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Village Close-Knit in '60'

By Barbara Willis

Beaumont, by the end of the 1960's, was a small, close-knit community of some 250 residents. Most families were inter-related, with the exception of a few newcomers seeking refuge from bustling city life.

The hamlet had co-operated on several occasions to construct facilities such as the community hall north of Bellevue School built in 1954 and the [original] curling rink, built in 1960.

Conflicts with the county government in the early 1970's had roots far back in to the '60's. A general community inability to influence or persuade county council in regard to Beaumont affairs came to a head in late 1971.

The Leduc county council was approached by developers with proposals for a trailer court of some 1,000 units for northwest Beaumont, and a major 500 home subdivision for the northeast sector of the hamlet.

A local meeting was held in the home of Mr. Henri Gobeil in early 1972, to organize a protest to the development proposals. Mr. Ken Nichol was asked by the group to act as their spokesman and accepted. The group opposed the trailer court entirely and wanted a more thorough investigation of the effects of a large subdivision on such a small community.

Briefs presented by this local group at a public meeting called by county council in Beaumont, drew out shortcomings in the planning of such a large scale development within the hamlet. Over 100 people turned out for that hearing to oppose the developer's requests.

In about May 1972, county council gave second and third reading to a bylaw allowing the proposed housing and trailer court development in Beaumont, totally ignoring the requests and concerns of the local residents. The one dissenting vote was cast by the local Beaumont councillor, Mr. Andy Magnan.

Beaumont then had 30 days to challenge the legality of the county's decision in court. In July, local representatives attended a hearing with a provincial court judge in Edmonton to present their challenge to the bylaw. The group's lawyer, Mr. Pierre Mousseau proved of invaluable assistance in appealing the county bylaw on a technicality in wording. Several other routes of attack were held in reserve in the event this first challenge failed.

In August, the judge handed down his decision in favor of Beaumont. In the meantime, a petition with the signatures of 80 to 90 per cent of the adult population of Beaumont was prepared. It was handed to the Minister of Municipal affairs on the day the judge's decision was announced, requesting Beaumont be allowed to incorporate as a village with its own municipal government. The timing of these transactions was critical, for, if the county reworded its bylaw and passed it, that law to allow development would be binding on Beaumont even if the village incorporated later. The only chance the hamlet had was to be granted village status before the county had time to amend its bylaw.

The Honorable Dave Russell, then Municipal Affairs minister, was approached by several influential people both in and out of the Beaumont area, urging that the hamlet be allowed to incorporate.

At a meeting in December, 1972 with Mr. Russell, a contingent from Beaumont – Dennis Hinse, Dennis Bérubé and Ken Nichol – were verbally told that village status would be granted. The official order-in-council came in early March 1973, dates effective January, 1973.

With the assistance of municipal inspector Lionel Roy, a municipal administration was set up. Mrs. I. Royer was approached to take the secretary-treasurer position and accepted. The first election in April 1973 saw all three councillors – Dennis Bérubé, Ken Nichol and Cyril Lavigne – win by acclamation.

The village's first operating capital came from a share in county surplus funds amounting to about \$18,000. Mr. Adrian Bérubé was hired as village foreman. The boundaries of the newly incorporated village encompassed one square mile. The first assessment of property for taxation came to about \$371,000. Today's* village assessment on property is about \$4 million.

The new council set about to stop the trailer court proposal which they did, and to re-negotiate with Craig Properties re: a housing development agreement.

Under the terms of that agreement with Craig Properties, 179 lots were built in northeast Beaumont. The developers also assumed the cost of constructing a sewage lagoon and water reservoir for the village. This first experience negotiating development agreements set the stage in Beaumont for some unique financial arrangements with developers, to the benefit of the village as a whole.

The 1973 census in Beaumont indicated a population of 349. The number of residents and new homes rose steadily throughout the '70's, in line with a development plan which will see some 4,000 residents in the village by 1981.

Village council changed membership somewhat in the next few years between elections. Cyril Lavigne resigned

Pg. 23

shortly after the first council was elected. Mr. Gerry Magnan was elected to fill that vacancy. In 1974, Dennis Bérubé resigned and Cyril Lavigne once more came on council by acclamation. The 1977 municipal election saw ten candidates run for the newly-expanded five member council. Elected were Jean Charrois, Allan Elander, Colin Farr, George and Ken Nichol.

Physically, Beaumont has grown and expanded in the 1970's. To date*, a fourfold population increase has taken place since the 1960's. New developments on all sides of the original core neighbourhoods are projected and some well underway.

Socially and recreationally, the village will be able to offer residents the use of a \$1.5 million center by the fall of 1978. Ecole J.E. Lapointe, Beaumont's newest school completed in the spring of 1978, adjoins the new village complex. This unique physical structure exists today due to the efforts of Beaumont's council and recreation board and successful negotiations with the county school board. A proposed village-county agreement will allow the community to benefit from the use of the school library (Beaumont provided \$50,000 to expand the original size of the

library for public use in off-school hours) and the school to benefit from use of the center's facilities.

Business in Beaumont has realized a resurgence in the 70's. The old egg co-op on Rue Lavigne was renovated for use as a popcorn factory in the early 1970's. Today* the building is used for the manufacture of J-Stone, a synthetic decorative fieldstone.

The Magnan Red and White store west of the church was reopened as a café in 1974. Since then it has had several owners. Renovated and renamed Chateau on the Hill in 1977, it presently* serves as Beaumont's only restaurant.

In 1976, Mr. Fred Haidner purchased the property previously occupied by Fraser's grocery store on the corner of 50 Street and 50 Avenue. He subsequently built a commercial and residential complex on the site.

Today, the Beaumont Caisse Populaire, Beaumont Mini-Mart and Beaumont Pharmacy operate in the complex.

A second commercial complex was built on 50 Avenue on property previously owned by Mrs. Eugenie Goudreau. The Beaumont Marshall Wells, Guy's Recreation Center and Brinkman's Hair Boutique are located in this commercial and residential complex.

Recently, Gobeil's Garage, a family-owned business since 1933 has been renovated into a self-serve station.

In 1976, the Beaumont village office was opened for use as an administrative center for municipal government. Village staff presently includes secretary-treasurer Isabelle Royer, secretary Connie McKinney, village foreman Henri Magnan and recreation complex manager Terry Vaughan.

And so we come to May 31, 1978. The transition from a small settlement of pioneering farmers grouping themselves around the church's spiritual and social leadership, to a growing cosmopolitan village, offering residents a unique opportunity for community involvement and participation – all in 80 short years.

Many of the early, original families such as the Bérubés, Goudreaus, Lavignes, Magnans, LeBlancs, Royers, Maltais and Gobeils to name but a few have members represented in the village population today.

Beaumont's people have always been fighters. If they wanted something, be it a church or control of their own political destiny, they went out to get it. They never waited for others to make the first move – Beaumont took care of its own.

It is essential that this independence and vital participation continue if the village is to remain a separate, unique entity. The founding French families provide the village with a link to the past, as sense of history and a dedication to the community spirit.

It is up to the village as a whole to communicate this essence of "esprit de corps" to those new residents expected to arrive in such large numbers soon.

The past four articles on the History of Beaumont have barely scratched the surface of our village's past. There are innumerable stories to be told, facts to be compiled and people to be interviewed. This experience has provided me personally with the opportunity to meet and talk with some marvellous people both in and out of Beaumont. Many assisted me by providing translations, photographs and stories of Beaumont life. The task of compiling information would have been almost impossible, and not nearly as enjoyable, without them.

Barbara Willis