

LOCAL

KEN HEWITT

It was one of the first non-native citizens' groups to come to the fore amid barricades, tire fires and standoffs in early 2006. And the public face of the Caledonia Citizens' Alliance was Ken Hewitt, a financial planner who is also a longtime resident.

But Hewitt hasn't been in the spotlight the past few months, instead focusing on his business and family.

"This year has been a roller-coaster.

There are a lot of lows and some highs," he said.

Facing public criticism was one of the lows. Helping set up a girl's hockey league in town was one of the highs. "When you see the smiles of kids that ... makes you determined to get the community to return to the optimism that was here before all this happened," he said.

Now he's stepping into the limelight by announcing his candidacy for the federal

Liberal nomination in Haldimand-Norfolk.

"I was inspired by what was happening in my own back yard for the last year," he said of the decision.

If he wins what is expected to be a contested battle to run as a Liberal in the riding he'll go head-to-head with incumbent Diane Finley, who has faced stiff criticism in the last year.

He said this past year awoke his long-held desire to run for public office.



MICHAEL LAUGHING

He's eating his dinner while he talks on the phone, a young child crying in the background. It's a long way from the Michael Laughing who earned the nickname "Hollywood" at the reclamation site, where he was front and centre for four long months.

Laughing struck stark poses for cameras during April and May. He stood atop a dump truck across Argyle Street. He threw cheese at a non-native crowd. Then, dressed in a headdress, he shook a white man's hand and the barricades ended.

But he is back in Akwasasne, a Mohawk reserve near Cornwall that straddles the U.S.-Canada and Ontario-Quebec borders.

"I called (my family) every day. But they couldn't get hugs and kisses," he said.

The first thing he did when he got home, besides spending time with the family he often spoke of while in Caledonia, was to cut his lawn. It had turned into a jungle.

"I don't have to worry about if some crazy white person is going to kill me in my sleep here," he said of life after Caledonia, in a phone interview from the U.S. side of Akwasasne.

Laughing's mother was from Six Nations and he still has family on the reserve. He said he only went to Douglas Creek Estates because Clan Mothers told him to.

"It changed me a lot," he said.

While he'd seen racism before, he said he had never heard the racial slurs hurled his way in Caledonia.

"I did a lot of praying to the Creator," he said, adding that it took a lot of effort not to respond to the insults. "The true landlords have woken up. Our fire is not out. It's still strong. I'm not done."

While he's no longer in Caledonia, Laughing said he's still watching it closely but doesn't expect to be at the reclamation site tomorrow.

"I have my own family. I can't keep leaving them."



JOHN AND DON HENNING

The brothers, whose dream was to develop the 40-hectare property on the outskirts of Caledonia, are still living in the area. Intensely private, the two Hennings are reportedly still recovering from the ordeal.

Their spokesperson Tricia Hellingman said their first priority after the province

bought them out was to spend time with their families.

"At the end of it, they were exhausted. This was their big project, that would have lasted years so they have to find something else now," Hellingman said on their behalf.

She said the brothers are looking at

other business opportunities beyond land development but hadn't started anything concrete.

"Both of them are in their mid 40s and both want to find a business opportunity, to remain active and productive," she said. "They appreciate the concern shown by friends and neighbours."



JANIE JAMIESON

It's a year she won't soon forget. The 35-year-old spokesperson for the Confederacy was at the building site the first day of the occupation. She has had 12 turbulent months.

"There's never a dull moment in my life," she said, laughing.

Earlier this month she had an emergency delivery at Brantford General of a baby boy — her third child. She was hoping for a boy.

Last April her 17-year-old stepson, who she'd raised from the age of three, died from the injuries he suffered in a

car crash a year earlier.

"I've had to rethink every aspect of my life. My role as a parent, as a mother — after watching my son die for almost a year and burying him, wondering what was in store for my other children's future," she said.

"How do I teach them to best protect themselves."

When she brought her premature baby home, her seven-year-old son looked at him and said "Our family just got better."

That just about sums it up for Jamieson. "He's exactly what we needed and the

funny thing is we didn't even know we needed him," she said.

The reclamation came, in some ways, at the right point for Jamieson. With all that personal turmoil, she needed a focus. The reclamation was that focus.

"I'm not going to sit back and tell my kids they're victims. I'm a fighter and survivor," she said. "I know there's so much more to do."

She's proud her people have "held their post" for a year.

"As a community we're only getting stronger. That's what I'm thankful for."



HAZEL HILL

The 45-year-old grandmother was seen on television screens across the country on April 20 as a spokesperson for the Six Nations Confederacy.

She was there when police raided the Caledonia subdivision which had been occupied by native protesters for nearly two months.

Hill has been on the front lines ever since, going to negotiations as the eyes and ears for the native people at what

they call the reclamation site.

Hill has been politically active for most of her life but her biggest regret this year was agreeing to take down the barricades that blocked Argyle Street.

"I think our people have shown honour, goodwill, and what have we received? Nothing," she said.

"We've put up with a lot and we dealt in good faith. What has happened?"

"The same thing that happened in Oka

and the promises disappeared ...

"If the barricades were up maybe they would be negotiating more seriously."

The biggest reward she's seen is the pride the community feels.

Hill admits she's had bouts of exhaustion in the past year — times when she just had to get away from it all.

"It's overwhelming but it's positive because I see things for the future that can only be good for me," she said.



McHale: Troublemaker or defender of his beliefs?

The study in the quiet condo north of Toronto is lined with books about religion. There's a set of Jewish encyclopedias along one wall and a set of Catholic encyclopedias along another.

Gary McHale speaks in a tone fit for the pulpit. He is happy for the audience.

The 44-year-old likes to talk, and does so for hours. He wants to tell the world about himself and his beliefs.

McHale has wedged himself between natives and non-natives in the festering sore in Caledonia where Six Nations people have occupied a partially built subdivision for a year.

The natives say in 1784 they were promised 10 kilometres on either side of the Grand River.

McHale came to Caledonia late, in July, but since then he's charted the dispute on his website, he's held public meetings, organized rallies and attempted to put up a Canadian flag steps from the disputed property, only to get arrested.

He says his actions give residents an outlet for their frustration. But police say he's a mischief maker.

He paints the non-natives — including himself — as victims. He doesn't want to talk about land claims,

just the two-tier justice system. The OPP are clearly his main target.

"They're making the victim the criminal and letting the criminals go," he says.

But his supporters — nearly none of whom talk publicly — say he's the only one sticking up for the average person. It's clear he has support.

He's raised \$11,000 in donations from outside of Caledonia, but most of the e-mails and phone calls he gets come from within the town's borders.

"I draw more people than anyone else," he says proudly.

Despite donations, he says he and his wife are on the edge of financial ruin. His income dropped by two-thirds in 2006.

But if God wants him to stop, the money will dry up, he says.

"I leave this in God's hands. I don't determine the future."

The youngest of six boys, McHale's mother was killed in a car crash when he was 10. His childhood was turbulent after that because his dad wasn't around.

"I grew up in a home where there were no rules," McHale said. Living with no rules took its toll.

The boys got into mischief and McHale earned a police record for shoplifting a rifle scope. Some of his brothers got into drugs.

On Christmas morning, a 13-year-old McHale packed up and moved to his aunt's. It was his first stand for a life lived by rules.

Rocking his large frame back and forth on an office chair McHale proudly points out that he was accepted by two universities, but he couldn't afford tuition. When he talks about his past he sounds as if it's scripted — he talks about moving for "employment reasons," he talks about work as a "task."

He started a bookkeeping business which now includes web design. At its height, he says he had offices in four cities. His wife worked for him.

He wants to make sure everyone knows the breadth of his success.

He calls his wife of 25 years into the study and asks her to find a copy of a DVD they created, which she does before returning to the kitchen where she's preparing dinner. She usually sits in on interviews, she says later.

In 1992, McHale enrolled but never completed a theology degree at the Central Baptist Seminary.

Religion remains central to his life and to his fight in Caledonia. He says being a Christian means committing to — even willing to die for — morals that run deeper than material belongings: "truth and justice and faith and peace."

That's the fight he has brought to Caledonia.

His detractors point to white supremacist groups who have attended his rallies. But McHale says he has no links to them, doesn't agree with them, but won't tell them to go away.

"They have a right to be there," he says, shrugging, wearing the same striped, green-coloured shirt he's been seen in at nearly every public appearance. "I can't stop them."

But the battle appears to not be just about Caledonia. Because even if he wins there, he's vowing to move the fight to Ipperwash Provincial Park, near Forest, Ont. — the place where the OPP killed an unarmed native.

"I believe I'm changing the system," he said. "I believe the OPP is just one government department that has serious problems ... We have all these two-tier systems set up all over the place."



RON ALBERTSON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR
Gary McHale's allies say he's the only one sticking up for the average joe.