

Sandra S. Lawn • Still working toward a better society

JOAN SONENBURG

Anyone living in or around Prescott will be as familiar with the name of Sandra S. Lawn as with the town itself. President of Sandra S. Lawn & Associates, Mayor of Prescott for 15 years, and a candidate for federal office in 1993 and 1997, this energetic woman has, over the years, contributed unstintingly to her community and to the environment. Now in her sixties, she shows no sign of letting up.

A strong advocate for environmental responsibility, Sandra first became involved in her community through her work on the Prescott harbour. Her first project was to set up HOPE (Helping Out Prescott's Environment), a group of volunteers committed to cleaning up the waterfront. But she soon realized she needed to do more than "pick up litter and raise cane." She became part of the area planning board and began to learn about the process of land use planning and its importance to community development and the environment. In the early '70s, she became Chair of the Planning Board which did a



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reassessment of the waterfront and downtown and developed secondary plan for the downtown area. "I think it was at that point," she recalls, "that I began to see that if I was going to be effective as a person wanting to bring about improvement to the environment, I was going to have to take the next step and run for council."

She was subsequently elected to council where she served for two years before becoming Mayor. During her term in office, she initiated, developed and supervised the mammoth waterfront project now known as the

Sandra S. Lawn Harbour. She has since become deeply involved in a number of other organizations that address the protection and conservation of the environment, in particular the forests and water sources of Ontario.

In Prescott, she has turned her fund-raising experience to helping the Friends of the Library in their campaign for the Prescott Public Library expansion project. This ambitious undertaking will double the size of the library and make it both physically and intellectually accessible. Sandra is Chair of this year's Ontario Senior Games Winterfest, and she sits on the board of the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival, presented each summer in the Kinsman Harbour Amphitheatre in Prescott. Now in its third year, the festival will showcase *Twelfth Night*, a tale of young love, separated family members, and comedic characters. Performances run from July 4-23 at 7:00 P.M. More information is available at www.stlawrencefestival.org < http://www.stlawrencefestival.org > or by calling

(613)925-0035.

But the current focus of her attention began with a request by the Minister of Health for her to chair South-eastern Ontario's Mental Health Implementation Task Force. This has become for Sandra an ongoing crusade. Among the many things she learned during this two year project was that there was a distressing lack of an appropriate system of mental health for children and adolescents in Ontario. "What it has driven home to me," she reflects, "is that should be where the focus is now with respect to health." She reinforces her statement with these disturbing statistics: The waiting time for adolescents in this area to receive help is seven months, and suicide is

the second greatest cause of death among adolescents.

Although the task force's work is ended, Sandra is still working to improve mental health facilities in Ontario, and in particular in her own area. She is a member of SEO CURA ID (South Eastern Ontario Community University Research Association for the Intellectually Disabled), plus several other related volunteer organizations to which she freely offers her energy, expertise and experience.

"These things are all interwoven in a very complex way, I think more in my brain than anywhere else," she explains. "But there are just so many interconnections from the science point of view and health. All the work

that's being done with respect to the human brain, all the work that's been done now in the area of the environment and climate change, the role that the forests and wetlands play in the protection of the environment, ground water protection, all of those things. And maintaining a natural environment that is so essential to the good mental health of our society. It just sort of all comes together."

And her dream is for all this work to eventually bear fruit. "I would like to see a new, thoughtful, brilliant approach to child and adolescent mental health," she says. "I think that would be so fundamental to creating a better society for everyone and a more productive society as well."