

LTE - Brockville

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Attachments: Letter to the Editor - Brockville Recorder and Times.docx (15.62 kB)

Hi all,

We wrote the attached letter to the editor at Atel's request, in response to the story below my signature. Let us know if you have any comments on the content or approach. Thanks.

Colin

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Issue: Local Business Blames Hydro, Taxes, Red Tape for Closure

♣ An Athens storeowner is blaming the cost of hydro, taxes, and red tape for the closure of Swan's Variety, a 47-year-old family-run business.

♣ The store has survived a major fire, recessions and the snakes-and-ladders economic challenges of running a business in rural Ontario. However, owner and Athens resident Karen Swan says crushing hydro-rate increases, high taxes and government regulations have proved just too much for her store. The business will close today.

♣ Swan blames the province's unwillingness to crack down on illegal cigarettes, high hydro costs and government red tape for the decline of businesses in rural Ontario.

♣ Swan says her store's hydro bill last month was \$7,000 because of delivery and other surcharges. While it was an anomaly, her hydro bills still average \$2,000 to \$3,000 or more a month. "They kill you; they kill the little guy," she said of the hydro rates, which cost a quarter of that only a few years ago.

♣ In addition to the hydro bill, Swan says her property taxes are close to \$4,000 a year. She also pays Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance premiums of around \$1,000 a month for her two full-time and one part-time employees. She also blames government regulations and harassment by the "tobacco police," who enforce provincial cigarette laws.

♣ Swan said it is impossible for her to compete with \$20-a-carton First Nations' cigarettes when she has to sell her legal cartons for \$100. Swan says she makes only 20 or 30 cents a package profit. "At 20 cents, I have to sell a lot of cigarettes to pay my hydro," she said.

♣ Swan said she cannot make ends meet and is losing money every month, so she has no choice but to shut down. "I poured everything I had into this place. It wore me down, it wore me out. I'm so sad," she said.

Newspapers: "The forced death of a rural business," The Brockville Recorder & Times,
Wayne Lowrie, A1