

The Townships

the
Record

Let those dandelions die — naturally Society 'more concerned with esthetics than with real environmental awareness'

By Steve Meurice

SHERBROOKE — If the sight of a few innocent dandelions springing up on the grass sends you into a lawn-care fit, you're not looking at them the right way, says Robert Lavigne.

"I call it dandelion-phobia," he says. "It's in the same category as hysteria or paranoia. It's part of a massive campaign by the 'perfect lawn' companies."

Lavigne ought to know. He runs an organic lawn-care service and nursery in Sherbrooke. One of the problems he runs into is the public's insistence on picture-perfect, weed-free lawns.

"We have a society that's much more concerned with esthetics than with real environmental awareness," he said in a recent interview. "Organic lawn care can't get rid of every single weed, but it will make the lawn healthier and more environmentally sound."

Another problem, one he says has affected his business directly,

is the use of the words 'natural' and 'organic' by competitors who actually use chemical herbicides and pesticides.

"Everybody calls themselves organic now. They put a little seaweed in their fertilizer mix and say it's organic."

'WEED CONTROL'

"In their ads they put big emphasis on the word natural. In small print on the bottom you'll see the words 'weed control', which really means herbicides. And we can't compete with their big advertising budgets."

Lavigne says demand for his lawn care service is down this year, although more people are coming to the store for organic fertilizers, plants and flowers.

"There's a whole variety of people, young and old, who come here looking for new ideas."

Lavigne started the business, called Deva, five years ago after an inspirational experience with pesticides. He was living in the little town of St-Venant, south of

Sawyerville, and was out for his daily walk.

"It was one of those beautiful spring mornings. As I came up over a hill I saw one of the neighbors spraying his apple trees. I could see the mist of the spray drifting over to the next house and I thought, 'there must be some other way of doing that.'"

He moved the business, named after "the spirit of plants", to Sherbrooke three years ago. Last year he got a contract with the Town of Mount Royal to tend 2 million square feet of parks.

He bid for the contract again this year, but says there was too much competition from companies that are organic in name only.

PESTICIDES

He says the massive use of pesticides is bound to eventually have environmental and health effect. And more serious than the current death-to-dandelions campaign, he says, people would rather have perfect looking food than healthy food.

In a test done at the University of Quebec in Montreal a few years ago, he said, 80 per cent of those surveyed knowingly chose an apple treated with pesticides over a somewhat less attractive but untreated one.

"We need a big information campaign. We eat a phenomenal quantity of foods covered in pesticides. Apples are sprayed 40 to 50 times."

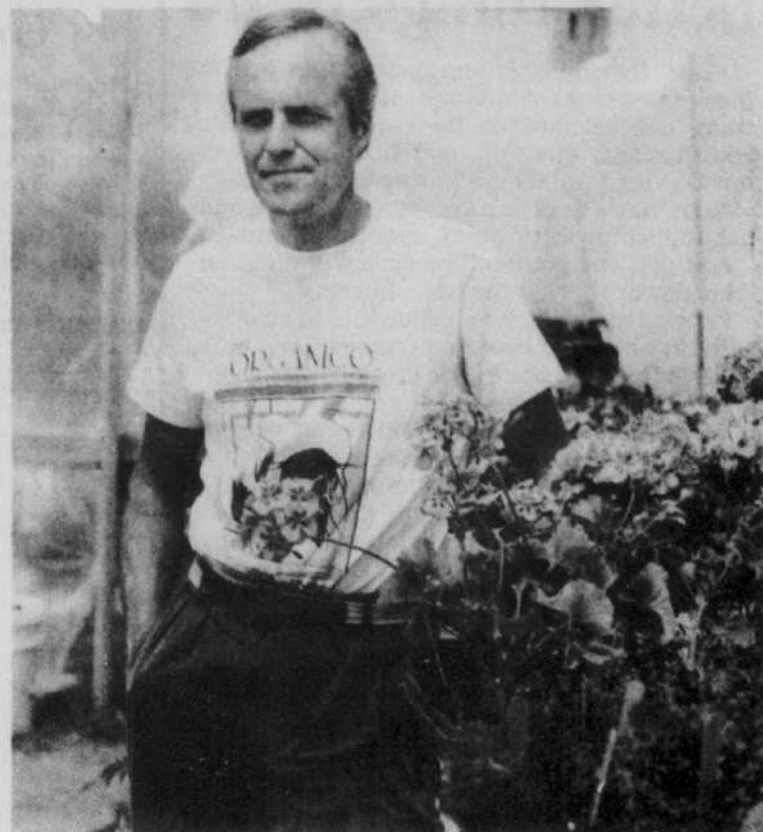
"We're finding pesticides in fish in the Atlantic ocean now. As long as we keep playing ostrich about them we're only going to see the tip of the iceberg."

Lavigne says he doesn't have much faith in the will of politicians to help change things.

"They put on a show of concern, but are they really changing? When it comes down to it, big business still pulls the strings, because that's where the money is."

Nevertheless, he says he remains an optimist.

"I just tell people there are plenty of things they can do in their own back yards."



'Too much emphasis on esthetics' — Organic lawn care specialist Robert Lavigne.
RECORD/STEVE MEURICE

CPR: Massawippi landowners next

By Dan Hawaleshka

SHERBROOKE — Canadian Pacific Railway says it has agreed to sell 12 kilometres of abandoned railbed along Lake Massawippi to a group of area land owners.

"As far as CP is concerned the deal is done," said Michel Spénard, a Montreal-based information officer for CPR.

Spénard said Monday it is only "a matter of weeks" before paperwork on the deal is completed.

The East Shore Property and Users Association has been negotiating with CPR for seven months.

N. Hatley water OK

SHERBROOKE — Residents of North Hatley can stop boiling their drinking water.

It has been deemed safe to drink straight from the tap, the town announced Monday.

CPR evaluates the land at more than \$10 million.

The association represents landowners in North Hatley, West Hatley and Hatley Township. The CPR will sell the land to the association, which is divided into 12 local groups. Each group will then decide how it will sell the land to members, said association spokesman Michael Allatt.

Allatt said sale terms have been settled and what remains to be done is "strictly technical."

SOLD TO LENNOXVILLE

The Lake Massawippi parcel of land will be the second to be sold. On Friday Lennoxville announced it will pay CPR \$149,000 over five years for 14.5 km of abandoned track between the town and the Massawippi River dam.

Neither Allatt nor Spénard would say how much the lakeshore deal is worth.

"When everything is done we'll reveal the price," Allatt said.

The abandoned railway is part of a 54 km stretch of rusty tracks and

gravel railbed between Sherbrooke and Beebe, known as the Beebe Subdivision. The lobby group Sentier Massawippi is fighting to have the railway turned into a park for cyclists, pedestrians and cross-country skiers.

Allatt said the association is willing to talk about creating a linear park.

"We'll sit down and see what we can do to help them with some things," he said.

Michael Grayson, a Sentier vice president, said what's done is done, but he can't help feeling disappointed.

"We can't cry over split milk," Grayson said.

"I don't feel good, obviously," he said.

Sentier Massawippi is in the middle of a \$40,000 feasibility study on the linear park.

'WHOA'

"I would have liked somebody to step in and say 'Whoa' before the sale is done," Grayson said.

He conceded the provincial go-

vernment "doesn't have a legal right to insist," but added it could have made more effort.

"Right from the beginning it looked like it was going to be tough to get the land along the lake," he said.

Grayson hopes the CP land between Ayer's Cliff and Beebe

will be bought for a trail. If so "There's going to be pressure to get an alternate route," he said.

The southern part of the lake around Ayer's Cliff is the most likely place Sentier Massawippi can hope to gain lakeside access for the trail, he said, adding the area is less populated than the north end of

the lake.

It will be up to government to get involved should Sentier or anyone else acquire the Ayer's Cliff to Beebe railbed for use as a linear park, he said.

"Different levels of government are going to have to get involved I would think."

Sherbrooke is looking for a few good citizens on new committee

SHERBROOKE (SDN) — Want to have a say in the city's development? Here's your chance: Sherbrooke is looking for four residents to sit on the town planning consultative committee (CCU).

According to Bill 146, which regulates development and town planning, Sherbrooke city council must change its town planning committee to include residents before adopting its new urban plan. The new committee will consist

of four city council members representing the north, east, west and downtown neighborhoods; four residents, all of whom may vote, and three officers who will not have the right to vote. The mayor will also be a voting member.

Residents on the committee must meet certain requirements: to be free in the evenings, interested in town planning, and able to put aside their personal interests.

The CCU mandate is to insure that principals and values are upheld in the city development plan, to promote it and to lobby for it.

The committee will have authority on the study and recommendations concerning town planning and zoning.

Anyone wanting to be a CCU member is invited to call Lise Dubord, of the city planning division, at 821-5930.

Drugs, not fight to blame in Sherbrooke boy's death?

SHERBROOKE (DH) — Preliminary results of an autopsy on a 14-year-old boy who died after a fight Friday show the death was not caused by a punch to the head as first thought.

"As far as marks of violence go — internal or external — there are none," coroner Pierre Boux said Monday.

Boux said his investigation will now centre on the possibility Sherbrooke resident Christian Lessard died after sniffing typist's correcting fluid, a solvent known as Liquid Paper.

Sherbrooke city police spokesman Cst. Serge Fournier said two young witnesses told police investigators Lessard had sniffed the toxic liquid with them.

Lessard died in a wooded area

near the *Jardins Fleuris* housing development in east Sherbrooke after a fight with a 14-year-old boy from Fleurimont.

The boy was released Monday by Quebec Youth Court Judge Michel Durand. He was not charged with manslaughter as expected. He had been held since Friday at Relais St-François, a rehabilitation centre for youths.

'VERY TOXIC'

Boux said liquid paper is "very toxic" and affects the body's nervous system. Sniffing the liquid could cause the breathing to stop, he said.

Toxicology tests will be carried out in Montreal to find out if Lessard suffocated. Results are expected within several days.

"I think it's something they absolutely have to look for," Boux said.

Before the preliminary autopsy results were known Monday afternoon, prosecutor Hélène Fabi said the Crown was "waiting for news on the autopsy before laying charges."

She could not be reached after the release of the autopsy results.

Peter Downey, the youth's lawyer, said the boy was released because no charges had been laid within what the law considers a reasonable delay.

Autopsy results had no bearing on the boy's release since they were not known when he appeared in court, Downey said.

"We've always maintained his innocence," he said.



A close call: Mathieu Laliberté, eight, of Rock Forest, shows off his mother's bedroom, where he was sleeping at about 1 a.m. Sunday when a town police patrol car crashed through the wall. Mathieu said he and his mother Pauline

were frightened, but are getting over it. There was a good side too, he said. His teacher let him tell the story in class Monday and he came home saying that people who never spoke to him before were saying 'hi'.

RECORD/KATHY MERCIER

Date set for KKK man's trial

SHERBROOKE (DH) — The Exalted Cyclops of the Nordic Knights was told Monday his trial on a charge of assault causing bodily harm will begin Dec. 3.

Eric Vachon, leader of the Sherbrooke chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, appeared before Quebec Court Judge Michel Côté to hear the decision.

Vachon's lawyer Conrad Chapdelaine told Judge Côté his client prefers to be tried by a judge alone. Vachon, 20, had earlier chosen trial by judge and jury. Under Quebec law he has the option of changing that decision once.

"We think we're able to get justice in front of a judge also," Chapdelaine said afterward.

At Vachon's preliminary hearing in May Judge Côté was told Vachon tore off a surgically implanted hair piece belonging to Normand Martin, owner of *Le Caméléon* bar in Sherbrooke. The brawl took place in February.

NOT AN ISSUE

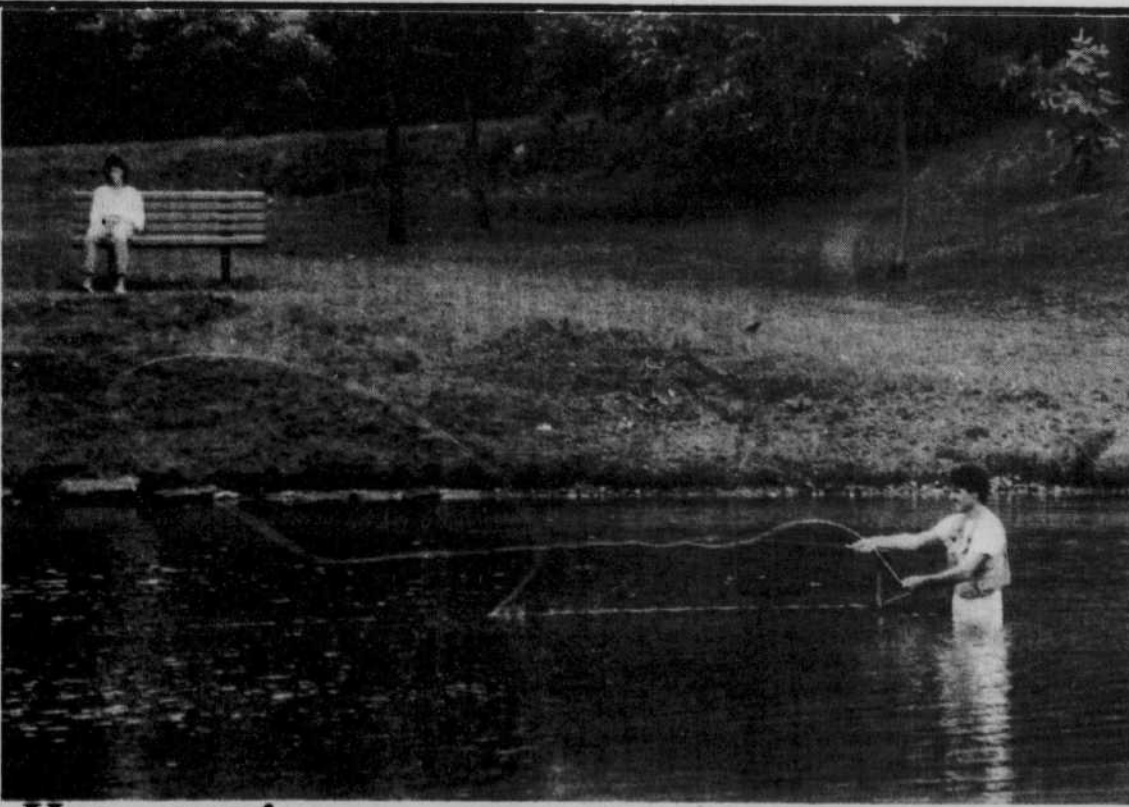
Crown prosecutor Charles Crépeau has said the trial will centre on the fight and not on Vachon's KKK leadership.

However Nicolas Pouliot, a witness in the trial and a former em-

ployee of the bar, is a member of the *Ligue anti-fasciste mondiale*, an anti-racist group which opposes the KKK.

On the night of the fight Pouliot says Vachon warned him to stop meddling in Klan affairs. Pouliot testified at the preliminary hearing that he pointed Vachon out to Martin, his boss at the time.

Martin testified he then told Vachon and his friends he didn't want any trouble and that they should finish their drinks and be on their way. Testimony showed the fight broke out when Vachon objected.



Hey, you! Some people just don't listen!
Entering the city's Howard Park pond to catch the big fish — in the smallest pond. RECORD/KATHY MERCIER