

Small town living

by BRIAN LOCKHART

I live in a small town, where not much happens at all.

However, I like the town. The people are friendly and I know many of the local yokels, which after 18 years, I am now one.

I like the slow pace and the fact that usually the people who work at the local Tim's know my order without me even having to ask. That goes for a few places in town.

There can be some drawbacks to life in a place with limited services.

While driving back from a hockey event on the weekend, the rear tire on my truck blew out. And I mean 'blew' out. Shredded rubber and steel belt everywhere.

My auto service provider, who sold me that tire, is sending it back to the good people at Goodyear to take rare advantage of their five-year, 100,000 km, warranty as my tire wasn't even half-way through its predicted lifespan.

'Never seen anything like that,' she said.

Of course I needed a new tire and they don't keep them in stock. A set was ordered and due to arrive at 8:00 a.m. the next day. Of course it didn't arrive - it was that kind of weekend - so they had to reorder for the next day.

It was now apparent I was going to be without a vehicle for a couple of days.

I had several interviews scheduled and a needed to be in the office so I decided to rent a car.

First off I called a local place which I had dealt with before. I get the feeling the owner is past his prime business days.

'Hello, I'd like to rent a car.'

'Okay, what kind of car do you need?'

'It doesn't matter. A compact or mid-size will do. Whatever you have.'

'Well, we don't have any cars. They're all rented. All we have are vans - I have a Dodge Journey.'

'Okay, I'll take it.'

'But it's a van. You said you wanted a car. We only have vans. We don't have any cars.'

'It doesn't matter. I just need transportation.'

'Well, this is strange because we don't have any cars. Why would you need a van? You said you wanted a car and all we have are vans.'

After a couple of exasperating minutes of trying to convince him I wanted to give him some business, I thanked him for his time.

I called another place in the same town. It is a well-known car rental company.

?Hello, I need to rent a car.?

?Do you have an appointment??

?An appointment? To rent a car? No, I don't have an appointment.?

?We don't staff that location. You have to make an appointment and someone will drive up from Mississauga to meet you. It will take a couple of days.?

Another no-sale. In a couple of days the battle would be over and I'd already have my car back.

So, I tried a third place. Again it was a well-known brand but in a town farther away.

This time I couldn't even speak to anyone. I just got a message saying ?thanks for calling, but there is no one in the office to take your call.?

That's the downside of small-town life.

On the good side is what happened while I was broken down at the side of the road in front of the Hockley General Store.

For some reason, that store is always a meeting spot for motorcyclists and apparently a lot of other people. And it's currently not even open.

One fellow who lived down the road saw I was trying to change a tire and came over to offer the use of his air pump.

Unfortunately, thanks to an engineering design failure that leaves the spare tire under the car exposed to the elements and road salt, after 10 years, it was useless.

Another older couple on their way back from an apple-picking trip stopped for some reason and came over to say hello. They let me use their cell phone to call CAA, then gave me a few apples to munch on ? just because they were nice people.

I had several conversations with total strangers who had stopped at the store over the hour and a-half that I waited for the tow truck. We talked about everything from the weather to the impending federal election.

Yup, there's drawbacks to living in a small town, but the advantages outweigh the disappointments every time.