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The Democracy Deficit and You

By Dan Parker

In October of 2002, then leadership candidate Paul Martin spoke of a democracy deficit, and how addressing this deficit would become a priority of his. Mr. Martin went on to outline a six point program that would give more independence to an ethics commissioner and more authority to individual members of parliament.

"The authority of the individual member of Parliament has been allowed to erode, while the power of the executive has grown steadily," Mr. Martin said, calling for the status quo to be changed to empower backbench MPs.

"This is no time for decision-makers or for decision-making to be isolated

(Continued on page 8)

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Stanley Cup Quiz

How many team names have been misspelled on the Cup? 0, 1, 2, 4? *(Answer page 11)*

What's in a Word?

What are the origins of 'a.m.' and 'p.m.'? *(Answer on page 5)*

Fashion Test

In what year were NHL player's names first put on their sweaters? 1923, 1949, 1956, 1963, 1974? *(Ans. on page 7)*

Sidewalk Sale Possibility

The Downtown Revitalization working group has set June 19th as the tentative date for a Flea market and sidewalk sale, pending approval by Town Council.

Regardless of the date, the event promises to be a fun day of music, games, activities and sidewalk shopping. In addition to store spe-

(Continued on page 3)

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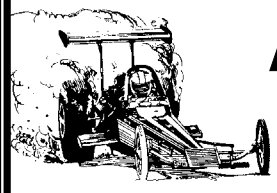
Declining Voter Participation

By Dan Parker

Mainstream media outlets and politicians complain about falling voter participation rates, while sometimes offering little in the way of considered analysis of why this is happening. Usually, a few surface issues are presented and a few Band-aid solutions are offered, along with a general exhortation to just get out and do it. This is hardly a prescription for democracy, which is dependent on voters being aware of and engaged with the issues.

At the federal level, voter turnout is listed as falling steadily, from 75.3% in 1988 down to 61.2% by the 2000 election. Less reported is the fact that the above percentages are based on registered voters. Once unregistered voters are included, the estimated participation rate is 53%.

(Continued on page 2)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(Continued from page 1)

An additional troubling trend is that only 25% of those aged 18 to 25 voted in the last election, as compared to 83% of people over 65.

There is good evidence that cynicism about the electoral system is the primary reason for falling voter participation.

A positive development in addressing this is the impetus to give backbenchers more 'free' votes in the House of Commons. The recent electoral reform finance legislation recently passed is another step in the right direction, despite stated concerns about free speech. Proportional representation is also receiving increased attention (see story on p. 9).

Countries with a version of proportional representation, which helps make every vote count, have a voter participation rate about 6% higher than Canada.

Other suggestions for improved participation include making voting compulsory, Internet voting, and making election day a national holiday. Compulsory voting would seem to go against the freedom that democracy is supposed to advance, while Internet voting has seemingly intractable security issues, where hackers or programming designs could predetermine an election outcome.

Even electronic voting machines are proving to be extremely unreliable in places where they have been tried in the U.S.

Following the lead of countries that have a national holiday for elections could be a good idea in an era when many voters have an increasingly busy schedule balancing their work and family obligations.

This last point raises bigger issues, which would need to be examined in order to truly address a democracy deficit.

In addition to improving the existing electoral system, democracy proponents should be looking at more fundamental improvements as well.

At one time, it was held that people would have increasing leisure to reflect on the issues of the day. Self-directed activity, and the personal growth that accompanies this, was supposed to be the wave of the future.

Instead, despite near-miraculous technology, most people are busier than ever, sometimes on imposed activities and bureaucratic work that has little or nothing to do with wealth creation of any sort. Leading edge change proponents are identifying and addressing such economic and political issues. Only when these issues become mainstream subjects for discussion can significant improvements in democracy take place.

Words of Wisdom?

- If all else fails, stop using all else.
- There's a fine line between fishing and just standing on the shore like an idiot. - by comedian Steven Wright

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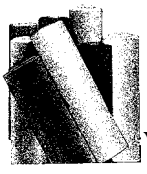
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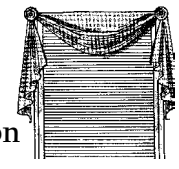
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The Priest and the Bad 'Habit'

Two priests on earth met an untimely end on the same day and found themselves before St. Peter. St. Peter told them that the computer systems are down, and their processing into Heaven would have to wait. Rather than cool their heels in the waiting room, the priests are offered a chance to return to earth, in another form of course, for one last earthly experience.

The first priest thinks about this and asks St. Peter if he can be a soaring eagle, to glide over the earth, feel the wind in his face and see earth's beauty from a great height.

The second priest tells St. Peter he wants to return to earth as a stud. St. Peter shakes his head at this, but grants each priest their request.

Later, the angels come to tell St. Peter that God managed to fix the computer system and ask where the souls of the two priests are. St. Peter points out where the eagle is soaring over a farmers field but admits that he has lost track of the second priest, who is stuck in a tire somewhere in northern Alberta.

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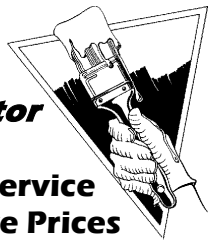

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It's the Thought that Counts

I had to go to the city the other day and was only in a store there for about 5 minutes to come out and find a darn motorcycle cop writing a ticket.

So I went up to him and said, 'Come on buddy, how about giving a guy a break?' He ignored me and continued writing the ticket.

I don't think much of big city rudeness, so I called him a pencil necked Nazi. He just glared at me and started writing another ticket for having bald tires!!

Well I didn't think much of this either, and let him know about it no uncertain terms. He finished the second ticket and put it on the car with the first. Then he started writing a third ticket!! This went on for about 20 minutes, the more I abused him, the more tickets he wrote.

Finally I just shook my head and left him, to go around the corner to where I was parked. Some days you can't do a good deed no matter how hard you try.

(Continued from page 1)

cials, there will be tables that can be rented by individuals or groups for selling flea market items, promoting your organization and so on. For more information on this, you can contact Amy at 778-5363.

The project to encourage late night Friday shopping in the downtown is continuing.

For downtown beautification, the planters will be filled by early June, with hanging baskets up by the middle of the month. Whitecourt will also be participating in the Communities in Bloom contest. If you have a green thumb, you can check out this concept at http://www.communitiesinbloom.ca/whatiscib/.

The idea of a soup kitchen and drop-in center downtown has been raised outside of the meeting. This would be worthy project for any local service or church group.

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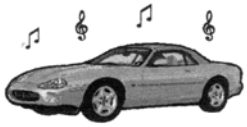

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The Pokey Pig

Three pigs went to the bar for a drink. The first pig finished up, went to the bathroom and left. The second pig gulped down what was left of his drink, then went to the bathroom and left.

The third pig finally finished his drink and got up to leave. The bartender pointed out the entrance to the bathroom, behind where the pig was sitting. The third little pig said "No thanks, I'm the little pig that goes weee weee weee all the way home"

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Safe camping requires preparation

(NC)-Finally with the warm weather upon us, we can retreat to the great outdoors and camp. Being close to nature can be an adventure for the entire family, but we need to take some simple fire safety precautions to make the trip a happy one to remember. Keep first aid supplies and emergency telephone numbers accessible at all times and follow these suggestions to ensure a safe camping season:

In Recreational Vehicles

Use only electric or battery lights in RV's. Clean and maintain appliances, gas connections, and vents. When using propane appliances, light a match before turning on the gas to avoid explosions and always keep combustibles a safe distance away. Never burn charcoal, or use portable heaters, lanterns or stoves inside the vehicle. Since the possibility of carbon monoxide is very real and can be fatal in minutes within a confined space such as an RV, the installation of a CO or CO/explosive gas alarm is a must. Extinguish smoking materials and campfires before retiring. Keep a fire extinguisher by the exit door, and install a battery operated smoke alarm with an emergency light. If you are traveling with children, practice a fire escape plan with them, making sure that exits are not blocked and that they are familiar with operating emergency escape hatches. In case of fire while driving, turn off the ignition and evacuate the vehicle.

In Tents

Increase your chances of avoiding a catastrophe - only buy a flame-resistant tent. Even with this precaution, never keep a lantern or any type of open flame inside or near the tent. Remember, "flame-resistant" doesn't mean fire-proof. A flying ember from a fire can land on the tent and ignite it in seconds. Clear a 3-foot area around tent site so that there is nothing flammable that could make a path to your tent. Extinguish fires and turn off lanterns and stoves before retiring. Keep a fire extinguisher within reach and be prepared to cut your way out of the tent if a fire occurs.

With Campfires

For most of us, campfires are an integral part of the camping experience, but with an increased concern for forest fires, some campsites no longer allow campfires. Before you even think about striking a match, make sure that you are permitted to have open fires on the site. When building a campfire, locate it a safe distance away from tents, trees or buildings. Make a pit large enough to keep the fire from spreading. Scrape away dry grass, pine needles and leaves within a 10-foot diameter. Locate a fire extinguisher nearby, and know how to use it in the event of an emergency. Avoid building fires on windy days. Always supervise children closely around a campfire, and be sure the fire is out before sleeping or leaving the campsite.

With Flammable Liquids

Use flammable liquids only for the intended purpose written on the container. Fill lanterns and stoves away from heat sources, using a funnel, and wipe up spills immediately. Never check for a gas leak with a lighted match. Instead, put a little soapy water on the connections. If the mixture bubbles, gas is seeping out and the unit needs to be serviced by a professional. When using a camp stove or gas lantern, always fill it before each use. Do not refuel a hot stove or lantern. Wait until it cools off.

Store flammable liquids outside, away from the tent or RV, preferably in an approved metal safety can. Transport only minimal amounts in a well ventilated area. Carry a "B" rated (for flammable liquids) extinguisher in the event of a fire, and never use water as a means to smother it out.

Camping can be a fun experience for the whole family, but unexpected things can happen in the blink of an eye. The best way to help guarantee a good time for all is to plan ahead carefully and follow commonsense safety precautions.

For more tips on protection and prevention, call toll-free: 1-800-565-1976, ext. 224, or visit: www.kiddesafety.com

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Pride and Prejudice

A blonde and a lawyer are seated next to each other on a flight from LA to NY. The lawyer asks if she would like to play a fun game? The blonde, tired, just wants to take a nap, politely declines and rolls over to the window to catch a few winks.

The lawyer persists and explains that the game is easy and a lot of fun. He explains, "I ask you a question, and if you don't know the answer, you pay me $5.00, and vice versa."

Again, she declines and tries to get some sleep. The lawyer, now agitated, says, "Okay, if you don't know the answer you pay me $5.00, and if I don't know the answer, I will pay you $500.00."

This catches the blonde's attention and, figuring there will be no end to this torment unless she plays, agrees to the game. The lawyer asks the first question. "What's the distance from the earth to the moon?"

The blonde doesn't say a word, reaches into her purse, pulls out a $5.00 bill and hands it to the lawyer. "Okay." says the lawyer, "Your turn."

She asks the lawyer, "What goes up a hill with three legs and comes down with four legs?"

The lawyer gives the blonde a knowing smile, before pulling out his laptop and showing her how he can use his air phone and modem to tap into the biggest databases in the world. He also tells her that he can e-mail his knowledgeable friends and how they can e-mail their friends to find the answer. The lawyer's smugness slowly disappears as the time passes and he cannot find the answer.

Finally, after an hour, he somewhat angrily wakes the blonde, and hands her $500.

The blonde says, "Thank you", and turns back to get some more sleep.

The lawyer, who is more than a little miffed now, shakes the blonde and asks, "Well, what's the answer?"

Without a word, the blonde reaches into her purse, hands the lawyer $5.00, and goes back to sleep.

Seniors Week Celebrated in Whitecourt

Whitecourt is celebrating Seniors Week from Sunday June 6 to Saturday June 12. There are activities such as crib and whist tournaments, bowling, strawberry tea, supper and entertainment evening and much more, to celebrate the seniors of Whitecourt. Please call Community Services at 778-6610 for information and location of events.

Word Quiz Answer These abbreviations represent the Latin phrases ante/post meridiem, which mean 'before/after midday' and have been in use in English since the 17th century.

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Celebrities and children's fight against malaria

GNA - International celebrities Dikembe Mutombo and Youssou N'Dour have added their voices to those of tens of thousands of children across Africa who are calling for increased awareness, more protection and better treatment for malaria, which kills 3000 children every day.

In the run-up to Africa Malaria Day, commemorated on 25 April of each year, children throughout Africa are engaging in children's parliaments, TV and radio commentaries, plays, and other creative activities to send a clear message to those who have it in their power to make a difference: adults, decision-makers, governments and donors. Their intention? To realize a child's dream of "a malaria-free future", the theme of this year's Africa Malaria Day.

"We are suffering a lot from malaria," says 13-year-old Efua Boateng, member of a church youth group in Ghana, "but I don't think the rest of the world understands. We need to let them know. We have to speak up on behalf of our younger brothers and sisters."

Dikembe Mutombo, New York Knicks basketball player, who comes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is supporting their efforts by urging children to sleep under insecticide-treated mosquito nets. "Beating malaria is like winning at basketball," says Mutombo in a public-service announcement being broadcast Africa-wide. "You need to get to the net."

More Words of Wisdom?

- If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, it will always be yours. If it doesn't come back, it was never yours to begin with. But, if it just sits in your living room, messes up your stuff, eats your food, uses your telephone, takes your money, and doesn't appear to realize that you had set it free..... You either married it or gave birth to it.
- The nice part about living in a small town: When you don't know what you're doing, someone else always does.
- The best way to forget all your troubles is to wear tight shoes.
- There are two sides to every divorce: Yours and craphead's.
- Isn't having a smoking section in a restaurant like having a peeing section in a swimming pool?
- Your mind not only wanders, it sometimes leaves completely.
- Just when you get used to yesterday, along comes today.

Soup Kitchen in Whitecourt

Whitecourt resident Keith Peskett is seeking volunteers and a location for a soup kitchen and drop-in centre in downtown Whitecourt. If you would like to help, you can contact Keith through K & C Office Services at 778-5577.

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The Sensible Environmentalist

DEAR DR. MOORE:

Does logging have a long-term impact on biodiversity?

(NC)-When people think of biodiversity, they usually think of species diversity, which refers to the number of different animals, plants and insects in a given area. Harvesting, especially when most of the trees are removed, has a considerable impact on species diversity-but only in the short term.

With or without human intervention, forests are in a constant state of change, which is important because different stages of forest growth appeal to different species. After a disturbance such as fire or logging, a site will attract grasses, berries and grazing animals, species that like open areas. As the forest grows, species come and go based on the environment they prefer. Sustainability is a factor because foresters in Canada are required by law to maintain habitat for wildlife species, and to make sure that forests of all ages are included on the landscape.

Some environmentalists promote the idea that a forest cut is an ecosystem gone forever. I believe that a sensible environmentalist understands that the process of renewal occurs over many years, and chooses to see a recently harvested site for what it is-a moment in time.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com.

Answer for Fashion Sense. Not unlike the game of hockey itself, sweaters have gone through their own evolution since organized hockey began. The first jerseys were woolen and knitted by local women. Team emblems and stripes were always standard decoration, but player numbers didn't appear until around 1912. Little changed until the switch from wool to polyester in the 1960s, and the Rangers sported the first jerseys with the player's names in 1974. Teams immediately began picking up on the practice, which soon became a NHL rule.

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(Continued from page 1)

from the reach of the public," he said.

Yet during the campaign for the Liberal leadership, Mr. Martin's team routinely engaged in actions which could be construed as anti-democratic. For example, a rule change restricted the handing out of Liberal party membership forms in Ontario to riding association executives. The great majority of the executive members were backers of Mr. Martin. This rule change basically ensured there could be no effective grassroots challenge to Mr. Martin's leadership.

The Martin team also stepped in to stop a nomination meeting in Edmonton East to appoint a Liberal candidate favoured by the Prime Minister. Additionally, Liberal candidates were appointed, rather than nominated, in Calgary Northeast, Calgary South Centre and as well as other ridings in Canada.

To be fair, the Conservative Party leadership also interfered in nomination meetings, most notably in Ontario. There, a previous Canadian Alliance candidate, who came within 3.8 per cent of the vote of being elected in the last election, was rejected as a possible Conservative Party candidate. The apparent reason the long time, erstwhile Reform and Canadian Alliance activist was banned was due to a personality conflict with the new leadership.

Rather than blame the individuals involved, it would appear the Canadian political system itself encourages such anti-democratic processes. Senate reform is one area where significant improvements can be made to promote regional representation and decision makers who are more responsive to voters.

Arguably, progress had been made through the recent election campaign finance legislation albeit with free speech concerns.

Another possible improvement which is slowly gaining recognition in Canada is proportional representation. There are various flavours of this political system, but in a nutshell, the design results in legislatures that more accurately reflect the views of voters.

"The first-past-the-post system has these fake majorities," says Walter Robinson, former director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. "We have parties receiving 40 per cent of the vote, carrying 60 per cent of the seats and exercising 100 per cent of the power unchecked for five years. Hence the term 'elected dictatorship'." Walter Robinson is now the Conservative candidate in Ottawa-Orleans

The Law Commission of Canada has also advocated Canada join most of the rest of the developed nations of the world in implementing a form of proportional representation. It is significant that other developed countries still using first-past-the-post system have other democratic advances, such as legislators routinely voting outside party affiliation in the U.S., and U.K. proportional representation elections in Scotland, Wales and the city of London.

Despite some problems with coalition governments, the steady move towards proportional representation shows the benefits of this system out-weigh the drawbacks. This is why it is all the more troubling that Paul Martin continues to duck this issue, even when presented with the report from the prestigious Law Commission of Canada. See:www.fairvotecanada.org/

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"Make This the Last Unfair Election"

The Law Commission of Canada's electoral reform report tabled in the House of Commons, is a wake-up call for the nation, according to Fair Vote Canada (FVC), a national citizens' organization for voting reform. The report recommends scrapping the current voting system and adopting a new system that adds an element of proportional representation.

"This could not be more timely," stated Larry Gordon, executive director of Fair Vote Canada.

"Canadians have been called to the polls. What better time to take a hard look at the damage being done by the current voting system? What better time to begin discussing a new voting system for Canada – one that gets us closer to the ideal of making every citizen's vote count?"

While commending the Commission for its leadership and recommendation for a mixed member proportional system, Fair Vote Canada believes that voting system reform cannot be left solely in the hands of Parliament or the government.

"Allowing those elected under the current voting system to control the discussion and decision making on alternatives would create a very obvious conflict of interest," stated Gordon. "That's exactly why many substantive democratic reforms that would enjoy widespread public support never see the light of day."

Fair Vote Canada recommends that:

· all federal political parties support a public deliberation and decision-making process in which citizens are able to consider several approaches to developing a more proportional, or fair, voting system;

· the primary objective be to identify the best made-in-Canada approach that gets us as close as possible to the ideal of making every citizen's vote count;

· citizens themselves identify the best alternative system from a shortlist of possibilities, either by using a referendum to narrow the options (similar to that used in New Zealand), or a citizens' assembly process (similar to that being used in British Columbia), or some other process to be developed; and

· once the best made-in-Canada alternative is determined, that Canadians choose between the current system and the alternative in a binding national referendum.

During the upcoming election, Fair Vote Canada will mount a public campaign calling on all political parties to support a reform process that will make this the last unfair election.

For more information on how you can help, campaign flyers and the campaign action kit are available for voting reform. Volunteers are asked to contact info@fairvotecanada.org to download and use the Fair Vote Canada materials.

Proportional Representation Only a Start

Regular readers of the political articles in the Advisor will know that we hold the position that some fundamental economic issues must be publicized to enable people to make informed decisions on important matters. One of these issues is the Gross Domestic Product wealth measurement system. This indicator is held to be of overwhelming importance by mainstream media and economists. Yet it counts destructive activity and constructive activity as being the same, as long as the same costs are generated. For example, disasters like the Manitoba flood and the Exxon Valdez oil spill were counted as economic growth by the GDP system because of the costs involved.

Slowly, mainstream financial institutions, and foundations, are at last backing research on better economic and money systems. Kudos to the **Ford Foundation** for sponsoring The Capital Ownership Group at http://cog.kent.edu/

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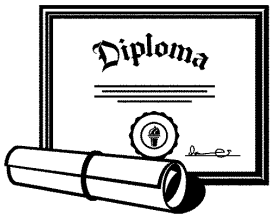

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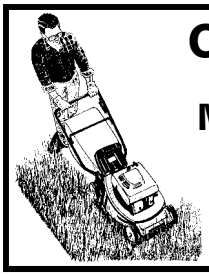

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Signs of the Times

The Godfather, accompanied by his attorney, walks into a room to meet with his accountant. The Godfather gets right to the point and asks the accountant, "Where's the three million bucks you embezzled from me?"

The accountant doesn't answer. So the Godfather asks again, "Where's the three million bucks you embezzled from me?"

The attorney interrupts, "Sir, the man is a deaf-mute and cannot understand you, but I can interpret for you."

The Godfather says, "Well, ask him where the money is."

The attorney, using sign language, asks the accountant where the three million dollars is. The accountant signs back, "I don't know what you're talking about." The attorney interprets to the Godfather, "He doesn't know what you're talking about."

The Godfather pulls out a pistol, puts it to the temple of the accountant, cocks the trigger and says, "Ask him again where the money is!"

The attorney signs to the accountant, "He wants to know where it is!"

The accountant signs back, "Okay! Okay! The money's hidden in a suitcase behind the shed in my backyard!"

The Godfather says, "Well, what did he say?"

The attorney interprets to the Godfather, "He says that you don't have the guts to pull the trigger."

Rotary in Afghanistan

GNA - By Vukoni Lupa-Lasaga - Rotary International

In Afghanistan, Rotary club efforts are helping to bring change to a country devastated by more than 20 years of war and neglect. Co-sponsored by the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle, California, USA, a brand new grade school and a computer lab at a University in Jalalabad are just two examples of such initiatives helping Afghans to lay the foundations of a brighter future.

At a ceremony attended by some 350 guests, the visiting Rotarians handed over the US$60,000 computer center to the university administration, now charged with the responsibility of running the facility that includes a satellite hookup to the Internet. To complement the computer center, the club has undertaken a project to teach English as a second language and distribute 12,000 dictionaries.

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Good Improvement in Workplace Safety

Alberta's workplaces had their best safety performance in over a decade. The 2003 injury rate of 2.8 serious injuries per 100 full time jobs was the lowest since 1991 when the current workplace injury records began.

The reduction is due in part to the Work Safe Alberta program to reduce workplace injuries by 40 per cent from the 2000 level by the end of 2004. Provincial industry, safety and labour partners have committed to meeting this goal.

While the results are promising, injury rates increased in some industries and there were still 127 work-related deaths and more than 39,000 serious injuries in Alberta last year. For more information on how to improve your workplace health and safety, call toll-free 1-866-415-8690, or visit www.worksafely.org

Mark Your Calendar for Toxic Roundup

Mark your calendar for Saturday, June 26 to rid your home of toxic wastes. You can drop them off at the Whitecourt Fire Hall, between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

The toxic round-up gives you a chance to clean your house of hazardous wastes. Check your kitchen, bathroom, laundry room, basement, garden shed and garage. This event is a cooperative program with EnviroSort, Alberta Environmental Protection, Northwest Sanitation Ltd, Town of Whitecourt, Alberta Newsprint, Blue Ridge Lumber, Woodlands County, Millar Western, Central Alberta Midstream, and the Whitecourt Environmental Society.

For more information, you can call the Town of Whitecourt at 778-2273.

You can also pick up a list at Northwest Sanitation for recyclable items you can drop off at their depot, which is open 24/7. Northwest Sanitation is located off Dahl Drive at the top of the hill, just down the road from Crystal Glass.

Stanley Cup Quiz

The misspelling of players names has occurred, and so has misspelling for Cup-winning teams. This happened a total of 4 times. In 1916, 'Montreal Canadiens' was recorded on the Cup as 'Montreal Candaians.' In 1963 it was the 'Toronto Maple Leaes' followed by the 'Bqston Bruins' in 1972 and finally the 'New York Ilanders' in 1981.

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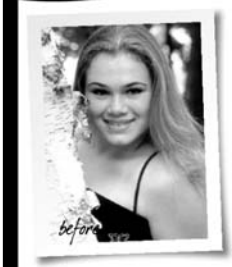

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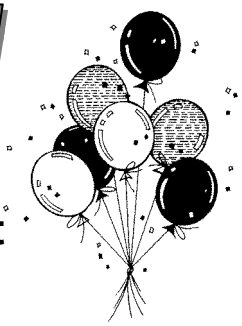

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