

The Tribune (Welland, ON)			Order/Commande
			122359
Date 11.07.2006	Circ. 17000	Page A4	1 / 2

Area citizen's assembly members

■ THEY'LL BE HELPING DETERMINE HOW YOU VOTE IN FUTURE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Assembly members taking their jobs 'very seriously': Fonthill resident

TRIBUNE STAFF
PELHAM

When it comes to politics, it seems everyone has an opinion.

And Fonthill resident Stephanie Jones has heard a lot of those opinions since being selected to represent the Niagara Centre riding in the Ontario Citizen's Assembly.

"I've heard opinions up the wazoo," she said.

By becoming a member of the Citizen's Assembly, she hopes to use those opinions, balanced against an understanding about electoral processes around the world, and provide the provincial government with recommendations on ways to improve the system in Ontario.

Ultimately, she said changing the electoral system could make a significant difference to the way Ontario's elected officials do their jobs.

"I think it will, if they take our recommendations," she said. "It all depends on how open the government is to taking our advice."

Jones and the members of the Citizen's Assembly will spend two months this fall learning the intricacies of the democratic process in Canada and around the world.

"Basically, it's like taking a university course in electoral processes," she said.

When the training is complete, she said the members of the Citizen's Assembly will be "the most well-educated advisory board of citizens that exists in Ontario."

Jones is an actor who operates a nonprofit theatre company called The Essential Collective.

Her work will take her to London, England, next spring to perform a play called *17.5*.

But recently, her interest in politics has stemmed from her parttime job at Chapters – surrounded by books about political science. Lately she's been reading books by writer and activist Jane Jacobs.

"Really, the only people who buy her books are liberal individuals," Jones said.

"We really need the conservative individuals and the moneymakers to buy her books so that they're thinking more responsibly when it comes to environment or the future or education."

She said one topic Jacobs writes about in her books is the struggles families face raising children in a society where a university education is a must while the cost of that education makes it increasingly unattainable.

"It's really astronomical. It's

\$16,000 a year now," said Jones, whose daughter is attending Wilfrid Laurier University in September.

It doesn't matter how much talent a person has, or how much experience, "when they get out all they care about is the that degree process."

Although a lot of things in society are getting better, somethings are getting worse "and that's one of them," she said.

"I really think that education needs to be more practical than academic."

Jones said the people involved in the Citizen's Assembly are taking the job very seriously.

She got that impression after attending a recent meeting.

"Everyone was dressed up," she said.

"Not over the top, but they were all dressed very well. Everyone in that room cared and was excited by this."

She called the meeting "very Canadian," referring to "how polite everyone was."

She recalled one man who was asking "completely irrelevant questions."

Instead of asking that man to sit down and be quiet, she said he was invited to discuss his concerns with the organizers following the meeting.

"They were so polite," she said.





STAFF PHOTO J.T. LEWIS

Fonthill's Stephanie Jones is the Niagara Centre rep for Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform.