



## MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR – MARCH 2009

As I write this column, the local newspapers are filled with disturbing news regarding the increasing high school dropout rate in Quebec. Statistics Canada states that the dropout rate in Quebec's public school system is the highest in the country and getting worse. Last year, 29 per cent of public high school students failed to graduate, up three percentage points from 2003. The numbers are worse for male students; about one in three didn't graduate. Students from economically depressed neighborhoods drop out at a staggering rate of 41 per cent. In wealthy neighborhoods, the numbers plummet to just six per cent.

This does not bode well for our future in many ways. Today's youth are tomorrow's leaders and we will not be able to thrive socially, politically or financially as a community, as a province or as a country if this trend is not altered.

Life experiences have taught us that education improves one's lot in life. In 2004, the unemployment rate in Canada among people aged 25 to 44 without a high school diploma was 12.2%, while for those who graduated from high school, it was much lower, at 6.8%. Moving to higher levels of education, the unemployment rate continues to drop, although not to the same extent.

A report released by the Canadian Council on Learning found that high-school dropouts cost Canadian taxpayers nearly \$1-billion in social assistance alone, and another \$350-million annually to the criminal-justice system. Dropouts made up 43 per cent of welfare recipients.

As a society, we have to find ways to ensure that our youth is well prepared to assume its future role. Education comes in many shapes and sizes and one size does not fit all. Getting our children better educated and prepared for the future is something we all should be thinking about.

As a parent of two boys and as Mayor of Baie d'Urfé, this is an area that I have been giving quite a bit of thought to. Baie d'Urfé is envied by many municipalities for the high level of citizen involvement in the life of the Town. Our enriched quality of life reflects the care, the pride and the very active participation of our citizens in all aspects of municipal activity, whether they are recreational, cultural, environmental, administrative or security related.

In March of last year, we created a Junior Council in an attempt to get our youth involved in the democratic life of the Town. We have met quarterly and the meetings have proven to be beneficial to both our young citizens and Council. Our next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup> at the Fritz Community Center. Please let your children, ages 10 and up, know about this meeting and have them call Nathalie Hadida, Mayor's assistant and Town Clerk, at 514-457-6047 to confirm their presence. In order to receive notices of upcoming meetings and events, suggest to them that they also provide their e-mail address.



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This is just a baby step in getting our youth involved in Town business. I welcome any other ideas you may have on how we can do our part to enhance our youth's overall life education.

### **Winterfest**

The Baie d'Urfé Citizens' Association, with the assistance of the Baie d'Urfé Rescue Squad, put on a very successful Winterfest on February 7. Hundreds of citizens, young and old, were treated to a fun day of winter activities, food, music and horse drawn sleigh rides. Many a new family in Town commented on the special community experience witnessed at the event and they were very surprised to hear that it was 100% volunteer-driven. A big thank you to our Citizens' Association and to our Rescue Squad for this wonderful initiative! A big thanks to them also for being visible role models on how to create a strong and happy community.

### **Council Meetings**

Council meetings in 2009 have been held at the Fritz Community Center. It felt a little awkward in January but by the second meeting at the Fritz, we were feeling quite at home. The new location and set-up makes the Council meeting feel a little like a family gathering around the kitchen table. Despite the extra workload and inconvenience of having to recreate a temporary Council Chamber every month, the experience so far has been positive. A good thing too, as it appears that we may be without the use of the Town Hall for several more Council meetings. Come to our next meeting on March 10<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. and check out our new Council Chamber.

Maria Tutino, Mayor