

NEWS FLASHES

Tories trim human rights body – again

HUMAN RIGHTS

Apparently, Tory cuts to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) have made it so lean and mean that the agency says it no longer needs five case officers whose contracts expire at the end of the month. Yeah, right.

After taking it on the chin from the provincial ombud last year for its massive backlog in cases, the OHRC claims it has its act together and no longer requires the five investigators. The cut leaves the OHRC with 42 case workers.

According to OHRC executive director Remy Beauregard, the number of cases dropped to 2,200 from 2,800 last year, and is expected to continue to decline.

Critics, however, say the declining complaint numbers may have more to do with the fact that the OHRC has been cut so deep, and people aren't bothering to file complaints any more.

The most recent cuts, says NDP MPP Rosario Marchese, "will put the quality of work at the OHRC in jeopardy."

SCOTT ANDERSON

Scientology spin and the missing PR flack

COMMUNITY

The Church of Scientology is not exactly used to syrupy press coverage. Too many weird scenes inside that gold mine, if you believe the tales of ex-members.

But this week the church got some favourable spin on the front page of the *Town Crier* for its cleanup efforts in the Yonge and Isabella neighbourhood where there've been two recent shootings at nightclubs.

The *Crier's* acting editor, Ken Shuler, says he knows something about the church's controversial past. "Yeah, I was kinda wondering about that," he says.

But he was "hard up" for a front-page story when it came walking right in the front door in the form of Scientologist Tim Bewcyk.

The front-page colour photo of shiny, happy, garbage-bag-toting Scientologists also came compliments of the church.

"It's kind of a strange coincidence," Shuler says.

Meanwhile, in other Scientology news, church spokesperson Al Buttner, it seems, won't be fielding media calls for a while.

Depending on who you talk to in the church, Buttner is either

on vacation, on a special project, or on sabbatical. For the uninitiated, that's Scientology-speak for spiritual rehab.

ENZO DI MATTEO

Satellite snaps dire photo of Canuck wilds

ENVIRONMENT

Time is running out fast for Canada's forests.

According to new satellite photo data compiled by Global Forest Watch Canada, a partner of the Washington, DC-based World Resources Institute, Canada's remaining boreal forests, which currently support the world's largest network of lakes and wetlands, is seeing serious incursions in the form of road-building, mining, hydro and logging developments.

Global Forest says only 5 per cent of Canada's forested watersheds remain undeveloped.

Companies breaking forestry laws, meanwhile, are being given the light touch. The Vancouver library, for example, collected \$1.2 million more in library fines last year

than the BC government levied for violations of the Forest Practices Code.

Global's Peter Lee says the grim snapshot is a wakeup call. Interestingly, Ikea, the home furnishings giant, is one of several companies that helped finance Global's data collection.

"Is it cynical? It's a market-based decision," says Lee. "Companies taking the lead are going to capture the green market."

EDM

Gap's embarrassing cowhide controversy

BUSINESS

Odds are, Pretenders front-woman Chrissie Hynde won't be appearing in one of the Gap's commercials after very publicly calling for an investigation into the sources of the Gap's bovine line of leather, along with the T.O. chapter of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Is the Gap doing a little pretending itself?

Although the chain distanced itself from leather suppliers when the controversy broke, it isn't now denying outright charges that it's doing business with apparel makers who get their leather in India, where cows are supposedly sacred and protected by law.

"The factories must follow applicable laws and industry-best practices," says the Gap's Kelley Leonard. "And that includes the humane treatment of animals."

ARLENE CLEMENT



Chrissie Hynde finds a Gap in leather rules

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