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**TEARING US APART**

*Wounds not healing after wind turbines turned friends into bitter enemies*

By Tom Collins

BRINSTON—Wind turbines tear apart communities and relationships, causing animosity that lingers for years, warn farmers who have lived through the ugly battles.

Don Winslow signed up almost immediately in 2013 when a wind company planned to build five turbines near Peterborough. Three months later, after immense public pressure and hostility, he couldn’t do it anymore.

“It relieved our stress tremendously [to cancel the contract],” the then-70-year-old Winslow told *Farmers Forum* after he cancelled his turbine. “We don’t have to sneak around the neighbours hoping not to run into them. There is always an element of society that is going to go overboard but people I respected were just as upset as the real radicals.”

There are only three wind turbine projects in Eastern Ontario – Brinston (10 turbines), Wolfe Island (86 turbines) and 5 turbines just west of Kingston, but there are more than 1,200 turbines in the province with another 1,500 on the way. The province is expected to announce new projects this month that could include another 98 turbines in Eastern and East-Central Ontario.

Most turbines are in Western Ontario where the stories are shocking.

**They put their pocketbook ahead of the community**

Time doesn’t heal all wounds, said Guelph-area dairy farmer Tim Martin. “There are people here that have absolute hatred for others. I have never seen anything so divisive in our community, ever, in my entire life. You try to say forgive and forget, but a lot of people say ‘We forgive them but we remember.’ They put their pocketbook ahead of our health and above the community’s well-being, and people don’t forget that.”

Martin’s community is unique in that it managed to stop 24 turbines from being constructed. At first, 13 farmers signed up for the project. But as tensions rose, no one else signed up for a wind turbine lease and nine of the 13 who did sign wanted out. The project was cancelled just before Christmas 2014.

Despite the fact there is no daily reminder of what could have been, the animosity is still there. Martin knows of farmers who were friends for years who still don’t talk to each other.

“My in-laws are Dutch and some of them are quite old,” Martin said. “They liken this to the war. They say through the war there were families that helped the [Nazis] and people never looked at them the same. Those people who supported turbines are never going to be looked at the same.”

One farmer who signed on for a wind turbine is now unable to buy any land because none of his neighbours will sell to him, Martin said. “People are selling to other people for less money just so he doesn’t get it.”

… But not everyone blames wind turbines. Some lay the blame on anti-wind protestors for stoking fears and fueling the fighting. Farmers with turbines have signed confidentiality agreements and won’t speak to news media. However, North Gower farmer Ed Schouten signed up for turbines on his dairy farm years ago but the project never went ahead. Although he is a strong supporter, Schouten said he would have to think long and hard about signing up again if the opportunity arose.

“You’ve got to be careful today because people are jealous and they’ll get back at you,” he said. “We have a lot to lose here. They can easily sabotage something on you. There’s all kinds of crazy people out there today.”

Schouten credited anti-wind groups for doing a good job of fear-mongering and, while they are a minority, get people riled up.

The anti-wind protestors “say [turbines] tear up the communities. They’re the people that tore up the communities, not the turbines. They say [wind turbines] pit neighbor against neighbor and all this stuff because they want another reason to get rid of them.”

…

Forty-five-year-old Bruce Albers moved to Shanly, about seven kilometres from Brinson, in 2008. He received a notice about potential turbines two weeks after moving in. It got ugly.

“You can tell just by going to the arena who is on which side just by who they’re hanging out with and who they’re talking to,” said the sheep farmer. “It certainly becomes awkward when you walk into a room and people stop talking or people go somewhere else.”

… “It really divided the community,” he said. “It was very polarizing. There are still people who don’t talk to each other. It’s definitely changed the fabric of the community. With something so large and so physical there to remind you every day of the divide, I don’t see how it ever mends itself.”