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A FORCE to be reckoned with

Anti-quarry group brings unusual savvy to their fight

Eric McGuinness
The Hamilton Spectator

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This David is armed with more than a slingshot.

Flamborough's stop-the-quarry group FORCE is up against an industrial Goliath in St. Marys Cement, owned by a Brazilian multinational with annual revenue of \$13 billion from cement, concrete, mining, metals, pulp, paper, orange juice, specialty chemicals and more. It even owns a bank.

But few volunteer community groups come equipped with the political savvy, smarts and skills that FORCE leaders bring to the fight.

Chair Graham Flint, 49, left his job as an international executive with Microsoft Corp. to organize FORCE (Friends of Rural Communities Everywhere). His wife, Silke, is an accountant who handles the group's finances.

Since the battle began five years ago, the couple has opened a Boston Pizza franchise at Clappison's Corners.

Vice-chair Mark Rudolph, 53, is an environmental consultant to major Canadian companies and served as chief of staff to a former Ontario environment minister. His wife, Jan Whitelaw, has 20 years' experience in the environmental policy field, including a stint as senior policy adviser to the premier. She's vice-chair of the Greenbelt Foundation and a former member of the Toronto Port Authority.

They're backed by a former town councillor, a banker, lawyer, website designer and other professionals determined to stop St. Marys from opening Canada's eighth largest limestone quarry and running more than 1,100 trucks a day down the narrow roads in their rural community of horse farms and estate homes northeast of Carlisle.

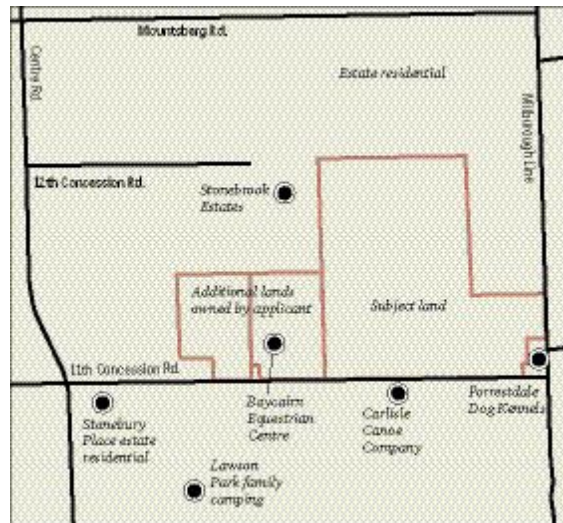
They've even recruited a panel of medical and environmental advisers, including Monte Hummel, president emeritus of the World Wildlife Fund Canada; Gail Krantzberg, director of the Dofasco Centre for Engineering and Public Policy at McMaster University; Jacques Gerin, former federal deputy minister of environment; and Dr. Alba DiCenso, professor in McMaster's department of clinical epidemiology and biostatistics and school of nursing.

The Flints say they discovered the Carlisle area on weekend bike rides from Mississauga and moved to Timber Run Estates -- a small enclave of custom homes on large, heavily wooded lots -- just five months before the quarry plan was revealed. They'd checked planning and zoning rules and looked hard for any potential threats to their rural lifestyle.

Right after a community meeting on the quarry proposal, the Flints sat down with their next-door neighbours, Rudolph and Whitelaw, to decide how to proceed, because they live directly north of the site. They joined others to form FORCE with



Cathie Coward, the Hamilton Spectator



a leadership team of 14 to 16 people.

Graham Flint says, "I naively thought I could take a sabbatical (from Microsoft)," but he eventually realized he couldn't go back and still devote the needed time to FORCE.

"It was incredibly time-intensive then, so I said, 'OK, I can afford to stay away for a couple of years to get this thing going.' Everything I've done since has been affected by my commitment to this community."

At the outset, Rudolph says, "Jan and I would put in 20 hours a week at night and on weekends," while raising three children then ranging from six months to seven years old.

"Our youngest, Jacob, has lived with this his entire life. Ask him what he hates most and he'll say, 'The proposed quarry.' We've deprived them of time we should be giving as parents. And there's collateral damage in time lost to go to Shaw or Stratford with the kids."

Flint says, "It does become part of who you are."

Other groups already look to them as a model for citizens fighting unwanted development in their neighbourhoods -- starting with the name FORCE, which Flint says was chosen to be "consistent with the mental and moral strength we would muster to consistently and positively direct attention to the proposed quarry."

They set up a non-profit federal corporation, able to appear before the Ontario Municipal Board as a party to any proceedings. They wrote policies on conflict of interest, protection of privacy, meeting attendance and work expectations. They set up committees to draw in larger numbers of volunteers for special events, signs, community outreach and fundraising, realizing not everyone could devote that much time to the cause.

Rudolph says it appeared from the start that the application would eventually end up at a months-long public hearing where FORCE could expect to pay \$10,000 a day for a top lawyer and one associate, so it would have to build a fund of \$600,000 to \$900,000 on top of the money needed to pay hydrogeologists and other specialists to scrutinize studies submitted by St. Marys along the way.

Bake sales clearly wouldn't do it.

"Knowing we'd need to raise \$600,000 to \$900,000 over eight to 10 years, we figured the average estate home in the area might be worth half a million dollars, and that it would drop by at least 10 per cent with the proposal in play," Rudolph said.

"Then we went to people and said, 'You have house insurance, don't you? Would you be willing to pay 1 per cent or \$500 a year to fight this?'"

Flint says: "We've probably raised \$500,000 over the five years and still have \$300,000 reserved for the hearing. People would have laughed at us five years ago, they would have scoffed, if we'd said we could do that."

They've bought full-page newspaper ads, organized a campaign to send postcards to the premier and made sure local politicians and agencies studied the quarry's potential impacts on drinking water, traffic, schools and the environment.

"We've tried to deliver, and people in the community have said, 'We've seen you guys are doing the job, we're glad to write you a cheque,' " Flint said.

When opponents went to the OMB over the expansion of the Dufferin quarry in Milton -- which was approved in 2005 -- the town, region, conservation authority and Niagara Escarpment Commission were lined up with the quarry company.

In opposing St. Marys, FORCE has 1,200 citizens on side, along with the 16-0 backing of city council and support from every other government agency involved, including the Ministry of Natural Resources, which is responsible for aggregates.

Rudolph says: "Here only the proponent is in favour. Every agency is with us. That's the difference. That exemplifies what we have been able to do as pro bono, unpaid, hard-working citizenry."

"In a post-Walkerton environment, to let this thing go through is not just stupid, it's political suicide."

Rick Smith, executive director of Toronto-based Environmental Defence, which is helping FORCE, says: "I work with a lot of community groups, and this is among the most organized I've ever seen. It's an impressive group of people, and there's no doubt in my mind they will win. Often, if a company can draw things out, organizations lose steam, but FORCE is more organized than ever."

Lynda Lukasik, executive director of Environment Hamilton, which isn't directly involved, calls FORCE "an incredibly polished, professional organization," adding: "It's no surprise given the people involved. I think it's terrific that professionals

are contributing their talents to the effort ... but it does make you realize that more affluent communities have many advantages, including a greater likelihood that there are savvy, connected professionals living there who can help with a fight like this one."

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FORCE GALA

FORCE is holding its fourth annual gala gathering at the Carlisle Golf and Country Club on Saturday. For tickets, e-mail gala@stopthequarry.ca or phone Donna at 905-689-3738.

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