

## An old fashioned renege

by Dave Adsett

Once in a while we get around to playing cards with friends. It is a couple's match, typically, guys against the girls with the guys often losing at a game of euchre.

Although the competition is friendly, we learned early on about "card laid; card played" and the ultra vigilance on the part of the girls when it comes to a renege, where suit isn't followed – accidentally of course. We see this mess between the county and city that could end up costing county taxpayers millions as a case of renegeing. But this is not cards and it is not a game for fun. The job of providing services to people based on handshakes and goodwill appears in jeopardy from here on in.

Caught in the crossfire again are innocent citizens, left to watch idly, as good money is squandered fighting a fight that need not be. Guelph and Wellington County will have spent tens of thousands of dollars plus countless hours preparing to defend and offend in the months leading to arbitration day. Hearings do not come cheap, but Guelph obviously sees this as an investment in savings down the road.

Council and staff changes at the city have contributed negatively towards the present animosity between the county and city, bringing it to the boiling point where arbitration is initiated.

We believe the underlying problem is Guelph still retains its status as a separated city, unaffected by the regional style of government we see elsewhere in this part of Ontario. Through decades-old arrangements, the work of a regional government was divided between the parties. The Home for the Aged and social services departments operated smoothly, the needs of citizens were met and the larger decisions were shared choices of a joint committee comprised of city and county politicians.

It is somewhat ironic now, knowing many of the personalities involved on a personal level, that the city's position is not unlike the actions of the former Mike Harris and Jean Chretien governments, where historic obligations and costs were handed off. Guelph, long regarded by us for its sense of fair play and reasonableness, has ushered in an era of brinkmanship, little different than Harris' purposeful picking of fights with teachers. It is incredible to us to see a good relationship sour in this way.

If the city is successful, there will be a substantive cost to residents here. The county, which conducts itself often with deals based on good will, will be forced to turn into another corporate behemoth where getting from point A to point B will be bogged down in legalities and paperwork.

If the city is unsuccessful, it will take years to recoup the relationship it once had with Wellington County staff and council. The trust, so important in a relationship of any sort, has been shattered with this exercise. Combine that with an historic failure to pay selective bills to the county on time and the times of getting along for the good of the people are all but lost.

It could very well be time that the county push the notion of no shared services with Guelph. There would be an increase in costs for both parties, no doubt, but at least the increasing discord between two old friends would end. It is hard to do business when more focus is placed on looking for a renege, rather than looking to see that the best job is being done for citizens.