



PORTRAITS OF THE OTTAWA VALLEY SEED GROWERS

ROLLING DOWN THE ROAD TO MILTON

By [Tom Van Dusen](#)

If it's an Echo Tours coach out of Smiths Falls rolling down the 401 with a Micky Gilley concert showing on the video system, then it has to be an Ottawa Valley Seed Growers Association road trip.

That's exactly what it was June 9-10, 2007, as the Seed Growers headed to Milton by way of St. Jacob's for the 28th anniversary induction into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame. One of their own was getting the nod, the late Barclay Dick, a legendary Renfrew County pedigreed seed developer whose good work is being carried on by son Bob, vice-president of the association. Bob and wife Pat were riding the bus full of supporters.

The Seed Growers had covered the sponsorship fees for Barclay as they have for several other agricultural greats who entered the Hall of Fame before him. Members are of one mind about the value of the hall in recognizing agricultural and rural accomplishments and feel it should be sustained and supported.

Why go to Milton by way of St. Jacob's? Well, when you're coming from Eastern Ontario, it's hard to go west beyond Metro, jam in a lengthy event and come back, all in one day. Why not acquire a little local culture at the St. Jacob's Market while in the neighbourhood? Actually, those of us on board didn't really collect any culture there. That came later. We did pick up



various food items and some other odds and ends to take home and I made the same mistake I make at rural fairs: I got seduced by the mini donut concession.

We stayed - very comfortably, I might note - at the Best Western St. Jacobs Country Inn which is close to the market and right beside St. Jacob's Country Playhouse. Renovated into a community theatre from a former winery and cidery, we could have walked to

the playhouse in 30 seconds. However, nothing was playing at the time. Not to worry! We loaded up and headed north to the Drayton Festival Theatre for a performance of “Jasper Station”... but not before stopping for a big feed – I mean a stomach stretching feed – at a Mennonite buffet restaurant, one of many businesses in the area a visitor soon ascertains is owned by some branch of the Martin family.

Can you get any more Canadian than “Jasper Station”, a musical comedy with dialogue and lyrics by national treasure Norm Foster in collaboration with Steve Thomas? It’s written by a playwright who lives in Ancaster, acted by talented Canadians, and set in a train station in Western Canada. All that Canadian content is certainly refreshing. I had a coffee in a Tim’s with Foster one time and I can tell you, he knows his market. I’m a huge fan of professional small-town theatre and sit on the board of directors of Upper Canada Playhouse in Morrisburg. And my brother Mike, a Russell lawyer, and Alex Mustakas, artistic director of Drayton Entertainment, are married to Hadley sisters from Stirling, making them brothers-in-law. All of that almost sounds like the makings of a Norm Foster play!

“Jasper Station” was fantastic entertainment, deserving the standing ovation it received from a capacity crowd. The players were excellent – all could carry a tune as well as act – and the set would be the envy of any much larger venue. The fact the theatre has been deftly set inside the old Drayton town hall made the experience even more stimulating.

Alex doesn’t just operate the one theatre in Drayton. He oversees a network of six so-called summer theatres including the Playhouse and the Schoolhouse Theatre in St. Jacob’s, King’s Wharf Theatre in Penetanguishene, and the Huron County Playhouse and Playhouse II in Grand Bend. I say “so-called” summer theatre because many such operations continue to extend their seasons as what they have to offer gains popularity. In the case of Drayton Entertainment, 22 productions will run across the six venues over a full year. I don’t have the numbers... but can you imagine the economic spinoffs from these thriving theatres.

After being thoroughly entertained in Drayton, it was off Sunday to a more solemn event in Milton... the Agricultural Hall of Fame induction.

There’s another treasure... the Hall of Fame gallery in the administration building at Country Heritage Park, all low lighting focused on original sketches of some of Ontario’s most prominent agricultural and rural leaders.





Many of them first-time visitors, the bus crowd walked through the gallery reverentially, picking out more than a dozen Eastern Ontario inductees hanging on the walls.

A little later, the 2007 induction ceremony came off masterfully... almost as if Norm Foster had written it and Alex Mustakas had directed.

Then it was back to the bus and the long road home, basking in our memories and in Mickey Gilly.



Stephanie English represented her grandfather, Peter Barclay Dick, at the Induction ceremony. Shown with her are John Benham, Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame president (left) and OAHoF Director Robert Aumell

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[Return to Portrait Gallery](#)

[Home](#)