

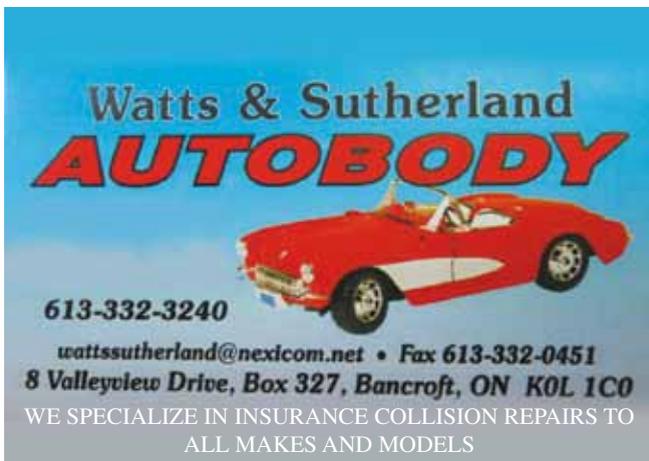
## Glen Alda Seniors ... continued ...

might make a deserving guardian of said beast, suffice it to say I am always looking for an inexpensive project bike to work on, then pass it on to someone who will treasure it as it should be - once it is running properly again.

August was a bit of a different month for the Glen Alda Seniors. For the first meeting of the month, (unlike last month when I said the second meeting of the month), the Seniors were off to Stirling Ontario for a trip to the Stirling Agricultural Museum and a guided tour that was followed up with a dining experience. Apparently the twenty five or so who attended had a very informative and enjoyable experience from what Bev and I heard. The second meeting for August was back at the Glen Alda Community Centre where burgers and corn on the cob were the main dishes on offer. Do not forget our practice of incorporating a pot luck element at our get togethers which is what makes them so special. The home-made salads, and for me, the deserts, really make the family like atmosphere of our group all the more rewarding.

September will see us once again enjoying the hospitality of Liz Johnston at her home on Chandos. This gathering has become a tradition with our group, and a welcome one at that as Liz. is a gracious host. The other event for September will see us back at the much improved Glen Alda Community Centre for a gathering and meal in the increasingly comfortable G.A.C.C. which is the home away from home for this group of outgoing seniors.

Remember; we are an open, active, friendly group welcoming of newcomers. We are always open to making our new friends feel at home at our gatherings. If you are interested in joining us, just give President Barry a call at 705-656-1850 and express your interest.



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## A premier and his cellphone

There was something endearing about Doug Ford's unusual habit of giving out his personal cellphone number to anyone and everyone. He invited them to call or text him with questions or concerns. The practice was so unorthodox that when he ended it a few weeks ago it made headlines.

According to Ford's office, the phone number was changed due to a deluge of calls from "special interests." When the news broke, the opposition and chattering classes had a field day. They described Ford's invitation to call or text him a "farce" and a "political stunt." It was unbecoming for a premier to act like some Home Shopping Channel host, encouraging you to "call now," before they run out of those really cool crepe makers they had on offer the other day.

Outside of hardcore PC loyalists, I may be the only person around who saw something positive about Ford's habit. Don't get me wrong. I recognize the impracticality of a busy premier trying to manage a steady stream of calls. Moreover, even if all Ford did was pass on inquiries to others, his involvement could be seen as giving people lucky enough to have his number an unfair advantage.

There are also delicate matters, such as those involving the police or courts, that premiers need to avoid at all costs. But what is so wrong with a premier actually wanting to talk to ordinary people? When I was at Queen's Park, the most valuable meetings weren't cabinet, caucus or high-level briefings. They occurred on Friday afternoon when I met with constituents in my riding. These were often difficult meetings. They usually involved individuals at their wit's end with nowhere else to turn. Folks on social assistance facing an unforeseen emergency. Laid off factory workers with little hope of finding another job. People who simply couldn't pay their rent and were desperate for help from someone.

I spent hours with people whose problems didn't quite fit the bureaucratic framework. I came to realize that some of our signature programs weren't getting the results we contemplated. Overall, I got to hear what ordinary folks were worried about — from ordinary folks instead of pollsters and strategists. Although it was difficult to solve individual problems, these meetings made me a much better MPP and cabinet minister. In fact, many of us privately thought that some of the premier's key advisers might benefit from sitting in on these meetings.

They might realize that what sounded brilliant in a boardroom at Queen's Park often looked different back home. Being trapped in a bubble is one of the biggest dangers of life in politics — especially for those at the top. It is so easy to lose touch with ordinary Ontarians when every meeting and interaction is stage-managed by a team of advisers who constantly tell you how well everything is going. Not only do you begin to believe your own propaganda, but it's easy to start following an agenda based solely on what you and your advisers believe are Ontario's major problems, paying little attention to the concerns of ordinary Ontarians.

Which brings us back to Doug Ford. I am not one of those who believes he became premier by accident. Although his platform appeared to be hastily pulled together, he was able to connect with people and liked to listen. I remember someone who worked on his campaign telling me why Ford was so enthusiastic about reforming math education. It originated with dozens of parents telling him how fed up they were with having to put their kids in private math programs because they weren't learning the basics at school. Although many educational experts mocked Ford's promise to get "back to basics" in math, it went over well with voters.

Critics will say Ford's current unpopularity is because he stopped listening, and this may be true. Unfortunately, one of the usual responses to low poll numbers is to insulate yourself even further from all the noise.

Premier Ford needs to avoid that temptation. Although giving out his cellphone number didn't work, he should be encouraged to find a better way to connect directly with ordinary Ontarians.

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