man who spotted the boys telephoned police.

The teenagers, found in good health, spent two nights in the woods without telling their parents.

"They were going to get food with the intention of going back into the woods" when they were found, QPF spokesman Michel Brunet said.

Brunet would not say why the boys ran away.

"They made no declarations," he said.

Brunet said the disappea-

rance was "a bit of an adolescent adventure."

Proteau and Cloutier kept warm overnight sheltered from rain in a small pup tent. They had no sleeping bags and covered themselves with extra clothing they had brought with them.

Their finding ends 2½ days of searching by family and police.

The two were reported missing Monday when they failed to show up for school.