

Mr. Speaker, Transition Committee Members

My name is Andy Ramsz, I've been a member of this community for the majority of my life. In 1968 Richard Gosnell, Eric Stang, Clare Wiersma and I were brought together in our first year of high school at Tecumseh SS. We came from different backgrounds and interests. Eric and I had been childhood friends since grade five; at Tecumseh we were offered new opportunities to form life long bonds with other students at the north side school.

- At Tecumseh we were quickly embraced by senior students as Red Feather preparations evolved in those first weeks. The spirit and excitement at Tecumseh was immediately evident.
- Tradition was an important aspect within the student body. Tecumseh was a smaller sized school with a population ranging between 400 – 500 students but it always demonstrated largeness when it came to school spirit, supporting team sports, encouraging free expression and teaching us to become leaders.
- By grade 11 the four of us had become very close friends. As an option course, we signed up for the same wood shop class and made the Totem Pole our class project. It would leave a permanent mark at the school representing the spirit, drive and determination of many students preceding our generation and for those to follow.
- The school is named after Chief Tecumseh, a brave great warrior, a leader and strategist. The school however lacked a physical display reflecting this bravery, leadership and spirit, we were about to change that.
- Richard had researched the history and design of totem poles in a number of books. I took a trip to the Royal Ontario Museum to view a number of totem poles and returned with numerous photos from which we could create our design.
- Our next task was to find an appropriate pole for the project. As fate would have it, Ontario Hydro was in the process of replacing poles along Queen St., this one was found in front of the Chatham public library.
- It was one of the broadest and tallest poles located in the city, and it had just been removed for replacement. The tree from which this pole was derived grew for at least fifty years. It stood as a hydro pole for probably twenty five to thirty years, and has stood for over forty five years as the Tecumseh Totem Pole. This pole is well over 100 years old but shows little of its age.
- Ontario Hydro crews delivered this pole to the school for us to begin our carving project in 1970.
- Only hand tools supplied by Richard's father were used to carve this Totem Pole. Not a single power tool was used.
- Our persistence and dedication was ultimately rewarded with completion and placement of the Totem Pole in the summer of 1972.
- Aside from being very proud at the completion of this project, it was a source of empowerment for the four of us. We had the trust of the teachers. Our Principal, James Noble was very encouraging. The staff and students had followed our progress over the two years and provided inspiration and motivation.

- The day on which we erected the Totem Pole, we stood in awe, so glorious was the wing span, so majestic. I can only imagine how inspiring it must look today to a first grader.
- As our final year at Tecumseh began, the students assembled around the Totem Pole to witness the dedication ceremony.
- The spirit united our entire school population. Our small sized school rallied for the United Way weekend winning coveted awards for spirit, float, the football game and Miss Red Feather. It was an awesome year to be a Tecumseh Brave.
- Many meetings and assemblies have occurred around the Totem Pole. It serves as a welcoming point for school guests and learning opportunity for students.
- Upon conversion of Tecumseh SS to an elementary school, students and teachers continue to use the Totem Pole as a teaching and learning tool. I personally participated with a grade six class, educating the students about the origin of the Tecumseh Totem Pole while they practiced their journalistic skills as they wrote stories for their own internal newspaper which has been provided to you.
- Later Dan will be presenting you with the "Save Our Totem Pole" petition. Speaking on behalf of the four of us I would like to thank each and everyone for the outpouring support we've received in the very brief period this petition has been available. It means a great deal to each of us that there are many from the Tecumseh family wishing to see the Totem Pole remain where it is as well the non Tecumseh supporters believing in the preservation of our local history at the school. I would like to read several of their comments:

- My son is 1 of the children moving from John N Given next year. I feel that the Totem needs to stay ([REDACTED])
- Even though I went to Tecumseh as an elementary student, this Totem pole was a significant part of this school and should never be removed. ([REDACTED])
- Many great memories of the Totem poles' significance when I was employed there. Always an announced meeting place for students to gather for impromptu team and club meetings . Even was used for a special attendance recording event. A great source of pride that we had something so unique in our school. Many visitors commenting on its uniqueness. Why would you remove something that has so many good memories for so many? ([REDACTED])
- My brother Eric is one of the students who worked on the iconic Totem pole. It is part of the Tecumseh history and a proud part of our family history. In the words of poet Mattie Stepanek, "Share these keepsakes with others to inspire hope and build from the past, which can bridge to the future." The Totem pole has become a long cherished symbol of welcome for the school and part of the history of those who attended. ([REDACTED])
- My father, Alfred Greenhalgh, was the shop teacher at T.S.S. way back when. The Totem pole is iconic for many of us. ([REDACTED])
- As a grade 10 student I wanted to be like those (four) guys. ([REDACTED])

- I went to Tecumseh Public School..., I always made sure I showed respect to the Totem pole as I believed it was our school symbol and an easy place to tell someone you would meet them. This pole has far greater meaning then any of us can understand.... I want my kids to come home and talk about the same Totem pole I once visited as a kid and it would be nice if their kids could too! Let's keep the legacy alive and well! (██████████)
- I spent 5 enjoyable years at Tecumseh Secondary School and this marvelous, tall, majestic, skillfully crafted artifact, welcomed us at the front entrance of our school. Being a Tecumseh Brave, gives one a sense of pride and honour to have met and known some of the nicest, sincerest, genuine people, teachers and students alike, who still to this day, I am honoured to call them my friends. Removing the Totem pole would be removing part of the history of our school and that just is not acceptable. Let's keep this artifact intact and in its rightful home..at the front entrance at Tecumseh school for future generations to also be in awe of and enjoy. (██████████)
- Tecumseh was a very special place in my teaching career. For me the Totem Pole...and the four men who created it embodied the spirit and heart of the "Golden Age of TSS". A superintendent asked me at the time "Leo, do you know what we have here?" "I'm not sure"....I said. Broadly smiling he fired back "A HAPPY SCHOOL!", with plenty of spirit, heart, enthusiasm, and self-motivation. The Totem Pole represents all of that. I strongly hope it will live on. (██████████)

As most of you know, Tecumseh school has been in existence since 1957, last year celebrating the 60th anniversary. The Totem Pole has been at the school for 45 of those years. The school and the Totem Pole are linked and for that reason it is my opinion the Totem Pole should remain at the school to preserve its history.

I'm sure you are aware of the local media coverage this petition drive has generated. We are proud to say our efforts truly are to preserve the Totem Pole for future generations to enjoy, promote meaningful conversation and to use as a teaching and learning opportunity.

In closing I certainly hope you will take into consideration not only my comments, but the comments received from the community in either making a decision or recommendation to leave the Totem Pole in its rightful place at Tecumseh Public School.

Thank you for allowing us time to present to you and patiently listening to our content. Dan will now have a few closing remarks followed by any of your questions or comments.

Respectfully,

Andy Ramsz, Alumni of Tecumseh S.S.

Well said Andy.

In 1988, the Tecumseh Secondary School graduated its last student. While the Alumni were not happy with the decision to decommission our Alma Mater, we took solace in the commitment of the Board of Education of the day that our great name, mascot, colours and artefacts would live on through a new group of younger Alumni. 2018 marks the 30th anniversary of this new era in Tecumseh Brave history.

Last year, when the Naming Committee asked the public to weigh in on the validity of this commitment in light of the proposed public school amalgamations, a small group of our members worked behind the scenes to ensure that the Board got the message loud and clear and in the end they made the correct decision to keep the Tecumseh name.

We thought that was end of the matter, however, in February we were upset to hear that the Board was quietly reaching out to public institutions as well as private citizens to find a new home for one of our most revered artefacts, the Tecumseh Totem Pole.

At your last meeting, Richard Gosnell quite eloquently made his case for keeping the Totem Pole at the school and out of private hands.

However, on March, 2nd our Alumni Reunion Committee was galvanized into action as a group when the public statement advising of the mascot change was released by the Board.

We felt that this decision was made without the benefit of a broader public discussion as was had during the Naming Committee process.

Since then we have reached out to Richard, Andy, Clare and Eric to pledge our support and have engaged the rest of our Alumni as well as the citizens of Chatham-Kent.

I am pleased to present a petition, signed by over 750 supporters, calling for the Lambton-Kent District School Board to once again make the correct decision and keep the Tecumseh Totem Pole where it belongs for the benefit of the public and for the future generations of Tecumseh Alumni.

Thank you,

Andy and I are happy to take any questions you may have.