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Very Interesting Person

Censor board movie buff

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MISSISSAUGA LIBRARY SYSTEM

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Ken Hartness is considered a pervert by his friends because they know the Mississauga resident is a member of the Ontario Censor Board. They assume he spends a lot of time watching dirty movies.

In actual fact, Hartness says he's seen no more than half a dozen "hard-core" pornographic movies in his more than two years on the board.

And Hartness will be leaving the board, as required, at the end of his third term. "Everybody thinks I'm a pervert," he says.

But contrary to popular opinion, the city man has not seen very many first-run films either, about a dozen. "Mind you, I can almost speak Chinese," he says, thanks to the stream of Kung Fu movies he's screened.

IGNORANCE

The 46-year-old marketing manager of the StenClabl division of Esselte Pendaflex, which has its Canadian head office in Mississauga, spends a lot of his time on behalf of the Censor Board speaking to community groups about its function.

There is a lot of ignorance about what the Censor Board really does, according to Hartness. Up until the time he was appointed, he admits he suffered from the same misapprehensions many other Canadians do.

"My attitude was, 'Who are they to say what I can see?'" recalls Hartness, who was the treasurer of the Ontario Conservative Party for five years before resigning two years ago.

Now when people ask him why the board censors films, Hartness replies by asking if the person knows what's being censored.

"They have no idea of the junk that comes through," he says. "It's graphic.



KEN HARTNESS

It's explicit. It's horrendous. It makes you practically sick to your stomach."

After having seen some of these films, Hartness feels the need to talk about them with his wife Barbara, the co-ordinator of Mississauga's Counter-Act anti-vandalism group.

Screening films can sometimes be a kind of "shock treatment," says Hartness.

He is careful to explain that the Censor Board operates on guidelines which are reviewed every three months and which

are established on the basis of regular public opinion surveys.

"What the people want to see is what we want them to see," he says. "People don't accept the degradation of women and children."

Through the surveys, the board tries to keep a constant monitor on the elusive "community standard" which governs what is seen in public theatres. Standards have changed remarkably in just the past few years. "People don't worry how long a kiss lasts these days," chuckles Hartness. "If the government tried to set specific guidelines about what should be seen, they'd be out of date in six months."

The Censor Board cuts about one in 500 major commercial films. Its main duty is classifying films into family, parental guidance, adult entertainment and restricted categories. Those guidelines are taken seriously by parents, says Hartness. The board gets many more complaints that it is being too lenient in its classifications than that it is being too strict.

If the Ontario Supreme Court ruling quashing the Censor Board's power is upheld by the Canadian high court, Hartness believes the silent majority that supports the board's efforts will voice its opinions. If the sadistic pornography the board cuts is ever shown in neighborhood theatres, Hartness predicts a strong "backlash."

The former co-chairman of the fundraising committee for Burnhamthorpe Community Centre, Hartness is well known in local political circles as campaign manager for people such as Bud Gregory, Chic Murray, Alex Jupp, and Rudy Skjarum. To date, he's never lost an election.

Even after his experience on the Censor Board, Hartness remains a committed "movie buff." He still likes to go to films.