

## SEANANUS DRIVE CONTROVERSY

# Residents' water is undrinkable

BY GORDON DENFORD

Letters submitted to the *Times Colonist* by Peter Kittredge on April 27 ("Esthetics are the issue, not health") and by Michael M'Gonigle on April 29 ("Community interests come first") contain misleading and selective information.

Since both letters refer to my family and our home, I must own up to the fact that I am one of those urbanites who 32 years ago opted for the spacious country life, bought acreage on Senanus Drive, built a house and settled down to bring up our young family.

Some of my neighbours had lived there since the 1920s, others built their homes during the 1950s and 1960s, and the well water was clean and plentiful. Many of them still live there today and over the years, without exception, we have shared the desire to preserve our rural and forested area and resist any and all development pressures.

We have no sidewalks, curbs, street lighting, regulation-sized roads or sewers and none of my neighbours or my family want them. We have consistently maintained this position since long before the Kittredges and M'Gonigles came

along to become our self-appointed protectors against the onslaught of the demon developers.

During the last 10 years, the substantial increase in water demands on the aquifer caused by the drilling of many new wells for homes and intensive agricultural use in the surrounding area has resulted in reduced available volume, high mineral contamination and salt water intrusion. This occurs (in varying degrees and depending on the time of year and the amount of rainfall) with nearly all of the 21 Senanus Drive residences and with many others on Mount Newton Cross Road.

In May 1999, at a time when our water quality and quantity was at its best, Loewen Hydrogeology Consulting carried out "a limited water chemistry sampling program" using "nine representative wells" and concluded in-house treatment for everyone was required. Kittredge and M'Gonigle have converted this into "an esthetic problem existing in only seven houses."

Since 1990, I have drilled three wells and been obliged to abandon two of them. A large reservoir was constructed and a treatment system installed. Our water was

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and still is undrinkable. Due to the corrosive nature of the water, I have replaced one well pump, one reservoir pump, two pressure pumps, eight hot water tanks, four sets of immersion heating elements, two pressure tanks and numerous valves, taps and showerheads.

I have consulted with some of the best water treatment consultants available and they all say the same thing: in-house treatment would cost \$30,000 to \$50,000 and is not practical because its output would be only 15 per cent of the input and for many months of the year, there is insufficient water available for its operation. Furthermore, the 85-per-cent waste water would be highly concentrated with minerals, causing a disposal problem.

M'Gonigle will forgive me if I do not accept his gratuitous advice and tanker-truck water in when needed at a cost of \$140 per load.

The community also rejected Kit-

tredge and M'Gonigle's task force recommendation that each house be individually assessed, cisterns and treatment plants installed and wastewater recycled.

To this end, and with the support of the mayor and the three councillors opposed to the water line's extension, M'Gonigle prepared an application for a Green Municipal Enabling Fund grant of \$70,000 to enable this program to be studied on Senanus Drive, in partnership with a local company engaged in that business. Unfortunately, neither he nor Central Saanich council informed the residents of their scheme.

What has been lost in all of this is the fact that Senanus Drive is a heavily wooded area, which is becoming drier every year and we have no means of fighting a fire. There have been some recent close calls.

Three councillors have steadfastly denied the citizens of Senanus Drive and

some on Mount Newton Cross Road access to a clean, safe and adequate municipal water supply. They have voted not to seek an opinion from the capital region medical health officer and have instead denigrated and ridiculed the Capital Health Region's reports and recommendations.

They ignored an independent study performed by Giles Environmental Engineering that confirmed the poor quality of the well water and the impracticality of treatment.

They have denied those citizens the right to access the federal and provincial infrastructure grant program created specifically for water problems such as ours. There would be no cost to the municipality; the residents would pay their share.

One councillor has told us we are not deserving of the federal and provincial grants. I guess the only thing the people of Senanus Drive do deserve is the privilege of paying the highest taxes in the municipality and living the best way they can with limited quantities of undrinkable water. Pretty scary!

*Gordon Denford lives on Senanus Drive in Saanichton.*