

On the Road

FEBRUARY 2026 NO. 92

A STOUFFVILLE MAGAZINE

Stouffville's History Hunter

Fred Robbins digs into old records and lost stories, bringing our community's past back to life

 Stouffville

Daniel's Home Run

Stouffville's connection to viral SickKids' World Series commercial

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From the Editor

Welcome to the first edition of *On the Road* for 2026.

Late last year, Stouffville High School was hit with the sad news of the passing of popular music teacher Diane Marlatt. OTR's Hayley Langdale sat down with Diane's family and former students to discuss her lasting legacy. Read about it on page 6.

I sit down with Stouffville historian Fred Robbins to chat about the old days. And trust me, there's lots to discover! It's on page 12.

The Blue Jays may have lost game 7, but there is a Stouffville-related positive that came from that. Read about it on the opposite page.

Enjoy!

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Stouffville

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SickKids Ambassador Went Hollywood for Freddie Freeman Commercial

Stouffville's Daniel Henry, 13, sings hospital's praises after rare congenital condition detected

by Jim Mason



Daniel Henry is pretty much your average teen residing in suburban Stouffville.

The grade eight student at Wendat Village Public School comes at you with a big smile and an extremely quick wit.

The 13-year-old likes his dog, when he's not playing *Call of Duty* or rep basketball and dreaming of earning a scholarship to shoot hoops.

Naturally, he's a large fan of Canadian NBA superstar Shai Gilgeous-Alexander.

But Daniel himself was thrust into the spotlight late last year, thanks to a TV commercial that went viral for all the right reasons.

The spot, for the The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) Foundation, featured Los Angeles Dodger Freddie Freeman getting dissed by three 'patients' and a staffer at the renowned Toronto hospital. Those World Series wounds heal slowly for Blue Jays fans.

It was the latest in a popular series of SickKids holiday commercials made by Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds.

The actors are not paid professionals. The children are ambassadors for SickKids, former patients who know the value of the hospital.

During the 2024 Victoria Day

weekend, Daniel developed a visible lump on the side of his neck. He was looking forward to celebrating a birthday the following week – not going through a battery of medical procedures.

His parents brought him to the emergency department at SickKids, where he underwent several diagnostic tests, including an ultrasound, MRI and CT scan.

As the mass grew, Daniel was advised to pause all physical activity, including basketball and outdoor recess at school, due to its proximity to his airway. He stayed home from school on some days.

Daniel was later referred to a SickKids otolaryngologist, who diagnosed him with a rare third branchial cleft cyst, a congenital condition that can be difficult to detect. Surgery to remove the cyst took place on July 5, 2024.

The procedure was successful, the cyst was confirmed to be benign, and Daniel recovered quickly, with follow-up visits showing strong healing and no complications.

His family became instant fans of SickKids.

"Oh for sure," said Daniel's mom, Camille Henry. "They are experts on kids. Nothing against any of our other

hospitals. But we were told by family and friends that it was the place we should be, and it worked out. It was great. I feel like if we didn't go there, we would have taken a lot longer to get all the diagnostics done, right? And to find a team who could figure it out because it is super rare and super weird."

The Henrys were so appreciative they signed Daniel up for the hospital's ambassador program.

His first gig? Fly to Hollywood for three days last fall, including a one-day marathon session to shoot the commercial.

"Freddie Freeman was incredible," Camille told OTR. "Such a great human. He came there in between training and



picking his kids up from the school. We finished his part pretty quickly, and he could have said, 'guys, I gotta go', but he stayed. He talked to all the kids. He signed all the collectible cards Daniel had and a ball. It was really, really wonderful."

There's been some recognition locally. At school, kids have called him "commercial boy" and "famous dude." Daniel read the starting lineup in the home team dressing room before a Stouffville Spirit Jr. A hockey game before Christmas.

He plans to continue being an ambassador for the hospital, possibly hosting a charity basketball tournament. And returning to SickKids for annual checkups. 🏏

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SICKKIDS FOUNDATION

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

AN UPDATE BY GLENN JACKSON



Open House marks milestone

The Downtown Revitalization project has been moving ahead smoothly, with January's third Open House marking a large milestone.

Accardi Engineering and the Town have been refining the detailed design, making sure community feedback is reflected. The team has also been exploring new streetscape ideas, reviewing pedestrian crossings and signal needs, updating streetlighting details, and responding to early design comments from Metrolinx.

Public feedback has shown that many want Main St. to feel more inviting - more trees, clearer signs, better lighting, places to sit, and small touches like planters and bike racks. They're also looking for spots to gather, like pop-up plazas, murals, outdoor dining, and public art, to bring more life and personality downtown. And on the practical side, people want easier transit access, smarter parking and drop-off areas, wider sidewalks, safer crossings, and clearer wayfinding so downtown becomes a true destination.

Accardi and the Town shared a range of design concepts with more than 75 attendees at the January 29 Open House, all aimed at improving safety, traffic flow, and the overall feel of Main St.

The concepts included adding traffic signals at Edward St. and Main St., along with creating restricted access from Blake



ABOVE: A concept drawing of Main St. looking east from O'Brien Ave. A new meeting lounge area is suggested on the north side by the Stouffville Creek, as well bump-outs and a new crosswalk.

St. to Main St., effectively making Blake St. one-way south. The existing crosswalk at Freel Ln. would stay in place.

They also proposed new public art features to help create a stronger sense of place. Gateway art pieces would be added at Blake St. and Park Dr., with additional installations planned for Freel Ln., Stouffville Creek, Mill/Market Sts., Church St., and Park Dr.

To support stormwater management and introduce more greenery, the design includes several bump-outs that help manage water flow, including on-street water storage, and feature native plantings. These would be located at Blake St., Lloyd St., Freel Ln., O'Brien Ave., 6240 Main Street, and Park Dr. The plan also introduces a new pedestrian crossing and a meeting lounge area at Stouffville Creek.

Other features include bioretention

tree pits with modular paving on both sides of Main St. in front of the Clock Tower, plus modular seating around Church St. and Main St. to create more welcoming places for people to gather.

The complete presentation, and video recording of the Open House, is available at townofws.ca/downtown. Construction is anticipated to begin in the fall of this year. In the meantime, each edition of *On The Road* will include updates on the project's progress.

Get project updates

Follow this project and sign up to receive the eNewsletter at townofws.ca/downtown

Coldest Night of the Year

Join the Stouffville community for a family-friendly winter walk on **February 28**, supporting people experiencing hurt, hunger, and homelessness. All proceeds stay local, helping City Street Outreach, a volunteer-run charity providing food, clothing, and essential support to those in need. Every step and donation makes a difference. Learn more at cnoy.org/stouffville

Fly Me to the Moon Fundraiser

On **March 7**, the **Stained Glass Centre** at Stouffville United Church will host the Fly Me to the Moon Fundraiser Concert in support of Emily's House Children's Hospice. Enjoy an evening of music while helping provide respite, palliative, and end-of-life care for children with complex medical needs, and support for their families.



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THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC

Mrs. Marlatt

by Hayley Langdale

For well over a decade, the musical underscore of Stouffville District Secondary School (SDSS) bore the unmistakable influence of Diane Marlatt: educator, musician, mentor, and the heart of a program woven into the Stouffville community. Between playful squawks of first-time instrument learners, harmonies of seasoned Grade 12s, and contagious laughter drifting through open doors amidst impromptu ABBA dance parties, Diane's presence shaped not just the sound of the school, but its spirit.

Diane, Head of Music at SDSS since 2009, passed away far too soon on September 19, 2025, after a nearly three-year journey with liver cancer. Her loss has been deeply felt across Stouffville and the music education community; by students whose lives she shaped and by colleagues who worked alongside her – one of which is her own husband.

To understand Diane's impact, it's impossible to separate her work from

the partnership that sustained it. For much of her career at SDSS, Diane taught side by side with her partner in life, David Marlatt, a collaboration rooted not only in shared professional goals, but in a lifelong love of music, education, and togetherness.

"Working together honestly felt effortless," David says. "We always joked that we didn't need music department meetings, because all day, every day was one long meeting."

Invisible Strings

Diane and David's story began in the music building at Western University in London, Ontario. Both trumpet players, they met as students as part of a close-knit group of musicians who rehearsed, performed, and spent countless hours together between classes. They lived on the same floor in residence during their first year and serendipitously ended up renting houses right beside each other for the remainder of their university years.

After completing her undergraduate degree and teachers' college at Western, Diane began her career with the Toronto District School Board before moving to York Region District School Board. She taught drama and special education at Markham District High School, later transitioning into music and English. "She always knew she wanted to teach," David recalls. "It wasn't a job for her. It was who she was."

When the opportunity arose for her to apply for a position at the newly built Stouffville District Secondary School, Diane unknowingly took a leap that would shape the final chapters of her life and legacy.

Meant to Be

The timing was perfect. SDSS was expanding, the community was growing, and the retiring head of music left space for fresh ideas. Diane stepped into the role just as the school's refreshed identity on Hoover Park Dr. was taking shape.

"There were exactly enough classes for her to teach full-time that first year," David explains. "By the end of the year, the principal told her the program was growing and they'd be adding another class."

That moment became pivotal. Diane went home wondering aloud at the dinner table about who might be willing to teach just one class. At the time, David was raising their two young children, running a home-based business, and occasionally supply-teaching. The solution became obvious. "I said I'd do it. One class worked perfectly with our family life."

That one class turned into many. Over the next 13 years, David taught anywhere from one to five classes annually. Together, they built a department defined by consistency, collaboration, and care.

Home and school life blurred seamlessly. Concert lineups were drafted at the kitchen table. Lesson plans were revised over summer breaks. They chatted over departmental goals at the cottage. Course changes, productions, banquets, and field trips were discussed long before they appeared on any calendar. "SDSS was a constant topic in our house," David says. "But it never felt like work. It felt like building something together."

Rooted in Her Values

Diane believed deeply that students should be able to do everything – music, sports, academics, extracurriculars, volunteering – without being forced to choose one passion at the expense of another.

Her collaboration with other departments, particularly physical

"She always knew she wanted to teach. It wasn't a job for her. It was who she was."

- DAVID MARLATT



Diane and former student Kendall Lily, local singer-songwriter.

education, reflected that belief. Scheduling conflicts were handled with flexibility and mutual respect, always with the student experience at the centre. "Students learn in different ways and come from different backgrounds," David says. "She acknowledged that and encouraged them to be themselves."

That philosophy shaped the culture of the music program. Leadership extended well beyond the stage. Students organized events, mentored younger peers, and took real ownership of the program's success.

Former SDSS music student Kendall Jones recalls that it wasn't until Diane began facing her serious health challenges that students realized how much she quietly managed behind the scenes. Even then, Diane remained involved, offering guidance, encouragement, and trust.

"She always believed in us," Kendall, now a budding singer/songwriter known professionally as Kendall Lily, says. "Even when we didn't believe in ourselves yet."

Beyond the Rehearsal Hall

Diane's ensembles performed around the area at events like the Markham Fair, Stouffville Santa Claus Parade, Strawberry Festival, and annual scholarship concerts held in partnership with local churches. SDSS music also began hosting collaborative concerts, in partnership with Markham-based music departments, Markville Secondary School and Bur Oak Secondary School. These weren't just recitals; they were bridges between students and communities.

"Playing in the community became really important to us," David remembers. "It helped students see that what they were doing mattered beyond the classroom."

Elementary school outreach nights welcomed prospective younger students into SDSS, led by senior music students gaining early teaching experience. These events built confidence, leadership, and a strong pathway into the high school music program.

Over time, SDSS music became something families planned around, alumni returned for, and residents came to know as part of Stouffville's cultural fabric.

"She taught us that confidence matters more than perfection," Kendall says. "And that's something I give my students right away: permission to try, even if it's messy."

Encouraging Students to Do It All

Under Diane's leadership, the program grew into something far bigger than theory and performance. Students became organizers, mentors, and community builders.

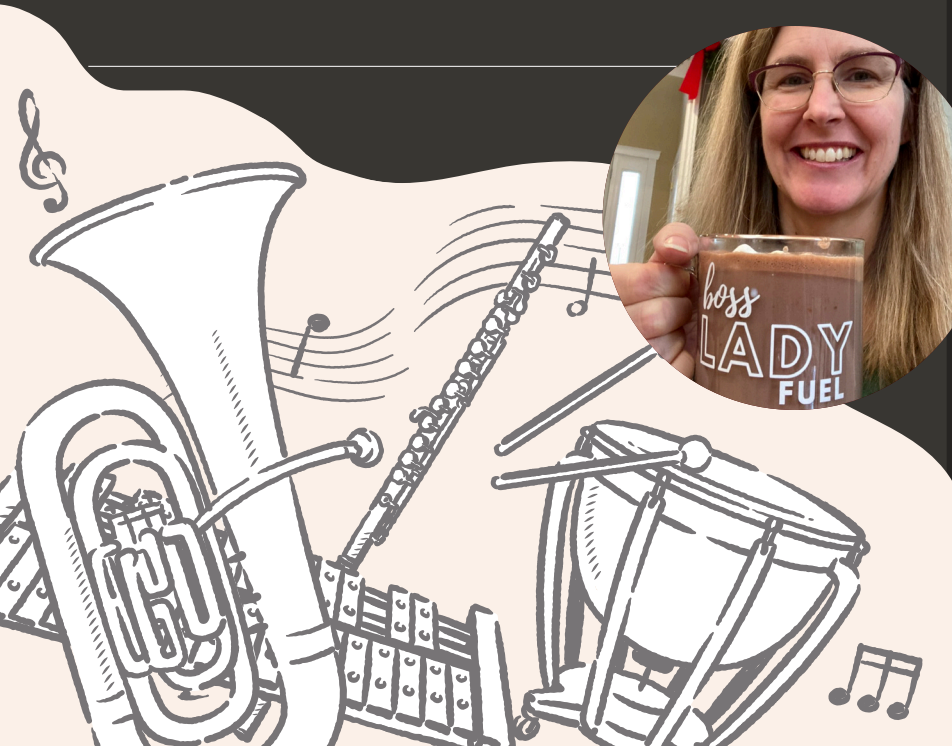
"She trusted us with real responsibility – not just music," Kendall says. "That's something I try to bring into my own teaching."

As a four-year member of Music Council – eventually serving as vice-president and president – Kendall saw firsthand the work behind the performances. "She treated Music Council like a second full-time job," she recalls. "And she still made time for everyone."

From setting up chairs and selling tickets to planning banquets, retreats, and outreach workshops, Diane taught students responsibility, collaboration, and pride in their work.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID MARLATT, KENDALL JONES, AND JIM MASON



“What she taught wasn’t just music. It was how to show up, support each other, and take pride in what you’re doing. That’s the part of her teaching I carry with me every day.”

- KENDALL JONES

What David admired most was Diane’s authenticity. “She was a lifer,” he says. “She taught because she loved it.”

That love showed up in small moments: handwritten notes, a knowing smile after a difficult rehearsal, her signature pause at the end of a piece – hands still raised – giving students time to feel proud before the applause.

Super Trooper

Diane’s diagnosis came unexpectedly, following routine bloodwork. Within weeks, she was preparing for major surgery to remove a significant portion of her liver. The next almost three years were marked by chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and radiation.

Her care at Markham Stouffville Hospital left a lasting impression. Even treatment days became opportunities for connection. Diane built relationships with nurses and staff, chatting easily, forming community wherever she went. “She almost looked forward to treatments,” David recalls. “Just to see people.”

Teaching Through Treatment

When Diane went on leave, David assumed full responsibility for the department while continuing to run his business and support their family.

“It was challenging,” he admits. “But

we planned everything together at home. I executed at school – but the heart of it was still shared.”

Maintaining normalcy for students became the priority. “She worried about them,” he says. “So, I tried to keep things as consistent as possible.”

What stood out most in these uncertain days was how much she did quietly for her students and the music department. Even through illness, Diane remained involved, texting ideas, offering encouragement, and empowering students to step up together. She taught whenever she could, returning part-time and finishing the spring semester in 2025.

Her final *Pops* concert became a bittersweet moment of return and recognition. Typically, a celebration of graduating students, the Spring 2025 Concert took on deeper meaning when Diane invited alumni to perform alongside current students. Kendall and the student-led Music Council coordinated dozens of former students who returned, some travelling into town specifically for the night. The stage and audience swelled with sound, memory, and gratitude. Alumni lingered long after the final note, embracing Diane, sharing stories, and some introducing her to spouses and children.

The following day, Diane arrived at school visibly uplifted, carrying the joy of a community that had gathered to honour her while she could still feel it.

Standing Room Only

After Diane’s passing, well over 500 people gathered to honour her life. The funeral home was filled beyond capacity, with mourners lining the halls and spilling out the doors – a quiet resonance, echoing the scope of her influence. “I had no idea what to expect,” David recalls. “Seeing two guest books filled with names was astounding.”

In the days that followed, it became clear that the impact of Diane’s work



extended far beyond performances or programs, living on instead through the people she had taught and the values she had passed along. As former student Kendall reflected, “What she taught wasn’t just music. It was how to show up, support each other, and take pride in what you’re doing. That’s the part of her teaching I carry with me every day.”

Without a Song or a Dance, What are We?

Diane understood that programs evolve, shaped by each generation of educators, with each teacher adding in some of their own sparkle to their school communities. Already, her lasting radiance is clear. A number of former students have gone on to pursue teaching, particularly music education; the highest compliment a music teacher can receive.

Now studying music and teaching her own students, Kendall hears Diane’s voice echo in her classroom. “I catch myself saying the same things Diane used to say like, ‘play strong and wrong’ without even thinking about it.”

At the annual music banquet, the room once again reflected what Diane had built over her much-loved years at Stouffville District Secondary School. As ABBA’s *Dancing Queen* filled the space, students, alumni, and staff flooded the dance floor together. David stood back, encouraging his “girl with golden hair” to have her moment, becoming encircled by some of her biggest fans. In the same way she had grown Stouffville’s music program and welcomed David into it, Diane took the lead on the dance floor: smiling, laughing, then reaching out and insisting he join her.

Diane’s final lesson to her beloved family, friends, and education community is simple and profound: time is precious. Relationships matter. Music creates bonds that endure long after the room falls silent.

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Stars Hockey Girls ‘Making Memories’ at Quebec Pee-Wee Tournament

Doug Kirton, grandfather of Stars forward Taylor Hagan, won the championship in the first year of the storied international event



by Jim Mason
jim.mason905@gmail.com

Taylor Hagan has heard a lot about the Quebec International Pee-Wee Hockey Tournament.

Her grandfather, Stouffville’s Doug Kirton, played in the first edition of the now storied event in 1960. As a goaltender, he backstopped his Scarborough Lions team to the Grand Championship of the inaugural event.

“He called it a once-in-a-lifetime experience,” Taylor told OTR.

This month, Taylor is writing her own story at the tournament.

She’s a forward on the Markham Stouffville Stars U13 AA team, one of 144 teams selected to play at Quebec. The tournament, which began February 11, wraps up February 22.

The Stars were scheduled to play their first game against a team from the Montreal-area community of Rosemère on February 15.

Taylor, a student at Oscar Peterson Public School in Stouffville, was eagerly anticipating playing in the tournament.

“Playing in the big arenas in front of

all of the fans,” she said was at the top of her list. “I’ve seen videos of the crowds and I’m excited to play in front of all the people.”

And where her grandfather and his teammates traded hats with the opposition, Taylor and the Stars are swapping pins with the members of other teams before games this week as part of a more recent tradition.

Given the extensive screening process and geographical scope of the event, there’s a good chance fans in Quebec City are watching future Professional Women’s Hockey League (PWHL) and national team players this month.

The Stars 12-team grouping includes squads from the Czech Republic and centres across North America. They are the only team from Ontario selected to play in the group.

On the boys’ side, some 1,385 future NHLers have played in the tournament, including Wayne Gretzky, Auston Matthews, Mario Lemieux and Guy Lafleur.

Scott Howes, the head coach of the Markham Stouffville team, played a lot of hockey before turning to coaching ten years ago. But the eight-year professional never got to play in the Quebec tournament.

“I’m hoping they are able to take in as much as possible ... that they take a couple of minutes and just realize what kind of experience they are actually getting,” said Howes, who operates the Around the Net Skill Training Facility in Stouffville. “Listen, we’re here to compete. But I don’t want the players to lose track and not realize how cool of an opportunity this actually is for them and what kind of memories they’re making.”

Stouffville is no stranger to the Quebec International Pee-Wee Hockey Tournament. Boys teams have taken part during the past 40 years, including a squad coached by the late Glenn Whitebread that came home with a championship trophy in 1986. Brandon Pridham, now an Assistant General Manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs, played on that team.

Follow the Markham Stouffville Stars at the tournament via: tournoipee-wee.qc.ca

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SCAN TO PURCHASE

FRED ROBBINS

& the curious pursuit of Stouffville's past

by Glenn Jackson

On The Road's Glenn Jackson sat down with historian Fred Robbins to explore Stouffville's history - and the path that led him to become its most devoted storyteller.



CURRENT DAY PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH AMELIA | ADDITIONAL PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRED ROBBINS | WALKING TOUR PHOTOS PROVIDED BY GLENN JACKSON

I hadn't even poured cream into my coffee - never mind pulled out my list of interview questions - when Stouffville's Fred Robbins, sitting across from me, starts the conversation.

"So, hot off the press," Fred says. "I look up Frederick Cheney, in an 1838 paper - the *Upper Canada Gazette* - he's being sued by three guys!"

I'm thinking, okay... this is different. Whoever Frederick Cheney is. Fred keeps going.

"First guy is Philip Badgerow - old Stouffville name," he says, in his always-effusive way. "Then two names I don't recognize: James Saxon and James Rankin McKnight. Or something like that."

"Anyway," he continues, "the sheriff's selling Cheney's land, which is - get this - Lot 1, Concession 9, an acre and a half on the north side of Main St., and Lot 35, Concession 9 on the south side."

After a quick lesson on what lots and concessions actually mean, Fred gets to the good part.

"The article describes the buildings on Lot 35, Con 9 - three log buildings and an ashery."

He throws his hands up. "I never knew! In 1838!"

So where was this? I ask.

"Right where the clock tower is," he says. "Downtown. The 1826 survey shows seven properties east of Church St., including a lumber mill and other buildings. I didn't know about the others."

"You have that survey?" I ask.

"I tracked it down, buddy," he grins. "I was like a dog chasing an old bone."

DEALING WITH PUZZLES

Anyone who's ever had a conversation with Fred Robbins, arguably one of Stouffville's premier historians, knows you don't really need to ask him questions. He just starts.

His mind is saturated with knowledge of Stouffville and the surrounding area, shaped by countless hours spent in libraries, museums, archives, and even cemeteries.

But today, I want to learn more about his history, not just Whitchurch-Stouffville's.

"When I started studying the history of Stouffville, I started at the Land Registry," Fred says. "I focused



Fred has hosted many historical walking tours in Stouffville, including those for Jane's Walk, Doors Open and the Historical Society.

on the area between the Ninth Line and Tenth Line, along what's now Main St. It listed the properties Abraham Stouffer sold off."

Abraham Stouffer and his wife, Elizabeth Reesor, are credited as the first Europeans to settle in Stouffville. They travelled from Pennsylvania in 1804 and settled near what's now Main St. and Mill St., close to the creek.

Back then, you didn't have to register land unless you planned to sell it. "He owned 200 acres - from Ninth Line to Tenth Line, up to the top end of Edward St.," Fred explains. "In 1806, he bought another 200 acres on the south side of Main St. from John Williams. Then, a while later, he bought another 200 acres to the north. He had a lot of land."

"So, here's my conundrum," Fred says. "We know Stouffer arrived in 1804, but the first real activity we see shows up in the 1826 survey. What happened in Stouffville between 1804 and 1825?"

It's a fair question.

Historians deal with puzzles. And today, Fred is mine.



Fred, the Historian-in-Residence, is available for drop-ins every Tuesday from 10 AM - 4 PM at the Stouffville Library.

HONEYMOONED IN SCUGOG

Born in 1954 and raised in Toronto by English parents, Fred moved to the Stouffville area in the late 1970s.

"My mom met my dad, John, through her father, Fred," he explains. "My grandfather, Fred Mawson, founded the Toronto Light Opera Company in 1942. His son, Howard, was a prominent tenor. They did Gilbert and Sullivan productions - and that tradition still carries on today."

Fred's grandfather came to Canada around 1905 from Yorkshire, England. "He settled with a family in Scugog, ended up in Toronto, got married, and then honeymooned back at the farm in Scugog!"

Coincidentally, Fred's great-grandfather, James, was a tailor in Stouffville around that same time.

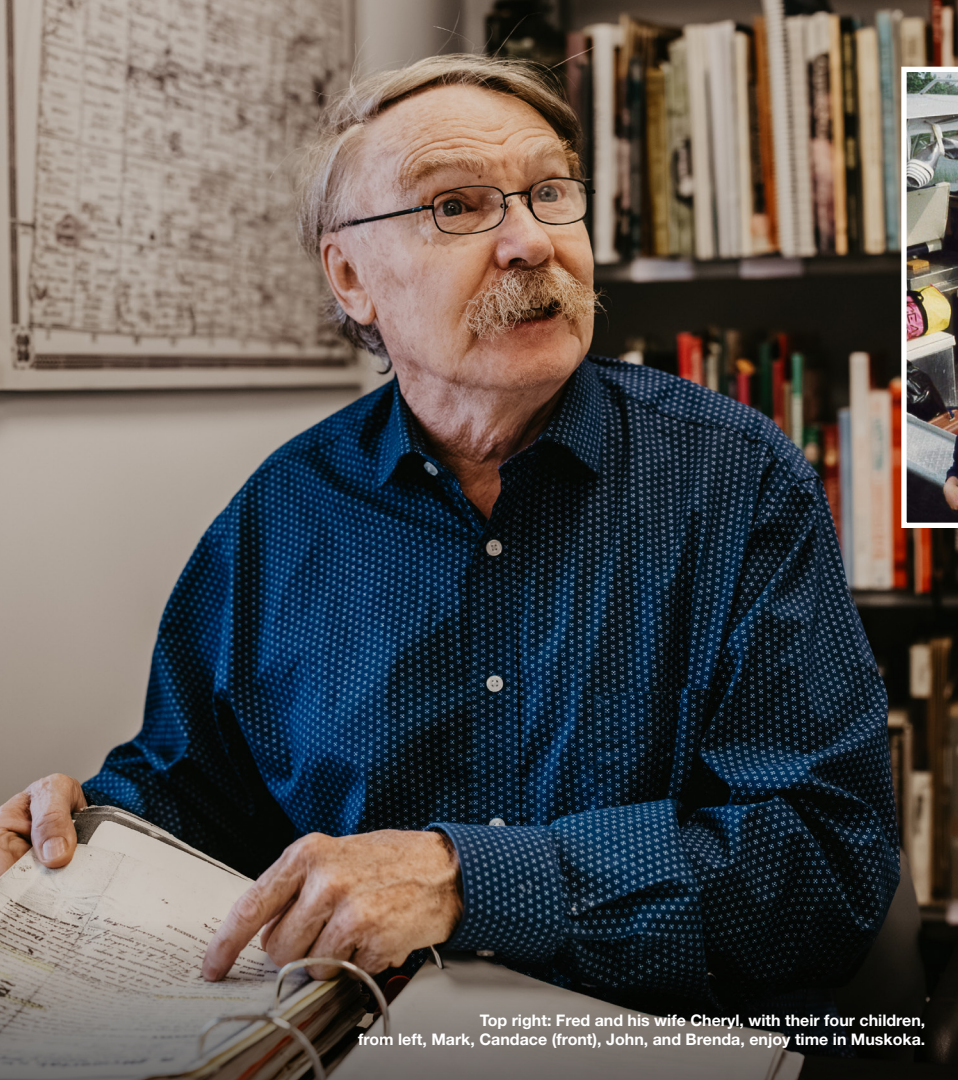
"In my collection, I have a postcard of my grandmother Mabel's three girlfriends standing in front of Frank Gordon's Confectionery - later the Stouffville Bakery - on Main St.. She lived up Church St.."

Fred is one of four siblings: brother Ken and sisters Carolynne and Heather. His father, John, passed away when Fred was 16, though his parents divorced when he was five. "I didn't really know my dad growing up."

The history bug didn't hit Fred early. As a kid, he attended nine different elementary schools in mid-town Toronto.

FRED'S FACTS

The Stouffville Creek, located in downtown Stouffville, has had its location changed at least three times. The most recent in the late 1970s.



Top right: Fred and his wife Cheryl, with their four children, from left, Mark, Candace (front), John, and Brenda, enjoy time in Muskoka.

“We moved a lot - single-parent families, Ontario housing,” Fred explains. “But we spent a lot of time at my dad’s parents’ cottage in Gravenhurst and at Jackson’s Point, even after my parents divorced.”

Fred attended Lawrence Heights Junior High and was going to Bathurst Heights Collegiate when his mother remarried.

“We moved to Oak Ridges after they got married, and I went to school in King City,” Fred says. “I had a part-time job at the library across the street. I loved it when people came in to do projects. That’s when I started to understand research techniques and how to find information.”

Around the same time, Fred discovered another lifelong passion: running.

“In Grade 10, I started running. I’d watch other kids training and think, ‘I can run faster than that.’ That’s where my love of track started.”

Jim Mason’s column in the May 2025 edition of *On The Road* traces Fred’s track career from start to finish line, including

his cherished visit to the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.

That same year, Fred enrolled in the Library Technician program at Seneca College, living near Bayview Ave. and Sheppard Ave.

“I could get to class faster if I ran to Seneca than if I took the bus,” he laughs.

LOOKED AFTER THE CEMETERY

Fred met his future wife, Cheryl, while attending Seneca.

Cheryl was a friend of Fred’s sister Carolynne, and the two had taken a nursing course together at Huron Heights in Newmarket. Cheryl later worked at Newmarket Hospital, now Southlake.

Fred and Cheryl were married on October 6, 1979, at the Missionary Church in Stouffville. Cheryl’s parents were living in Stouffville at the time.

Fred didn’t end up finishing the Library Technician program at Seneca, and he was perfectly fine with that.

“Cheryl and I were married, we’d

moved to 19th and Markham Rd., and I got a job at Century Mill on Stouffville Rd.”

After Century Mill, Fred worked at A&S Construction and completed his carpentry apprenticeship through George Brown College at the top of his class.

From there, the couple moved around a bit - first to Musselman’s Lake, then Rupert Ave., and eventually to their current home on Ninth Line in Stouffville. Together, they have four children: Brenda, Candace, John, and Mark.

It was around this time that the history spark really ignited for Fred.

“Cheryl and I started attending Bloomington Christian Church,” he says. “There’s a plaque above the door that says 1833 - probably still there - and that got me interested in history.”

He began chatting with Jonathan Lemon, who lived down the road. Lemon’s mother looked after the cemetery across from the church.

“Around the same time, my mom and a friend went out to Peterborough for a big church centennial,” he says. “I tagged along for the Sunday afternoon visit, and they handed out a pamphlet listing all the past ministers and everything they’d contributed to the church over 100 years. I remember thinking, this is fantastic.”

“It was an early church too, just like ours. And I thought, why don’t we have something like this for Bloomington? That’s where it all started.”

“I never went to school for history

FRED’S FACTS

An early cemetery has been recently found near Shoppers Drug Mart in east Stouffville just past Harding Gate. It dates from 1820 – 1840, prior to the founding of the Stouffville Cemetery in 1848.



- I’m self-taught,” Fred adds. “I did it the old-fashioned way. You want to learn something? Read a book. Talk to someone.”

It’s that mindset that’s helped make Fred one of Stouffville’s most well-known and trusted historians, respected by fellow researchers and the community alike.

NEARLY FELL OFF HER CHAIR

“As I started my research into Stouffville,” Fred said, “I noticed a pattern in the ledgers. Scribbled in the margins, again and again, were the words ‘as per Gibson survey.’”

So, Fred starts wondering: What survey? Land registries don’t keep surveys - only registered plans. Which means if you want the survey, you have to find the surveyor.

That led him to Speight, van Nostrand & Gibson, a surveying firm still in business today.

“So, I drive down there,” he laughs. “Like I said - I’m a dog chasing a bone.”

He tells the secretary he’s looking for a Gibson survey.

“She asks what year. I say 1826. She nearly fell off her chair.”

She tells him an archivist comes in on Fridays. Fred leaves his contact info. A week later, a letter arrives in the mail - one he still has.

“It was the first survey of the Village of Stouffville, done in 1826!”

The map showed buildings, the creek, Main St., chains and links marking measurements, and the first seven village lots on both sides of Main St.

The dog got his bone.

Fred notes historians rarely get the full picture. Letters are missing. Records are biased. Voices are gone. Like a puzzle with half the pieces lost, you learn to work with uncertainty instead of forcing neat answers.

“That’s what hooked me,” Fred says. “Now it’s an adventure. A puzzle. A detective novel. What can I find next?”

At that point, Fred had the survey, the Bloomington Church research - and the bug.

Now what?

MEETING LONGTIME RESIDENTS

So, he joined the Whitchurch-Stouffville Historical Society in the late 1980s, alongside Ruth Burkholder,

Stephen Sword, Fen Smith, and others. He eventually served on the executive and spent a term as President.

“Ruth founded it,” he says. “But we all took turns.”

In 1991, the society launched historical walking tours. Fred worked closely with Marion Lewis, a former schoolteacher who lived on Sunset Blvd.

“She’d be up until one, two, three in the morning researching,” Fred recalls. “That’s when we first started using computers. Some of her printouts are phenomenal!”

Marion became a mentor - teaching him where to look, what to chase, and how to research properly.

It was about this time Fred was introduced to the Ontario Genealogical Society and got involved in their cemetery transcription project.

“I thought I’d transcribe Bloomington,” he says. “Turns out it was already done - so I started digging into burial timelines instead.”

The puzzle kept growing.

Around the same time, Fred was meeting longtime residents and older families - people like Tom Winters, Ivan Harris, and Wayne Lambert - each one adding another piece.

By the mid-1990s, Fred had joined the Town’s Recreation Board, the Museum Board, and LACAC (Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee), which later became the Heritage Advisory Committee.

“That’s when I learned how preservation really works,” he says. “Planning, Development Services, Committee of Adjustment - it got me going to Council meetings.”

Fred attended heritage conferences on his own and remained on the Heritage Advisory Committee for nearly 20 years.

“I learned about Doors Open at a conference one day,” he says. “I brought it back to Stouffville.”

Today, Doors Open Whitchurch-Stouffville still runs the first Saturday of June. Fred was part of the original organizing committee and later helped launch Jane’s Walk in Stouffville - an idea sparked while attending the Toronto Heritage Awards in 2013.

Fred has led many free walking tours of downtown Stouffville over the years, including those on such topics as drug stores, churches, and barber shops.

One puzzle led to another. And Fred just kept chasing the next piece.

PAID HIS DUES ON THE SPOT

By the early 2000s, Fred’s place in Stouffville’s heritage scene was well cemented. He was widely recognized as an authority on local history and a regular presence at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum in Vandenkerke.

To this day, he still makes routine visits to the museum’s research room, always adding to what he knows.

“As a local resident with a passion for research and storytelling, Fred encourages others to become passionate about the history of our community,” says Krista Rauchenstein, Supervisor and Curator, Museum and Heritage Services, who has known Fred for close to 20 years. “He digs deep to uncover stories long forgotten and, through his research, he keeps those stories alive.”

Not only has Fred’s knowledge been noticed, but so has his unselfish willingness to share it.

“Over the years Fred has always been more than willing to share his research with Museum staff (and vice versa),” Krista says. “There are times when the Museum team needs assistance with a particular project, a walking tour for example, and Fred is always willing to assist.”

“They do a great job,” Fred says. “We’ve got a wonderful working relationship.”

In addition to the Museum, Fred routinely collaborates with the planning department at Town Hall. Trevor Alkema, Stouffville’s heritage planner, taps Fred’s knowledge on a regular basis.

“(Fred and I) have met to discuss (many) ongoing projects, and how we can support one another,” Trevor says.

Trevor says Fred has completed



ABOVE: Three of Fred’s grandmother Mabel’s friends standing in front of Frank Gordon’s Confectionery, later the Stouffville Bakery, on Main St. near Market St. c. 1905.

Heritage Impact Assessments and other research for companies working on properties throughout the Town.

By the late 2010s, Fred's long-standing habit of attending the Toronto Heritage Awards - something he still does every year - paid off in a big way. The President of the York Pioneers, Ontario's oldest historical society, approached him and asked why he wasn't already a member.

Fred paid his dues on the spot.

A few years later, he joined the board. A year after that, he became President.

In 2020, Fred was recommended to the Ontario Heritage Trust by local MPP Paul Calandra as a volunteer.

"It was an honour and a privilege for him to do that," Fred mentions.

Today, Fred sits on the Trust's Board of Directors.

FEELS A REAL KINSHIP

For a historian, Fred occupies a pretty unique space in this town - and that gives him a unique perspective. He wasn't born here. He didn't grow up here. His family isn't from here. His relationship with Stouffville is only 50 years old.

When I mention that there are probably hundreds of longtime residents who know a lot - we just don't know what they know - Fred explains why his kind of research matters.

"That's called lived history," he says. "I didn't live the history here. I have to research everything, which actually makes it harder. But because I'm unbiased, I can uncover things that even old-timers don't know."

"Fred feels a real kinship with the people who lived in Stouffville before him," Krista adds. "He gets to know them through his research and tries to understand who they were."

It's that approach that sets Fred apart.

"He has the links to residents and their existing knowledge that can be hard for a heritage planner to tap into," Trevor notes. "People will share family history with him that you just can't get anywhere else."

And those sources are reliable. Trevor says that when Fred brings something forward, you can trust it.

"Sound research based on solid sources is what we lean on," Trevor explains. "Finding those sources is one of the hardest parts of the job."

"This whole history thing is one giant learning curve," Fred says. "There are so many ways to learn - archaeological records, oral traditions, maps, documents. You need all of it for a proper historical study."

"My instinct is always to go back as far as you can," he adds. "That's the hard stuff. Research from 1990 is easy. But 1840? That's the goal."

And it's in those early years, Fred says, where most of the gaps still exist here in Stouffville.

"After the Gibson survey, pretty much all we have before 1850 is Walton's Directory from the 1830s," he explains. "It lists properties and heads of households by lots and concessions. After 1860, it's assessment roles and school lists that fill in the gaps."

Then he smiles.

"I've got a three-inch binder on Summitview School alone."

INTRINSIC VALUES

Speaking of schools, Fred has long been a regular guest speaker in classrooms across Stouffville, sharing his knowledge with countless students over the years.

"I went to St. Katharine Drexel School last year to talk to a class," Fred says. "I explained that a quick Google search doesn't solve your problems. The first answer isn't always the right answer. You have to ask yourself, does this even make sense? What does it mean?"

Fred says the kids quickly started to realize they can make connections - and through those connections, uncover information they didn't even know was there.

"I once got a thank-you note from a student at Stouffville Christian School," he laughs. "She wrote, 'Fred, you told me more than I need to know!'"

I tell Fred that she might actually be onto something. Do we want to learn our history, or do we need to learn it?

"There's a portion you need to know," he says. "There's a background to everything - a process that brought us here. And if you don't know that process, are you really learning?"

FRED'S FACTS

In the 1820s, one of Abraham Stouffer's grist mills in Stouffville contained a store which housed 2000 gallons of whiskey. A newspaper ad in 1827 looked for a distiller where "liberal wages will be allowed."

So, what's lost if we stop studying history?

"I think it comes down to intrinsic values," Fred says. "A sense of place. A sense of community. If you don't know the history of a building or a neighbourhood, you lose that."

"My kids are seeing it now," he adds. "They'll say, 'My old elementary school is gone. My old high school is gone. It's not my Stouffville anymore.' Those neighbourhoods gave people character and connection - and that matters for mental health. If the buildings are gone, we still need to study and save the memories."

"If we don't tell, and re-tell, those stories," he says, "they can be lost."

ALWAYS DIG DEEPER

And Fred is continuing to do his part. Despite losing Cheryl, his life-long partner, in March of 2022 to cancer, Fred has continued his journey through life educating and inspiring new minds.

He currently has three books on the go, which he hopes to publish over the next few years: one on Stouffville reeves, one on the history of Stouffville fire services, and one marking Stouffville's 150th anniversary in 2027.

And Fred's influence continues to be widespread.

"Fred's tenacity to get to the bottom of a particular subject is something that inspires me," Krista says. "Fred has taught me to always dig deeper."

"He has always encouraged me and my work, and supports the Museum's efforts," she says. "He is a great advocate, a strong supporter, and a great friend."

In many ways, Fred's work reminds us that history is never a finished puzzle. Piece by piece - through careful research, curiosity, and respect for the past - he continues to connect the fragments that deepen our understanding of our town, proving that even the largest historical puzzles can come into focus when placed in the right hands.

I pour the cream into my coffee and take my first sip. Now... where did I put those interview questions? 📄

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All in the Family

*Jaymee MacKenzie Brings
Wealth of Experience,
Strong Pedigree to Main
Street Insurance Agency*



by Bruce Stapley
brucemstapley@gmail.com

When Jaymee MacKenzie assumed the reins of her dad's insurance agency in November, she came in as a well-seasoned chip off a plethora of old blocks.

For Sandy MacKenzie, it was time to call it a day after almost 40 years spent running his agency in Stouffville, operating under the State Farm Insurance banner when he came to Town in 1986, before Desjardins Insurance bought out State Farm's Canadian operations in 2015. "Two years ago, I had just come back from a vacation in Florida when I started to think I had lost the enthusiasm I once had for the business," recalls Sandy. "Jaymee and I had talked about her taking it over before, but it wasn't the right time. This time I thought, 'What a great idea!' Jaymee's got terrific experience in the insurance business, she's really very gifted, and she's worked hard for what she has already accomplished."

The arrangements were finalized and Jaymee MacKenzie Insurance Inc. was founded on November 1st of last year, with Sandy staying on until his retirement at the end of December. The agency continues to offer auto, home, business and life insurance, as well as financial services.

Looking back through the years, it was all but inevitable that Jaymee would end up in the insurance business. Sandy's dad and various uncles on both sides of the family all had careers in the field. Even Sandy's mother studied to earn her insurance credentials so she could be conversant with her husband. Jaymee's husband, Andrew, ran a Desjardins Insurance agency until his

recent retirement, and her sister-in-law has worked in the industry the past four years, and recently joined the MacKenzie team in Stouffville.

"It started through my dad," Jaymee said. "I knew I wanted to be an insurance agent before I went to university. It was a gravitational pull." Sandy remembers his daughter's early interest in his profession. "We never really talked about it back then, but I knew Jaymee wanted to be in insurance," he said.

Jaymee took her dad's advice and acquired a university degree in political science before setting out to earn her Chartered Insurance Professional designation in just under two and a half years. She then went on to complete her Fellowship Chartered Insurance Professional – the highest designation in Canadian Property & Casualty insurance.

With her credentials established, Jaymee's career took off like a shot. She was hired by State Farm in 2007 to work out of their head office, first as an Auto Claims representative and then in Complex Auto Claims before moving into a leadership role. She left to work for another insurance carrier for a few years, leading a claims team before heading up a strategic team in underwriting. "That was a really great experience in helping me grow as a leader," recounts Jaymee. "I got to build the team from the ground up."

She then moved into a second-line leadership role as the Manager of the Ontario Auto Claims department, during which time she also had the opportunity to develop and lead an initiative with a group of aspiring leaders. Shortly after her

husband was diagnosed with Early-Onset Parkinson's Disease in 2022, Jaymee returned to Desjardins to help run his agency.

With all that experience behind her, Jaymee has developed a keen sense of what it takes to be successful as an insurance agent. "Building relationships is really the key to our success, being driven and determined, and knowing the importance of educating our clients. Sometimes people don't know about the product offerings that are available to them, like affordable life insurance, or what coverage such as critical illness is. It's all about customizing and tailoring solutions for individuals and their families to maximize their benefit."

Jaymee credits her dad with helping impress upon her the most important aspects of running the business. "Dad has provided such a great example for me. I know how important his team, his clients, and the community were to him." All members of Sandy's staff continue to work with Jaymee, with the addition of two new recruits. Jaymee has joined the Greater Stouffville Chamber of Commerce and is attending the Downtown Revitalization meetings. "Jaymee is involved," Sandy notes. "She's been telling me things over the past year like 'Dad, I'm doing this, and I've joined that.' I've tried to be generous with my time through the years, but Jaymee will take it to the next level."

Jaymee couldn't be more excited about the position she now finds herself in. "I think about all the time I've wanted this since I was 18. It's 25 years later and the dream has come true."



Jaymee MacKenzie (right) has taken over her father Sandy's Desjardins Insurance Agency in Stouffville after 18 years spent working her way up the ladder in the insurance industry.

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A pet lamb plea may be rejected



by Jim Thomas
thomas-jim@rogers.com

You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. True, for me.

Having grown up on a farm, animals of all shapes and sizes were common. Ours, however, were somewhat restricted, numbering at most only nineteen cows, four horses and several dozen chickens. However, across the road, our neighbour, Fred and Rosie Cole, had large numbers of almost everything, including sheep.

These woolly 'taunties', as we kids called them, weren't ordinary. They were famous, capturing, as grown-ups, multitudes of awards at Toronto's Royal Winter Fair.

Mr. Cole was proud of his flock. He was also protective. So much so, any trespasser who might pose a threat would soon look down the barrel of a 12-gauge shotgun. Unfortunately, our beloved Collie did just that, costing him his life. While provoked by our neighbour's aggressive defence, our dad said nothing. Friendships, back then, were highly regarded.

So, what made Cole's sheep special? The following spring, answered this question. It wasn't the current adults but dozens of loveable lambs. Then and there, I promised myself that someday I'd have a lamb of my own, a self-provided gift that's still on my waiting list. But hopefully, not for long.

Most parents insist that children without pets are not considered a family. And I agree. With the arrival of our first child, we purchased a pup. We later added two more, plus a cat. Unfortunately, the three beagles died under the wheels of non-stop drivers. The cat, luckily, lived out its nine lives.

As Stouffville's population has increased, so have dogs. It's not unusual to see three, even four groups of canines proudly parading up and down our street, travelling to and from Ninth Line North to Rupert Park. For safety's sake, all are properly leashed, and most toilet trained.

What does the future hold for a residential lamb-tent within one Rupert Avenue backyard? Not good. First and foremost, I've been told, a lamb is now considered 'livestock', a type of pet that could be considered unattractive and unwanted by nearby neighbours. Second, it might prompt unfriendly visitors like an occasional fox or coyote. And third, its vocal bleats, day and night, could be disturbing to folks wishing for rest.

Strange as it may seem, chickens are permitted. They, we all know, produce eggs, a vital form of nourishment. A lamb, at least my lamb, would provide nothing except friendship. This is what I wish.

The set-up, as I see it, would include a night-time safe and secure tent partnerships plus day-time frolics, including trips to the local park and noon-hour visits, with the principal's approval, to nearby Glad Park school. Tent-keeping would extend from May through October, with the lamb returned to its original farm home in November. By then, it would have matured into a full-grown sheep.

What is the life expectancy of a newborn lamb? I've been told it's between 10 and 12 years. For many, this time frame is often reduced since they're also a popular table delicacy. However, rest assured, such a fate will never happen. An 'until death do us part' tag will be written into the lease.

So, what does one pet lamb expert say? His advice is both encouraging and discouraging. The positive is that pet lambs can be rewarding companions as they respond well to caregivers. They can be easily trained, but in-house accommodation could be difficult. They sleep between 12 and 16 hours daily. They're gentle and responsive. They fare well on milk, clean water, hay and grass.

The negative? Never raise only one; always raise two or more. The lamb's purchase price may range from \$150 to \$2,000. Without a mother, the offspring may baa all night. Never leave a lamb alone; death's a certainty if not protected.

Whatever the plea, exclusion from a recently upgraded decision has established the fact that a law is a law with change unlikely.

Regardless, I still hope to proceed, despite the fact that a sizeable fine is likely after an inspector pays a visit. Then, I can only hope the acting York Region court judge will have once been a former sheep-farmer. 🐑



Putting Stouffville on the Map

by Cristina Liu, Stouffville Economic Development Officer



Tourism is more than a weekend getaway; it is a powerful engine for economic growth and community vitality. In Stouffville, that truth is shaping bold investments and visionary planning designed to transform the Town into a must-visit destination for travellers from across Ontario and beyond.

Tourism does not happen by chance. It thrives through strategic development, thoughtful infrastructure, engaging experiences, and strong partnerships. Stouffville understands this and is taking decisive steps to ensure its visitor economy flourishes for years to come.

The historic Village of Stouffville is undergoing a major reconstruction that will redefine the downtown core as a vibrant hub for residents and visitors alike (see page 4 for this month's update). According to geofencing data collected from 2024, the Village welcomed 185k tourists who traveled more than 40 km to discover this unique destination, including 11.6k visitors from outside Ontario. These numbers highlight a tremendous opportunity for further tourism development, and the Town is positioning the Village as a cultural community hub. In 2025, the Village

welcomed 13 new businesses that helped shape the flavour and character of the downtown area, adding to its appeal as a destination for dining, shopping, and cultural experiences.

Complementing this transformation are two exciting projects: the Civic Square Expansion, which will add 400 m² of space at 6343 Main St. to host signature events like the Holiday Market, Patio Series and expanded Stouffville Market programming, and the Urban Plaza at 6240 Main St., designed by local talent Riley Rogers. This people-focused space will feature flexible seating, shaded areas, a performance shed, and interactive amenities that support an event-ready gathering space that brings energy and connection to Main St.

Stouffville's commitment to connectivity shines through the Memorial Park Trail Connection, linking Park Dr. to the Stouffville-Rouge Trail network. This project, in partnership with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, will strengthen ties to Rouge National Urban Park, Canada's first national urban park, which welcomed 26k visitors in 2024, boosting cycling tourism and outdoor recreation.

In 2026, the Ballantrae Multi-Sport Complex is scheduled to open its doors, offering a FIFA regulation soccer pitch, multi-use courts, fitness spaces, and amenities for all ages. This state-of-the-art facility will attract multi-day sporting events, driving visitor spending in local restaurants, shops, and accommodations.

Beyond downtown and recreation, Stouffville is also investing in agritourism development. The Town is reassessing zoning policies around on-farm diversified uses to improve processes and explore amendments that support more tourism activities on agricultural properties. In addition, an agritourism toolkit will be developed to help existing farms introduce new visitor experiences and guide future investment, strengthening Stouffville's position as a destination for authentic rural experiences.

These projects are guided by the Stouffville Visitor Plan (2025–2028), launched last year to strengthen tourism through 26 action items focused on agritourism, downtown revitalization, and leveraging the Oak Ridges Moraine's natural beauty. Stouffville is not just planning for the future; it is building it. And with these transformative initiatives, the Town is poised to become a destination where visitors do not just stop by; they discover, stay, and share their experiences. Visit townofws.ca/visitorplan for more information and to view the Visitor Plan. 🌿



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PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY BRUCE'S MILL CONSERVATION PARK

Tap Into Stouffville's *Maple Season*

Bruce's Mill Conservation Park

The Bruce's Mill Maple Syrup Festival, hosted by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), takes place each spring at Bruce's Mill Conservation Park located at 3291 Stouffville Rd. Open weekends from March 7 to April 6, 2026, the festival also runs daily throughout March Break and the Easter long weekend.

Visitors can explore the sugar bush and learn how maple syrup is made through demonstrations highlighting Indigenous, early settler, and modern production methods. The festival also features family-friendly activities, horse-drawn carriage rides, seasonal food options, and opportunities to purchase maple syrup and maple-themed products, making it a popular way to welcome spring.

Willowgrove Farm

Willowgrove Maple Syrup Tours offer a hands-on maple experience that has delighted school groups for more than 50 years and is now open to the public. Taking place on March 14 and 15, 2025 from 10 AM to 3 PM at 11737 McCowan Rd., these small-group tours feature 90-minute programs led by experienced educators.

Visitors are guided through the maple syrup process, from identifying maple trees and tapping with traditional tools to watching sap boil into syrup in the Sugar Shack. The interactive experience includes tasting fresh sap and syrup, sensory learning activities, and a family-friendly puppet show. Following the tour, guests can enjoy a short history lesson and browse the pop-up Market Shop featuring maple syrup, honey, fresh-pressed apple cider, maple treats, and merchandise. 🍷

Bruce's Mill Conservation Park

📍 3291 Stouffville Rd. ➡ trca.ca/brucesmill

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Nationally-Ranked Spirit Preparing for Jr. A Hockey Playoffs

by Jim Mason

The Stouffville Spirit are flirting with having one of the best seasons in the 30-year history of the Jr. A Hockey franchise.

In mid-January, the Spirit was in first place in the 12-team East Conference of the Ontario Junior Hockey League.

They were ranked in the top ten by the Canadian Junior Hockey League since last fall, rising to as high as No. six.

The team added four players before the January 10th trade deadline, including Stouffville's own Kyle Baston who was obtained from the King Rebellion.

The Spirit will honour its graduating players in a pregame ceremony at its final home game of the regular season on February 19th.

The first round of the playoffs will be played between March 6th and 19th. 🍷



Kyle Baston outside Stouffville Arena, home ice of the Stouffville Spirit.

NOTES

Evan Breckles, who played with Baston in the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association, has committed to play at **Concordia University** in Mequon, Wisconsin next season.

Five Spirit players have been **called up to Ontario Hockey League** teams this season.

Three Spirit forwards (Jacob Martineau, Zack Corte and Hudson Armstrong), Head Coach TJ Hill and Equipment Manager Joey O'Callaghan were selected to take part in the **OJHL All-Star Game in Milton on January 18th**.



For updates go to stouffvillespirit.ojhl.ca or @spiritjra on social media.

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Creativity at Work

How a Local Artist Helps People Reclaim Joy, Reduce Stress, and Reframe Their Minds

by Cassandra Papas

When Stouffville's Nancy Falconi bought her first camera to photograph her newborn daughter, she had no training and no plans for a career in art. What began as a way to capture a moment turned into a lifelong passion – one that reshaped her well-being and now helps others do the same.

Today, Nancy is a professional photographer, artist, and creative educator. With over a decade of experience teaching art, her work centres on how creativity reduces stress, enhances thinking, and builds connection, personally and in the workplace.

I spoke with Nancy to explore her journey, how creativity benefits the brain, and why we all need more imagination in our daily lives.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NANCY FALCONI

Cassandra Papas (CP): You started in corporate HR. What led you into art?

Nancy Falconi (NF): It began with motherhood and a camera. But as I got deeper into photography, I noticed how alive and calm it made me feel. In corporate settings, burnout and emotional depletion are common. Art became a refuge, and I realized it could be more than a hobby. It could be a healing practice.

CP: Did your corporate background shape how you now bring creativity to workplaces?

NF: Absolutely. Large organizations often have creative wellness initiatives, but smaller teams don't always know where to start. I offer interactive Lunch & Learns and team challenges that are hybrid-friendly and accessible. Even a short session can noticeably reduce stress.

CP: People often say, "I'm not creative." What do you say to that?

NF: That's one of the biggest myths. You don't need to be an artist to be creative, you just need to start. The idea that you must be good at something stops people before they try. Creativity is about exploration, not perfection.

CP: Like when people say, "I'm not a runner," but they run. It's about doing the act.

NF: Exactly. I tell people to think back to what they loved as a child, that's where joy and curiosity lived, before self-judgment crept in. Creativity doesn't need to be big. It

could be taking pictures with your phone, noticing light and shadow. It's about seeing the world with fresh eyes.

CP: You created a framework around this?

NF: Yes, it's called *Unlocking Creativity: 3 Steps to Inspired Living*. Step One is finding what sparks joy. Step Two is taking small actions to build confidence. Step Three is creating a plan to make creativity part of your life. It works for individuals and in the workplace. It helps people stop waiting for "more time" and start now.

CP: What does this look like in action for teams?

NF: A Lunch & Learn might include a photo prompt, a hands-on art exercise, or a creative challenge. These sessions encourage laughter, risk-taking in a safe setting, and empathy. Art helps people reframe mistakes and reduces fear-based decisions, which is critical in today's work culture.

CP: You mentioned it impacts the brain, too.

NF: Yes. Engaging in creative activities shifts brain patterns toward calm and openness. The amygdala, the part of the brain which processes stress, can relax when we create. No fancy tools needed, you can take a ten-minute break, snap a photo, and engage a calmer part of your brain.

CP: That makes it feel accessible.

NF: It is. I remind people to be kind to themselves. Creativity isn't about mastery, it's about presence. Even the Beatles started small. Creativity builds resilience, releases

emotion, and reminds us of who we are.

CP: For businesses looking to start, what's a good first step?

NF: Start small. Host a Lunch & Learn or short workshop. Give your team space to explore and play. You don't have to overhaul your wellness program overnight. Just invite creativity in. ■



Want to Learn More?

Nancy Falconi offers creative wellness workshops, art classes, and online resources focused on accessibility, compassion, and the belief that creativity is for all. Listen to her free audio recording, *Unlocking Creativity: 3 Steps to Inspired Living*, at [NancyFalconi.ca](https://www.nancyfalconi.ca)

Engaging Stouffville's Youth: *The Work of YAWG*



by Nabeeha Sibghat
townofws.ca/YAWG

Decisions about parks, programs, and public spaces are made daily in the Town of Stouffville, but the people affected by these choices are the youngest members of the community. For many years, youth voices have been discussed or acknowledged in theory but rarely placed at the centre of local decision-making. That is exactly what the Youth Advisory Working Group (YAWG) is aiming to change. YAWG is a platform for youth leadership and meaningful collaboration between the young people of today and the Town of Stouffville. By bringing youth ideas directly to the table, YAWG can prove that young voices are an essential piece of the Town's future.

YAWG is a group of youth from across Stouffville who are passionate about improving the community and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to get involved. The group works closely with the Town of Stouffville staff to plan events and raise awareness of issues that impact its young residents. YAWG aims to connect local government with youth voices and ensure that decisions are made from direct input instead of assumptions about their needs. With members representing a wide range of perspectives and experiences, youth voices are treated like a diverse set of viewpoints instead of a single narrative.

YAWG exists with one main goal. For many young people, the local government can feel distant or inaccessible, and while municipal decisions shape everyday life, youth may feel underrepresented in these conversations. YAWG's work is impactful, with members who meet regularly to discuss youth-related issues and share



ideas on how to address impracticalities faced by their age group. One of the group's key roles is to advise on and help plan programs and initiatives designed for their age group. This includes contributing to recreational planning, offering ideas for events and activities, and helping with shaping resources that reflect what youth need to see in their community. Events like Movie Nights, Trivia Nights, and Youth Seminars are planned and executed through the group to make sure that everyone in the community can participate and belong.

Beyond its influence on the Town's initiatives, YAWG has a powerful effect on the youth involved. For many members, it's their first experience participating in local governance and working with municipal leaders, and through YAWG, youth can gain confidence in expressing their ideas and advocating for change. Teamwork is central to the group's success, and YAWG emphasizes that participants' opinions matter and can create change in their community. The group creates a supportive space where members are encouraged to speak up, listen to each other, and work collaboratively toward common goals.

The benefits of YAWG extend far beyond its members; programs and initiatives for youth, shaped with their input, are more likely to meet real needs, attract participation, and foster a sense of belonging. YAWG helps to ensure that opportunities and events strengthen the relationship between youth and the Town of Stouffville. Most importantly, YAWG helps cultivate a generation of engaged citizens. When youth are invited into civic spaces early, they are more likely to remain involved as adults, helping create a stronger, more connected community over time. With YAWG, we can support youth today while keeping them engaged for tomorrow.

YAWG is open to youth in Stouffville who are interested in leadership, community engagement, and making an actual difference. So, whether someone is passionate about advocacy, event planning, policy, or simply wants their voice heard, YAWG offers a space to get involved. All the information about joining YAWG during the next school year, the application process, and meeting schedules can be found through the Town's website. Youth who are curious but unsure about applying should explore these resources to be more encouraged and learn about the group's work.

Youth voices matter. The Youth Advisory Working Group demonstrates what is possible when young people are trusted, supported, and included in decision-making. As YAWG continues to grow and evolve, it stands as a reminder that meaningful change only truly begins with listening and executing plans that make all members of the community feel involved. ■



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Experiences in 2026

Building on a year of international recognition and strong momentum, the Town of Stouffville is excited to announce the launch of its 2026 Sponsorship Program. With an award-winning events portfolio and a proven track record of meaningful partnerships, this program offers businesses a unique opportunity to connect with the community and make a lasting impact.

The annual sponsorship program features a calendar of free, inclusive events that celebrate Stouffville’s culture and community spirit, attracting more than 150,000 attendees each year. From the award-winning Ribfest and the beloved Holiday Market, to the newest summer tradition, Symphony Under the Stars, these events create memorable experiences that bring people together.

Arts, culture, and heritage are at the heart of Stouffville’s event lineup. 19 on the Park Theatre’s Concert and Patio Series deliver year-round entertainment with live music, comedy, and family performances. Museum and Heritage Programs, including the Antique & Classic Car Show, Doors Open Whitchurch-Stouffville, and Santa Visits the Museum, invite residents to explore the Town’s rich history through engaging, all-ages activities.

The Sponsorship Program supports events that make a real difference. The annual Stouffville Main Street 5K benefiting Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation shows how sponsorships can help strengthen essential services and causes close to home.



Symphony Under the Stars 2025

Why Partner with Us?

Global Recognition

In 2025, Stouffville’s events program earned six Pinnacle Awards from the International Festivals & Events Association (IFEA), a testament to creativity, excellence, and audience engagement.

Unmatched Reach

Our event marketing campaigns had over 234,000 engagements in 2025 and over 6.3 million impressions, giving brands unparalleled visibility and authentic community engagement.

Community Alignment

Sponsorship in Stouffville goes beyond logos; it’s about creating memorable moments and event enhancing experiences for attendees.

Affordable Housing Incentives Available!

Town Council has officially approved the Affordable Housing Community Improvement Plan (CIP), a key step in creating a more inclusive and sustainable Stouffville. The CIP offers a range of financial incentives to support the development of diverse and affordable housing options for residents of all ages, incomes, and abilities.

Beginning early this year, the Town will roll out select incentives, including:

Affordable Rental Grant

Up to \$10,000 to renovate an existing unit (e.g., basement apartment) or \$11,000 for new construction or conversion of affordable multiplexes or Additional Residential Units (ARUs).

Accessible Design Top-Up Rebate

A stackable grant of up to \$3,000 to add accessible or barrier-free features in a new affordable unit.

For full program details and updates, visit townofws.ca/affordablehousing

Now Underway

The Town has launched a comprehensive review of its Town-Wide Zoning By-law and Urban Design Guidelines. Visit the "Talk of the Town" section on page 31 for details on the **March 11, Public Meeting**. Learn more and take the survey at townofws.ca/rezone

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Downtown projects get Council approval

Former gravel pit to be filled in; Police seek surveillance camera funding



by Glenn Jackson
glenn.jackson@townofws.ca

Downtown Stouffville Projects

On December 3, Council approved two major projects to revitalize downtown Stouffville: the expansion of Civic Square and the creation of a new Urban Plaza.

Civic Square at 19 Civic Avenue. will soon offer more green space, interactive water features, improved lighting, and a shaded area for community events. Construction is planned for this spring.

Meanwhile, the new Urban Plaza at 6240 Main St. will transform a parking area into a vibrant gathering place, featuring flexible seating, greenery, and a performance shed for local talent and cultural programming. Parking needs will be met by leasing nearby land.

These projects have a combined budget of \$1.7 million. More information about both projects can be found at cometogetherws.ca

Gravel Pit Filling

On November 19, Stouffville Council authorized the execution of a Site Alteration Permit agreement with Bloomington Soils Inc. for 5783 Bloomington Rd. near the Ninth Line. The project will restore a former aggregate extraction site to its original grades, maximizing agricultural use.

Over seven years, approximately 1.9 million cubic metres of certified fill will be imported, with strict environmental controls in place: groundwater monitoring, mud and dust mitigation, noise barriers, and a public complaint system.

Operations will run on weekdays only, with annual permit renewals and regular reporting to the Town. Council will receive formal quarterly updates during the first year of operation to monitor the effectiveness of the established reporting and control measures.

Upon completion, four acres will be conveyed to the Town for new parkland, improving local amenities and land usability. The Town expects to generate about \$2.5M in revenue from fill fees.



Downtown Stouffville's Civic Square is set for a major refresh, according to a report to Council late last year. The report highlights plans for more green space, interactive water features, upgraded lighting, and a shaded gathering area for community events. Construction is set to begin this spring.

York Regional Police Cameras

York Regional Police (YRP) presented an update to Council on January 21 on the YRP CCTV Community Camera Program, recommending potential installation sites in Stouffville. The program enhances public safety by placing CCTV cameras in strategic areas that support crime prevention, detection, and investigations, integrating with the existing ALPR network.

Based on local crime trends - such as violent incidents, break-ins, and vehicle theft - YRP identified three priority locations: Main & Mostar, Highway 48 & Hoover Park, and Main & Market. Early results from across the region show reduced crime near existing cameras.

YRP has asked the Town to consider purchasing or repurposing cameras costing \$10,000–\$15,000 each. Council has directed staff to review the proposal and report back.

Councillor Upton Report

Council received an Integrity Commissioner's report on December 3 finding that Ward 4 Councillor Rick Upton repeatedly sexually harassed at least two female staff members beginning in 2022. The investigation found he made unwelcome comments about appearance, sexually suggestive remarks, and, at times, unwanted physical contact. The

report concluded that his behaviour was a pattern, and not isolated incidents.

Council approved sanctions including mandatory training, virtual-only staff interactions, reassignment of Deputy Mayor duties, a 90-day pay suspension, and formal apologies. Upton issued a formal apology to Council at the January 21, 2026 meeting. 📰

COUNCIL & PUBLIC PLANNING MEETINGS

Upcoming Council Meeting:
Wednesday, March 11 – 1 PM

Next Public Meeting:
Wednesday, March 11 – 7 PM

Agendas for Council and Public Meetings will be available on townofws.ca/council at 12 PM the Thursday prior to the meeting.

Anyone wishing to provide comments may attend the meeting in-person at the Municipal Offices. Contact clerks@townofws.ca for more information.

Listen live: townofws.ca/cmlivestream
Live posts on X: @ws_townhall
Subscribe to the monthly newsletter: townofws.ca/councilnews

talk of the town

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Official Plan & Zoning By-law Amendments for Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF)

Mar. 11, 7 PM at Town Hall
Learn about proposed changes to the Town's Official Plan and Zoning By-law, including updates to permitted uses, development standards, and parking requirements.

Parking Requirements for Medium and High-Density Developments

Identifying opportunities to reduce minimum parking requirements in medium and high-density developments within the Town's Strategic Growth Areas, such as Main Street.

Expanding Missing Middle Housing

Exploring how varieties of housing types, including multiplexes and low-rise apartments, may be integrated into existing neighborhoods. This will identify which properties may allow up to four residential units.

townofws.ca/rezone

19 ON THE PARK THEATRE

Line Dancing Social

Feb. 26 | 7 - 10:30 PM | \$25 | 19+ event

DuffleBag Theatre Presents: Robin Hood

Mar. 15 | 11:00 AM | Family friendly

Lights! Camera! Action! March Break Camp

Mar. 16 - 20 | 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM
Ages 6 - 12

townofws.ca/19otp

MUSEUM

March Break Camp: Global Getaway

Mar. 16 - 20 | 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM
Ages 6 - 12 | \$310 | Code #38722

Summer Camp at the Museum

Registration now open | New theme each week

townofws.ca/museumcamps

Easter Hoppenings

Mar. 28 | 10 AM - 1 PM | \$15 per child

Birthday Party Packages at the Museum

Bookings now available | Ages 4 - 10

townofws.ca/museum

RECREATION

Summer Camp Registration Is Open

Choose from recreation, swimming, sports, arts, museum, theatre camps and more for a fun-filled summer.

townofws.ca/camps

Summer Adult Hockey League

Registration now open

townofws.ca/hockey



Spring Program Registration

Opens Feb. 24 | 12 PM

townofws.ca/active

BUDGET

2026 Budget Engagement Report now available online

Your input helped shape budget discussions and is reflected in the *What We Heard* summary and final engagement report.

townofws.ca/budget

EVENTS

Stouffville Main Street 5K & Kids 1K Dash

Jun. 21 | 8:30 AM

townofws.ca/5k



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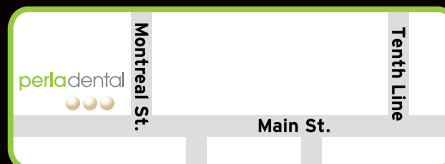
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