

Independent Editorial

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Businesses say water ban could have been worse

While youngsters are frolicking at the splash pads, parents are turning on lawn sprinklers and pool owners are topping up with the garden hose, some business owners in Barrhaven are tallying their losses from the two-month outdoor water ban.

Commercial car washes in Barrhaven had complained that shutting down would cost them thousands of dollars a day. Most did not shut down until the city threatened large fines and loss of their business licenses.

Ken Ross, on the other hand, not only stopped watering the plants in the garden centre at his Independent Grocer until the city's water tanker arrived, but voluntarily took a loss on rain barrels and bottled water for residents.

Ross knew the garden centre would take a hit from the ban because residents wouldn't buy what they couldn't water. Within weeks of the ban being announced, business at the garden centre was down 50 per cent. Still, Ross prefers to see the positive side.

"We did surprisingly well," said owner Ken Ross. "We suffered a financial loss on the garden centre for sure, but it could have been much worse. Without the city's water truck we would have lost several hundred thousand dollars."

Ross' garden centre closed the first weekend in July, as it always does, because growers are no longer supplying the smaller annuals and perennials gardeners want at the beginning of the season.

"Monday night after the ban was lifted there was a big rush at the garden centre," he said, "because people know the cycle at a garden centre and they knew there would be good deals."

Ross said he is personally glad the ban is over because he really enjoys gardening in his own backyard.

"I will continue to use my rain barrels," he said, "but it's nice to know I can turn on the hose during dry spells."

Lee Bosse didn't have the benefit of a city water truck or a garden hose for Avanguard Interlock and Landscaping during the ban. He had worried that he couldn't do jobs professionally without water for basic construction and cleanup.

"I pushed back my clients to later in the summer," Bosse said, "but it was getting late so another company and I were going to invest in water equipment when the city made its first announcement that the ban would be lifted early, so we waited."

It's hard to calculate how much he lost because of the ban, he said. Several clients cancelled because he couldn't get the work done as quickly as they wanted and he lost out on several estimates on jobs, but can't be sure it was because of the water ban.

No one could be happier that the outdoor water ban is over than Shelley Bond, executive director of City View Centre for Child and Family on Longfields Dr. in Barrhaven. She and the staff were not looking forward to caring for the centre's 123 children, 18 months to eight years old in the summer heat with no outside water for splash pads or wetting down the sand box to discourage wasps.

"Mother Nature helped a bit," said Bond. "There weren't that many really hot days. When we were outdoors the staff got the children to focus on other activities and games that didn't require water. But now they are thrilled to be able to make a sand castle that sticks together."



PHOTO BY SGT. MATT MCGREGOR

Amanda Rheume and her band spent Canada Day entertaining thousands of Canadian troops at the Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. The local singer was part of the Team Canada entourage of entertainers that performed for Canadian soldiers Friday.

Half a world away on Canada Day

Many of you were among the half million or so people who took a flyer on the local Canada Day celebrations in the community to head to Parliament Hill this year.

Will and Kate drew enormous crowds, and the celebration of Canada was one that established a new bar.

But sometimes, to really feel and get what it means to be Canadian, you have to celebrate Canada Day half a world away.

Like, perhaps, at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan.

Amanda Rheume got the chance to experience the most meaningful Canada Day one could ever celebrate Friday. The Barrhaven singer was asked to be part of the Team Canada entourage in Kandahar. She was joined by Rick Mercer, "Bubbles" from the Trailer Park Boys, impressionist Andre-Philippe Gagnon, Lisa LaFlamme from CTV, Manotick's Wendy Daniels from 106.9 The Bear, Brian Burke, GM of Toronto Maple Leafs, Luke Schenn, politicians Peter McKay, Rona Ambrose, Julian Fantino and more. During the visit, Amanda also participated in a celebrity ball hockey game with the troops and visited a forward operating base.

It was not Rheume's first time performing for the troops in Afghanistan. She was over in 2009. Later that year, she was supposed to perform for Canadians in Honduras on Canada Day, but was holed up watching a military takeover occur from her hotel room window.

"It's like nothing you could imagine," she said. "The feeling there was something I will never forget."

What made this concert special was that it was the last one in Kandahar. The troops are getting ready to come home. There was an experience of collective appreciation for Canada and everything it stands for.

"I've played Major's Hill Park on Canada Day before, but this was just completely different," she said.

The math is simple. At Major's Hill Park, there are people out partying because it's Canada Day. In Kandahar, Rheume found herself in a war zone. People are risking their lives for Canada. Our troops are not there to conquer or to impose Canadian values. They are there to protect the domestic and international integrity upon which Canada has grown from.

Rheume beams as she talks about her trip, and flying in a chopper for the first time. A first chopper ride for anyone would be a little bit scary, but for Rheume, the fears were magnified as they were flying through a war zone.

But the excitement dwarfed the feeling of fear.

"They are getting ready to come home,"

Rheume said.

She did not want to get into a political discussion, but I know from previous discussions that she is not a fan of war. Who is? But she will be the first to tell you that the Canadian soldiers that she met are among the most remarkable people she has ever met.

"The bond between the soldiers there was unbelievable," she said. "Canadians have some of the best soldiers in the world, and our military is known for being humanitarian and as caregivers. The work that they have done in Afghanistan is incredible. You don't see it or hear about it when you read the papers. But they have made a difference. When you go there, you see what they have done and what they are doing. I wish every Canadian would get the chance to see what I saw."

Rheume said that she came back from Afghanistan on Sunday with two things that will stay with her.

The first is how proud she is to be Canadian and how proud of what Canadians have accomplished in Afghanistan.

The second is seeing how excited Canadian troops are to be coming home.

As far as the concert is concerned, Rheume said the gig was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Her band was the only one on the tour, and she could not believe how grateful the troops were that she would come and perform.

"The conditions are bleak over there," she said. "And there is no entertainment. It's not like they can go and catch a band after work or go and do anything like that. There is nothing like that for them. Some of the troops have been out in the fields and got to come in to the base for the concert. It's an extreme environment and they can't watch live music. It meant so much for them. It reminded me of the purpose of what I do."

Rheume came back Sunday, feeling more proud to be Canadian than she has ever been in her life.

"We are so lucky to live where we do," she said. "We don't have to worry about being killed or stepping on a bomb or having our school blown up. I have never appreciated Canada more than I do now," she said.

She is getting ready to play at Bluesfest in Ottawa, where she will be on the MBNA Stage Sunday, July 17 at 3 p.m. She will be releasing her new CD as part of the show.

And we forgot to ask her how she did in the ball hockey game against Luke Schenn and Brian Burke. We can only assume that, on Canada Day in a sea of red, that the blue team would have lost.

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

by Jeffrey Morris



BARRHAVEN Independent

P.O. Box 567, Manotick, Ontario K4M 1A5
Telephone: (613) 825-9858, Fax: 692-3758
www.barrhavenindependent.on.ca

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Publisher: Jeff Morris
Managing Editor: Jeff Morris
Reporter: Bev McRae

Contributing writer:

Tatyana Gerbasi
Client Service Manager:
Caroline Chescoe Kemp

Advertising and Marketing:
Gary Coulombe
John Van Zyl

Photographer:
Mike Carrocetto

Phone: 613-825-9858
Fax: 613-692-3758

email:
Advertising: advert@bellnet.ca
Editor: newsfile@bellnet.ca
News/sports: newsfile@bellnet.ca

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