

## A picture of mittens is worth a thousand words

### **COLUMN: Nine council members standing side by side -or is there more to this story?**

**Posted 1 hour ago**

A photo opportunity to promote the Olympic torch coming through Niagara Falls might be the closest thing city council comes to as a "family portrait."

Mayor Ted Salci and all eight councillors took a break between committee meetings Monday to pose for a group photo, holding a banner for the Dec. 20 event and sporting those red Olympic mittens that are the "must-have" accessory for Canadian fans of the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver.

You could search the picture for hidden meanings the way Kremlinologists in the 1970s and 1980s scanned May Day photos of the Soviet Union's Politburo for hints of who was in the General Secretary's good books and who was on the outs.

Mayor Ted Salci, the head of council, wasn't front and centre in the picture, the way a hockey team's goalie is usually at the heart of a team photo, surrounded by the rest of his or her teammates. When you look at the photo, the mayor is a little right of centre. Exactly where you'd expect a good Conservative to be in this economic climate.

Fortunately for the mayor, the red mittens match the ribbon on his chain of office. Since it was an Olympic-themed photo, it's lucky he wasn't forced to choose between the mittens and the ubiquitous chain.

Salci has both hands on the banner that councillors held about waist-high for the picture.

CouncillorCarolynn Ioannoni, sporting a red blazer co-ordinated nicely with her red mittens, was the only councillor to grip the banner with both hands.

Standing on the mayor's right, it's almost like Ioannoni and Salci are poised for a tug-of-war. A sign of things to come in next year's election, maybe?

You'll notice Wayne Thomson wasn't wearing his city-issued mittens. Maybe he didn't want to risk covering up his cufflinks in the photo. The red mittens have a white maple leaf embroidered on the palms and the Olympic rings with "Vancouver 2010" stitched onto the back of the hand.

They're acrylic, made in China and sold at Zellers, which might explain why the fashion-conscious Thomson looked like he was allergic to them.

It should go without saying Thomson would stand at the other end of the lineup from Salci with whom he has had a simmering rivalry since Salci defeated him to take the mayor's job in 2003.

Thomson kept his hands at his side throughout the five-minute photo shoot, as if to say he didn't want anything to do with something Salci's fingerprints are on.

Thomson's most reliable council ally, Shirley Fisher, stood right beside him. She, too, kept her hands at her side. Her hands only go up when Thomson's do. You know ... like the way she votes.

Olympic mittens are \$10 a pair if you go to Zellers to buy them. So, it would have cost taxpayers more than \$100 (\$90 plus \$11.70 in taxes) to outfit nine politicians. This at a time when they've told social agencies and community groups not to expect any increase in the grants they get from city hall in 2010.

---

No more cash for the Project SHARE food bank. But mittens for politicians.

At least, covered with soft wool mittens their hands might feel a softer when they reach into your pockets at tax time.

When they came to power three years ago, this crop of politicians vowed to be the "hands-on council." They wanted to run the show at city hall. This was supposed to be the group that pried the power away from bureaucrats and did what the people want.

But Jim Diodati, Vince Kerrio, Janice Wing, Bart Maves and Vic Pietrangelo each held the Olympic banner gingerly with one hand. A cynic might suggest that's how this council has acted since 2006 -a lot of bluster about grabbing hold with both hands, but really only having one hand on the wheel.

Diodati and Pietrangelo bookend the group photo. If Niagara Falls were the old Soviet Union, they would be the outsiders, symbolically distanced from the central figure. But it's also the best position from which to team up and put the squeeze on the old leader.

Politics is funny. You could read into it a lot about politicians' ambitions based on the way they jockey for position in a group photo. Then again, maybe there's nothing to it and Diodati and Pietrangelo were stuck on the ends of the picture because they arrived late. But that's not as much fun to wildly speculate about. clarocque@nfreview.com

---

Copyright © 2009 Niagara Falls Review