

# localnews

■ HISTORY: 'A lot of people's hearts went into this project'

## Harriet Tubman comes alive with unveiling of new sculpture

KARENA WALTER  
QMI Agency

ST. CATHARINES — Harriet Tubman has always had a strong historical presence at the British Methodist Episcopal Church in St. Catharines, but now that presence is concrete.

A stone bust of the famed Underground Railroad conductor was unveiled at the church Monday, surrounded by a new meditation garden.

The celebration marked a collaboration that transformed a dead lawn at the church at 92 Geneva St. into a stone path, garden and focal point.

"A lot of people's hearts went into this project," said Rochelle Bush, church historian and Salem Chapel Trustee.

The bust was donated by sculptor Frank Rekrut, who spent months creating the likeness.

The garden project, meanwhile, was financed by the St. Catharines

Green Committee and St. Catharines Horticultural Society and designed by Eco Landscape Design of St. Catharines.

Other donors contributed to the work's installation, benches and a pedestal.

In a remarkable coincidence, Rekrut began working on a Tubman bust prior to learning the church wanted a statue.

He only took up sculpting a few years ago.

When a copy of a bust of a cardinal by Gian Lorenzo Bernini worked out well, he turned his attention to a local subject.

Rekrut said he often drove by the BME church near work and decided to make a Tubman statue.

Meanwhile, ECO had designed a garden next to the church that included a statue in the design, but it wasn't something the church or green committee could afford to commission.

So when Rekrut called to offer

his bust for free, everyone was floored.

"I just thought this was a unique opportunity," he said.

Producing a sculpture from a black and white photograph proved challenging.

"We brought home every book in the library we could find," Rekrut said, referring to himself and wife Laura Thompson, who is an oil painter.

"We only found one front-on photo and it's tricky."

Those gathered Monday were enthusiastic about Rekrut's effort.

Tubman escaped slavery from Maryland in 1849 but continued to make trips to the southern states to help others find their freedom.

Eleven of the freedom seekers were brought to St. Catharines in 1851 and joined what is now the BME church, where Tubman herself worshipped.

Bush said the beautification project is in preparation

for the 160th anniversary next year of Tubman's first visit to St. Catharines, when a national historic plaque will be unveiled. In 2013, the 100th anniversary of Tubman's death will also be remembered.

Bush searched far and wide for an appropriate quote to accompany the statue on its pedestal — one that wasn't already being used at other Tubman sites in the U.S.

She found very few quotes from Tubman that were recorded.

"We wanted something unique to St. Catharines," she said. "Needle in a haystack, but it was there."

The obscure and bold quote Bush discovered seemed appropriate for a woman who risked her life to bring more than 300 slaves north of the border.

The statue reads: "I wouldn't trust Uncle Sam with my people no longer. I brought them all clear off to Canada."



JULIE JOCSAK QMI Agency

A bust of Harriet Tubman was unveiled in the garden next to the British Methodist Episcopal Church on Geneva Street in St. Catharines. The bust was sculpted by artist Frank Rekrut, who is seen being photographed by the bust.

■ ELECTION

## Use common sense with websites, politicians urged

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"It's like a global focus group. They can consistently reach out to constituents and voters, ask questions, find out the issues of the day and be able to address them."

A common-sense approach, however, should be taken when using such websites, said McPherson. That goes for everyone, but social media presents especially disastrous consequences for politicians during election campaigns.

"If you're not willing to say something to a reporter or the

public, don't put it out there," she said. "Don't put pictures you don't want people to see, or make comments you're not willing to back up."

"Politicians have to have a sense of customer service when they're communicating with people online."

Unlike Diodati and Salci, Fort Erie mayoral candidates Doug Martin and Ann-Marie Noyes don't have much experience with social media.

However, both say their election plans include creating Facebook pages and web sites.

"It definitely has some benefits," said Noyes, a town councillor since 1997.

"I think any tool that helps us communicate with the electorate is valuable."

On the other hand, Noyes said she has been hesitant to start a Facebook page in conjunction with her mayoral campaign until she knows she's able to keep a close eye on it.

"People tell me you have to be cautious, because there is an opportunity for abuse," said Noyes.

"It's something that once you

start, you have to monitor it quite closely, because it can be a valuable tool but it can also be used as a weapon against you."

While she may end up spending more time online this election, she won't be spending any less time pounding the pavement.

"I have been knocking on doors for the last two or three weeks, because that face-to-face is important. It gives you an opportunity to really listen to people and seeing (with your eyes) the local issues. You don't get that on Facebook."

Clarke Bitter used Facebook to help launch his campaign seeking a trustee position at the District School Board of Niagara representing Niagara Falls.

He has posted his campaign platform there and has challenged his opponents to do the same.

Bitter said there's no doubt in his mind social media is helping him get his message out and helping him keep abreast on the latest developments.

"It has become such an integral part of people's day-to-day lives," said Bitter. "Even me. I use it to keep up-to-date with what's going on with the election campaign through (links to) articles that pop up in The Review."

Kimberly Zanko, a first-time candidate for town council in Fort Erie, said she's hoping candidates using Facebook and other social media sites will help

to get more people interested in municipal issues, especially young people.

"Through social media, I'm hoping personally, to engage people," said Zanko, who lamented the poor voter turnout for municipal elections.

Zanko said the internet has helped to level the playing field somewhat, particularly when it comes to money.

"When you look at the cost of signs and literature, campaigning is very expensive," said Zanko. "With social media, Facebook is free, LinkedIn is free, and even websites now - I was able to purchase a website and register a domain for under \$150."

— with files by Ray Spiteri

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