

# On the Road

APRIL 2026 NO. 93

A STOUFFVILLE MAGAZINE

## Women of Stouffville Edition

### On the Rise

Kennedy Faulknor shares her journey from Stouffville's soccer fields to Canadian Champion

 Stouffville

#### Jim Thomas' Farewell

After 75 years of writing, Jim signs off with his final column

#### Strawberry Festival

Organizers hope to bring back old-time feel to popular festival

#### Hurricane Relief

Stouffville woman rallies community to aid Jamaica



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## From the Editor

A very happy spring to everyone — it almost felt like it would never arrive.

International Women's Day was celebrated on March 8th, and we're delighted to devote this issue of *On the Road* to the remarkable women of Stouffville. In these pages, Vancouver Rise soccer star and local resident Kennedy Faulknor shares her inspiring journey from injury to championship glory (page 12).

Fellow Stouffville athlete Hannah Catalano takes us along on her path to the Special Olympics (page 18), while Natalie Leung also shares her journey as she reaches for the stars and charts her own path forward (page 22).

And speaking of stars, Jim Thomas shares his final column, bringing to a close an extraordinary 75-year career in Stouffville journalism.

Enjoy.

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY - MARCH 8TH

# Finding My Voice: Man! I Feel Like A Woman!

by Sophia Addorisio



Growing up, the idea of being a girl for the rest of my life was terrifying. I hated the pink, the glitter, the makeup and the ideals surrounding women despite not being able to understand them yet. However, I didn't hate being a girl in itself - I hated the way society treated girls and women as a whole. From a young age, I recognized that as women, our voices are often not seen as equal or as powerful as others. I realized that as long as I wore pink, enjoyed makeup and stereotypical 'girly' things, I would be deemed as 'unworthy' of being heard. The power of an authentic voice is not realized until it is taken away from you. Only then does someone realize why telling your story is important, not only for personal benefit, but for others in the community looking for connections.

When I was 7, a boy my age told me I couldn't play soccer with him and his friends because I liked pink. Imagine the astonishment on a little girl's face when they are told that the thing they loved most would prevent them from

participating in a recess game. I tried to fight it, insisting that I could play good, if not better than them, if they let me play. The group of boys looked at me and my friends, and laughed in our faces. From that day on, me and my friends were determined to get on that soccer field, no matter the consequences. Teal - the direct opposite of pink on the colour wheel - became my new favorite colour from then on. A few weeks later, I confidently marched back up to these boys in my bright blue sweatpants and demanded them to let me play - it didn't work.

Suddenly, owning a sketchbook and spending my days drawing was too much of a 'girly' hobby for them. 'You can't like art and be good at soccer,' they stated as if there were studies proving it, before turning me down again. So, I did what any rational kid would do. I buried my sketchbooks at the bottom of my backpack and stopped drawing for a month before I tried again, blue t-shirt and all paint stains washed off, and a tiny spark of hope in my chest. I prayed that maybe, since I had already changed myself so much, that they would realize I was truly worthy of playing soccer with them. That recess ended up with me in tears, complaining to my teacher, and being told 'boys will be boys' for the first

**The power of an authentic voice is not realized until it is taken away from you.**

- Sophia Addorisio

time ever. I was always 'too loud' or 'too sensitive', always too much, to play with the boys, and that was the fact of the matter.

I wish I could say that it ended there when the other kids in my class matured and eventually realized that girls were more than capable of accomplishing everything they could do and more. I wish I could say that still, almost 10 years later, I don't deal with ignorance and stereotypes on a daily basis. What differentiates me from my past self, however, is my voice. Sometime between that moment of being denied access to the soccer field and entering grade 11, I realized that my voice was made for me to use, both verbally and through my actions. Pink - more specifically baby pink - is my favorite colour, and I still manage to get A's in all of my classes. My passion for the arts only got stronger through the years, and it has only driven me towards a goal of working in the male dominated field of architecture. I paint my nails every other week and listen to female pop artists, and I also go to sleep at night while looking at the various awards earned through my years of school, with room on my wall for more.

The hate of the colour pink was never about the colour itself - it was about the stereotypes and the lack of voice it seemed to give me. It only took me a decade to realize that my voice and the authenticity of it is what was so important. I encourage myself and any women in my life to always be loud. Everybody was made to take up space, to be honest within their identity, and be themselves. The gift of an authentic voice is what society should be built off, instead of stereotypes and incorrect ideals. As I get older and navigate my way through life, I hope that I will continue to find new ways to express myself, all while proving those who tried to keep me silent wrong. 🙌



TOP PHOTO BY CASEY CUNNINGHAM | BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY OF SOPHIA ADDORISIO

# Choosing Courage Over Comfort

How a Stouffville resident mobilized an entire community to support families in Jamaica

by Michaela Ray

When Claudette Zabsonre first heard that a rare and devastating hurricane had torn through Jamaica last October, she was sitting quietly in her living room in Stouffville. The storm had struck the rural south of the island, where many families live in fragile homes and have limited access to resources. Entire communities were left devastated. Homes were destroyed, roads washed away, and families were suddenly without food, shelter, or a way to reach help.

Claudette's response was instinctive. What can I do? she asked herself. The answer came immediately. She felt called to act, to raise awareness, and to gather essential supplies. What she did not yet realize was how deeply her Stouffville community would rally behind her effort.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Claudette grew up surrounded by a culture rooted in resilience, faith, and shared responsibility. Those values stayed with her when she moved to Canada in her twenties and continue to shape her life today. A mother of two, grandmother of four, and devoted caregiver to her late mother, Claudette says her mother's strength and generosity taught her that fulfillment comes from lifting others.

Over the years, service has been the centre of her life. She has worked with the Toronto District School Board, the



University of Toronto, and volunteered extensively with organizations including United Way, Habitat for Humanity, Southlake Hospital, and community initiatives supporting seniors, accessibility, and housing security. After moving to Stouffville nearly twenty years ago, her contributions continued quietly but consistently, from creating the town's first Black History celebration to serving for years on the Accessibility Advisory Committee.

So, when Jamaica needed help, Claudette leaned into what she knew best. She reached out to friends, neighbours, churches, businesses, and local elected officials with a simple message. This is what I plan to do. Will you help?

The response was immediate. The Whitchurch-Stouffville Leisure Centre offered space for a four-day drop off event. Volunteers stepped forward. Local pharmacies and grocery stores donated generously. Churches opened their doors and extended collection

timelines through the holidays. Residents dropped off food, diapers, formula, and water. Children and families packed boxes together, transforming the Leisure Centre into a place of shared purpose and connection.

In the end, more than 160 boxes of essential goods were shipped to Jamaica. Some were distributed through the Jamaican Canadian Association, while others were delivered directly to remote communities through trusted humanitarian partners, ensuring even the hardest to reach families received support.

For Claudette, the effort was never about recognition. What mattered was seeing people come together for a shared cause. She lives by a phrase she often repeats. Choose courage over comfort. Her hope is that others trust their instincts to help, even when the first step feels daunting. One person can start something meaningful. A community can carry it forward. Stouffville did exactly that. 📌



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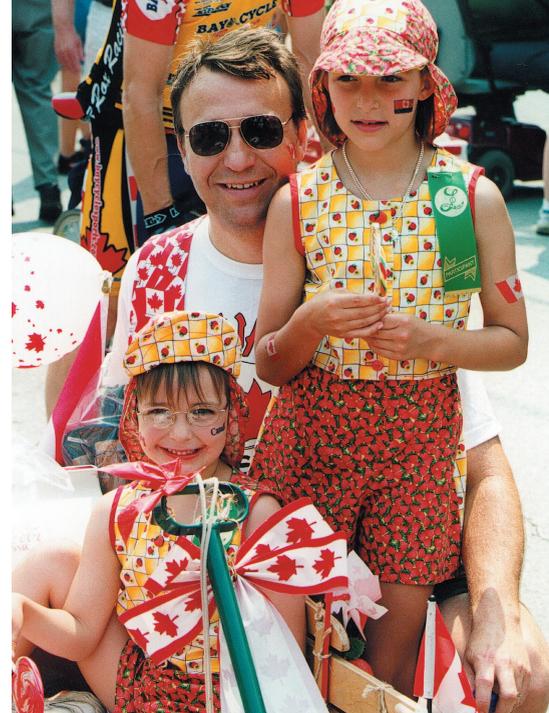
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## CHASING STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL'S

# Old-Time Charm

by Glenn Jackson

**AFTER DECADES OF GROWTH, ORGANIZERS ARE WORKING TO RESTORE THE SMALL-TOWN WARMTH THAT LONGTIME FESTIVALGOERS REMEMBER.**

For more than four decades, the Stouffville Strawberry Festival has grown right alongside the community it celebrates, expanding into a signature, family-friendly tradition filled with live entertainment, local vendors and (of course) fresh Ontario strawberries.

When the festival formally began in 1984, families flocked to Main St. and Memorial Park over the Canada Day weekend. There were beer gardens and street dances and, thanks to the Stouffville Buttermakers, one of the largest slo-pitch tournaments in the province.

That first year, the festival stretched an astonishing 11 days, spilling beyond the town core into surrounding communities, with everything from pie-baking contests to parades and beauty pageants. It was a celebration that felt proudly homemade and unmistakably local.

It was so successful that then-premier David Peterson visited in 1986.

Forty-two years later, the Strawberry Festival continues to thrive. It now attracts more than 40,000 people each year. A spectacular fireworks displays follows on Canada Day.

Today, the Strawberry Festival is a partnership between its volunteer board of directors and the Town of Stouffville. The festival was recently recognized with a Top 100 Award from Festivals and Events Ontario.

### HOMETOWN REUNION

But as the crowds and programming have grown, some longtime festivalgoers say something quieter has faded. It is that distinctly small-town, old-time feel that once made a stroll down Main St. feel like a true hometown reunion.

Now, as organizers look ahead, there is renewed interest in looking back, not to turn back the clock, but to bring forward the simple traditions that once made the Strawberry Festival feel unmistakably local.

“As the festival grew, it started to lose some of its hometown charm,” says Sue Sherban, a longtime volunteer and the festival’s newly elected president. “Our goal, starting this year, is to bring that back.”

As a lifelong Stouffville resident who grew up at Musselman’s Lake, Sherban remembers those early days well. For her, the key to restoring that feeling is simple: volunteers.

According to Sherban, volunteers are what give the Strawberry Festival its soul.

“When it’s run by volunteers, it speaks to who we are as a community,” she says. “The festival grew organically. People brought their own ideas and their own flair, and that’s what made it special.”

Dozens of local organizations did just that, including the Stouffville Ministerial Association, the Block Parent Association, the Stouffville Lioness Club and the Gormley Women’s Institute, each contributing something uniquely their own.

“Too many events today follow a cookie-cutter template,” Sherban says. “We need to get the Strawberry Festival back to a place where it truly feels like community again.”

Sherban’s connection to the Strawberry Festival dates back to 1995, when she first volunteered with youth

programming. Over the years, including time as Stouffville’s Ward 6 councillor, a position she still holds, and as mayor, she remained closely connected to the event, even as other responsibilities pulled her away from hands-on involvement.

By the late 2010s, community feedback was consistent. While the festival was still successful, something of its small-town character had been lost. In response, residents encouraged Sherban to return in a leadership role, a request she ultimately accepted.

In September of last year, she was elected chair of the festival’s board of directors with a clear goal in mind. The festival’s vice president is Liz Fraser.

### SMALL-TOWN STOUFFVILLE

“Our primary focus is to get the festival back on Main St.”

That goal will be phased in, according to Sherban, largely due to the Downtown Revitalization project currently underway (see Page 29 for this month’s update). Main St. is expected to be under construction starting next year.

“This year, the Markham Stouffville Cruisers will host their car show on Main St. on the Saturday,” she explains. “Then the street will be under construction for about two years. Once that work is complete, we can bring the festival back.”

It is a goal Sherban is committed to seeing through.

“My intention is to stay involved long enough to see the festival return to Main St.”

Closing Main St. adds to the culture that defines small-town Stouffville, she adds.

“How many towns can shut down their Main St. for a day to host a festival?,” she asks. “And we know how much people love it when the street is closed, even for a short time. It adds to that small-town culture that makes Stouffville special.”

Volunteerism remains at the heart of that vision.

“We’re taking the festival back to its original template,” she says, “but with



From left: Liz Fraser (Strawberry Festival Vice Chair), Lois Irwin, Sue Sherban (Chair) handing out Canada Day cake.

*“This festival has always been about people.”*

**- SUE SHERBAN, PRESIDENT OF THE STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL**

room for volunteers to bring fresh ideas.”

Sherban also stresses the importance of understanding how the festival operates. The Strawberry Festival is a nonprofit organization, independent from the Town, with all sponsorship dollars going directly into legacy and community programming.

While the Town supports logistics and operations, she says, volunteers remain responsible for delivering the events that define the festival.

“That’s how we bring back the community feel, by welcoming people with new ideas, new energy and new flavours. If someone has an idea for a community event, we’re here to listen and help make it happen.”

Sherban stresses that the festival must continue to serve all generations, a challenge when trying to reintroduce activities that were popular more than four decades ago.

“We have to cater to everyone,” she says. “That means offering a mix of traditions and new experiences.”

Popular youth-focused activities already include the three-on-three basketball tournament and BMX biking, with hopes of adding roller skating as another option for younger attendees.

At the same time, there is programming for adults and families. Yuk Yuk’s comedy returns Friday night, bingo is planned for one afternoon and classic events such as the Strawberry Social, Strawberry Café and light musical performances will take place at Latcham Hall.

### ALL ABOUT NEIGHBOURS

At its heart, the Strawberry Festival has never really been about strawberries, stages or midway lights. It has always been about neighbours, running into familiar faces on Main St., volunteering beside friends and sharing traditions that feel uniquely Stouffville.

“This festival has always been about people,” Sherban says. “About showing up for one another. When you bring that back, you bring back the feeling that this is our festival.”

That’s the spirit organizers hope visitors will feel this year: a festival that welcomes new families while honouring old memories; one where longtime traditions sit comfortably beside fresh ideas and where every generation can find something that feels like it belongs.

“If you’ve ever loved the Strawberry Festival, or if you’ve never experienced it at all, this is the year to come. This is the year it will start to feel like home again.”

The Stouffville Strawberry Festival returns Friday, June 26 to Sunday, June 28 at Memorial Park, with events also taking place on Main St. For full details, including contact information if you would like to volunteer, visit [strawberryfestival.ca](http://strawberryfestival.ca)

## 2026 STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL

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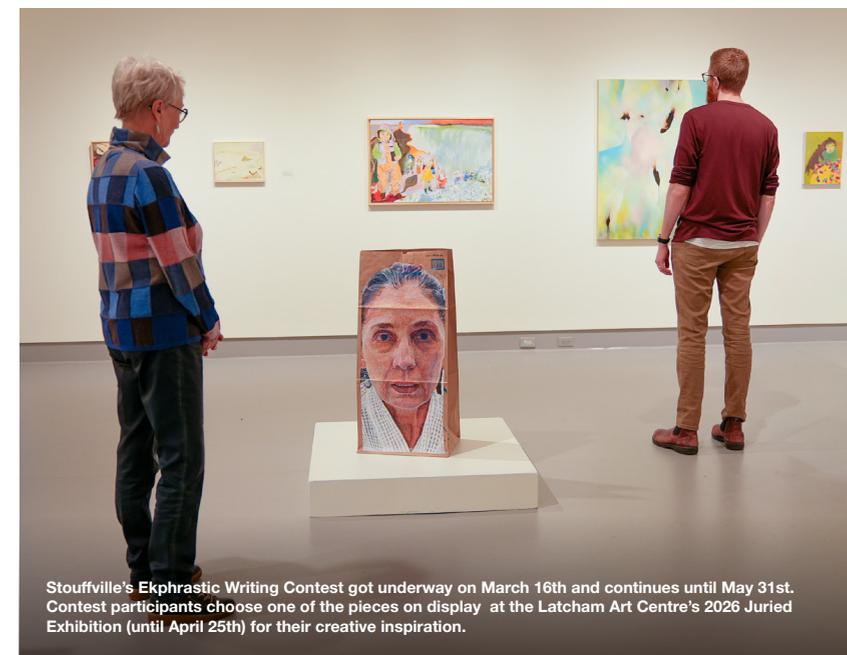
# When Art Speaks, Writers Listen

*Stouffville's Ekphrastic Writing Contest Invites Words to Answer Images*

by Glenn Jackson

In galleries, libraries, and notebooks across Stouffville, a quiet but electric conversation has begun - one between image and imagination, canvas and cadence. This spring, writers are being invited to step into that dialogue through Stouffville's Ekphrastic Writing Contest, a community-driven celebration of art-inspired storytelling hosted by The Inklings Adult Writing Group, which has been meeting at the Stouffville Library since 2022.

Ekphrastic writing - work created in response to visual art - has ancient roots, but its appeal feels especially contemporary. In an era of images everywhere, the contest asks writers to slow down, look closely, and let a single artwork spark poetry or prose. The result is not a description of art, but a creative response: a story, a voice, or a moment that could only exist because an image came first.



Stouffville's Ekphrastic Writing Contest got underway on March 16th and continues until May 31st. Contest participants choose one of the pieces on display at the Latcham Art Centre's 2026 Juried Exhibition (until April 25th) for their creative inspiration.

### From Gallery Wall to Written Word

At the heart of the contest are four visual artworks selected from the Latcham Art Centre's 2026 Juried Exhibition, on view at 2 Park Dr. in Stouffville from March 16 to April 25. Contest participants choose one of these pieces as their creative catalyst.

From there, the rules are intentionally simple. Writers may submit either poetry or prose, with prose entries capped at 500 words. The contest is open to adults aged 19 and over, welcoming both seasoned writers and those who may be sharing their work publicly for the first time.

Submissions opened March

16 and close May 31 at 11:59 PM, giving writers the space to revisit the artwork, revise their drafts, and refine their responses. Entries are accepted online via [stouffvillewritingcontest.wordpress.com](http://stouffvillewritingcontest.wordpress.com), with questions directed to [inklingswritingcontest@gmail.com](mailto:inklingswritingcontest@gmail.com). Further rules and regulations are also available on the website.

While creative expression is the core reward, the contest also recognizes excellence with tangible prizes. Cash prizes are awarded in both poetry and prose categories, sponsored by local real estate agent Imraz Ramani. Additional prizes are provided by local supporters

including Glowtown, Francis + Meyer, Foxglove Books and Timber Creek Golf. They also plan to include many of the storytellers, poets and prizewinners in an evening of storytelling sometime this fall.

### Why Ekphrastic Writing Matters

Ekphrastic writing occupies a unique creative space. It asks writers to interpret without explaining, to translate colour, shape, and mood into language without diminishing the original artwork. Each submission becomes a parallel creation - one that stands beside the art rather than on top of it. 📖

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE INKLINGS ADULT WRITING GROUP

## Lemonville Group of Artists

**Friday, May 1 - Sunday, May 3**

📍 Lemonville Community Centre

👉 [lemonvillegroupofartists.com](http://lemonvillegroupofartists.com)

The Lemonville Group of Artists returns this spring with its 33rd Annual Art Show and Sale, celebrating more than three decades of local creativity. The show opens Friday, May 1st, 2026, from 7 to 9 p.m., and continues Saturday and Sunday, May 2nd and 3rd, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Held at the Lemonville Community Centre, the event features a diverse collection of original artwork by group members, with many pieces available for purchase. Admission is free, the venue is wheelchair accessible, and light refreshments will be served.

Everyone is welcome to stop by, browse, and enjoy a weekend of art. Learn more at [LemonvilleGroupofArtists.com](http://LemonvilleGroupofArtists.com), email [LGAinfo@gmail.com](mailto:LGAinfo@gmail.com), or call 647-621-2472.

# Cornhole Craze: Adults Love Playing Kids' Game in Stouffville League

Rock music, theme nights, social fun draws them to the Legion every Tuesday



by Jim Mason  
jimmason905@gmail.com

John Mellencamp's Jack & Diane is only drowned out by good-natured hooting and hollering in the main hall of Stouffville's Royal Canadian Legion.

It's a spring Tuesday evening, the home night of the Stouffville Cornhole League.

Cornhole?

In case you somehow missed the phenomenon, it's the old bean bag toss game, now for adults. As seen at festivals, bars, tailgate parties, concerts...

Two wooden boards, each featuring a six-inch hole, are placed 27 feet apart. Players take turns tossing 16-ounce cloth bags filled with synthetic resin at the opposing board. A bag through the hole earns three points; one that lands and stays on the board nets one. First to reach exactly 21 points wins.

"Back to our childhood days," says Glenn Reed, the guest host on the Tuesday night we visited the Stouffville league. "Now it's a sport."

An estimated 4,000 Canadians are officially registered in one of 40-plus leagues. About half of them are in Ontario.

Thirty-five players are at the Legion tonight. It's a 50/50 male/female split. Ages range from the 20s to the 60s, says Darrell Gibbons, who founded the Stouffville league four years ago.



Bottom left: Tournament-level players Chris Cruickhank (left) and Brett Boyd square off during a Tuesday-night session of the Stouffville Cornhole League at the Royal Canadian Legion.

Attendance grows every year.

"They love the social aspect and the ever-growing abilities each and every week the players see in themselves," said Gibbons, a 15-year member of the local legion who first played the game in Newmarket. "The higher-level players are so supportive in teaching them to grow their own game. Some players just love the social aspect of it while others strive to improve their skills to go to provincials and nationals."

The bar is open. A couple of players sing along to a Tom Petty tune during a break between the five games they are guaranteed to play.

"It's harder than it looks," Kimberly Clark says with a laugh after taking a shot. It's the second time playing in the league for the real estate agent and her friends. "But it's a great time."

Stouffville resident Chris Williams was somewhat of a reluctant convert.

"Neighbours down the street dragged me off the couch kicking and screaming one night," he said. "Now I love it. This gets me off the couch and doing something in the middle of winter."

There are theme nights (ugly sweater, St. Patrick's Day, Christmas potluck) and a year-end party with live entertainment on May 12th.

There's tech. Thanks to the Scoreholio app, scoreboards behind each board handle sign-ups, live scoring, standings and playoff pairings.

Brett Boyd is one of a handful of

players in the Stouffville league who will play at the provincial and national championships. In preparation, the Stouffville dad has been on an unofficial southern Ontario weekend circuit of tournament play.

The former national level fastpitch star is a quick learner. He tossed his first bag less than three years ago at his hometown Legion after seeing a post on Facebook promoting the Stouffville league.

"There is a bit of strategy to it when you're up against the top guys and girls," he said, wearing his official Stouffville Slingers shirt. "You've gotta learn how to block the hole (defensive bag in front), how to shoot airmails (direct shot into the hole), roll bag (high-arcing flip) and your cut shots (45-degree curve). You gotta have them all, or you'll get run over."

"Here, it's coming out, have some fun. Work on those shots all night. It's a loose environment. It's very nice."

## Stouffville's Cornhole League

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# ROOTED IN **STOUFFVILLE,** RISING **NATIONWIDE**

by Michaela Ray

*From Stouffville fields to national history, one athlete's journey of perseverance and pride.*

*When I sat down with 26-year-old Kennedy Faulknor it was hard not to think about the journey that brought her here. Not just to this conversation, but back home to Stouffville.*

Just months earlier, she had helped lead the Vancouver Rise soccer team to a Northern Super League championship in the league's inaugural season. She had stepped back onto the pitch after an 18-month battle with post-concussion syndrome that left her uncertain whether she would ever play again. And in January, she stood inside Council Chambers while the Mayor spoke about her career, her resilience, and the pride this community feels in calling her one of its own.

But when she begins talking, the accolades fade into the background.

"I started playing soccer when I was four," she tells me with a smile. "My dad coached me growing up. I come from a Jamaican family, I grew up watching him play, watching my older sister play. Soccer was kind of just... everything."

Weekends meant waking up early to watch the Premier League and Champions League with her dad. Even more, watching the Canadian women's national team made the dream feel real. "It was my whole world," she says. "I always wanted to do this."

At 16, that dream accelerated faster than most teenagers could imagine. Kennedy earned her first call-up to Canada's senior women's national team, becoming the youngest centre-back to represent the country. She found herself in camp alongside players she had grown up watching on television.

"It was surreal," she says. "I went in with one of my best friends, Deanne Rose. We were just two 16-year-olds rooming together in Brazil."

She still remembers stepping onto the field against Brazil, and against her idol, Marta. "That was my first time playing in a stadium like that. It's a memory I'll have forever."

But not every defining moment came under stadium lights.

In 2016, while playing with the youth national team, Kennedy suffered her first concussion. She was sidelined for a year, the first extended time she had ever been away from the game. She missed major opportunities, including a World Cup and an Olympic cycle she had been on the cusp of breaking into.

"That was really hard," she says quietly. "It was the first time soccer was taken away from me."

She recovered, went on to play four NCAA seasons at UCLA, her dream school, and continued building her career. But concussions would resurface again later, more severely. After another head injury, she experienced prolonged post-concussion syndrome and was out for 18 months.

"There was a point where I didn't know if I would ever play again," she admits. "I was seeing so many different doctors and not getting answers."

She describes the injury as "dark" – invisible to others, difficult to measure, and isolating. "People can't see it physically. You can look fine, but you're not fine."

During that time, she found herself searching online for others who had gone through the same thing. "I didn't know anyone who had dealt with post-concussion syndrome before. I was on Reddit, on TikTok, trying to find someone who understood."

Eventually, she connected with a group of doctors in Toronto who helped her find a path forward, something she says she will always be grateful for. And when the opportunity came to try out for Vancouver Rise FC in Canada's



brand-new Northern Super League, she took it.

The opportunity itself was historic. The Northern Super League is Canada's first-ever fully professional women's soccer league, created to give Canadian players the chance to compete at the highest level without having to leave the country. For decades, elite Canadian athletes often had to build their careers overseas. Now, with six founding clubs across the country, the league represents a major step forward for women's sport in Canada and Kennedy is part of the very first group of players helping to shape its future.

Getting the call that she had made the team felt monumental. Playing again felt even bigger.

"I was just so grateful to be back," she says. "That season meant everything to me."

In the league's inaugural year, the Rise captured the championship title, a historic moment for women's professional soccer in Canada. Kennedy speaks about the friendships formed in that first season and the significance of building something from the ground up.

**"Your health is number one. Your brain is everything. I wouldn't want to risk that for anything."**

**- KENNEDY FAULKNOR**

PHOTO LEFT BY SARAH AMELIA | PHOTO RIGHT COURTESY OF VANCOUVER RISE FC : JORDAN JONES



Even the first home opener at BC Place drew 14,000 fans.

"That was incredible to see," she says. "People want to watch women's sports. When you give us the platform, when our games are on TSN and CBC, people tune in."

She laughs when we talk about ticket prices for women's games rising to match men's events. "That's exciting," she says. "It shows people value it."

What stands out most in our conversation isn't just Kennedy's résumé, it's her perspective.

At 26, she speaks with the steadiness of someone who has already experienced the full depth of an athletic career: the meteoric rise, the crushing setback, the rebuild, the return. There's no bravado when she talks about success, and no bitterness when she talks about the hard seasons. There's simply clarity.

"Your health is number one," she says when we circle back to concussions. "Your brain is everything. I wouldn't want to risk that for anything."

It's a message that feels especially powerful in a Women's History Month issue, a reminder that strength doesn't only look like pushing through. Sometimes it looks like pausing and speaking up.

Talking publicly about her post-concussion syndrome wasn't easy, but Kennedy felt it was something that needed to be done. She remembers how isolating it was not being able to find stories that reflected her own experience.

"There's not always something you can physically see," she says. "And that can make people misunderstand what you're going through."

By sharing her journey publicly, she has become the person she was once searching for, proof that recovery is possible, that setbacks don't erase talent, and that vulnerability can coexist with elite performance.

That same sense of responsibility carries into how she views her role within the Northern Super League. The league itself represents a historic shift in Canadian sport. A fully professional women's soccer league on home soil, something Kennedy admits she never imagined would exist when she was a child.

"When I was growing up, there wasn't a professional league in Canada for women," she says. "Now young girls can watch players in their own backyard."

The impact of that visibility can't be overstated. For years, young Canadian players had to look abroad for professional pathways. Now, they can see a future at home.

Back in Stouffville, that momentum feels tangible too.

During her time recovering at home, the longest stretch she'd spent here since high school, Kennedy found herself back at local tracks and fields. She began coaching private sessions for young players in the community.

"Seeing those little girls and boys training honestly inspired me," she says. "They're the future."

Some of those same kids later attended her games in Toronto, messaging her and cheering from the stands.

"That meant everything," she says. "Just knowing they were there."

In January, when Town Council recognized her achievements and announced that her Vancouver Rise jersey would be framed alongside other Stouffville professional athletes, she admits she didn't know what to expect.

"It was really special," she says. "When the Mayor was speaking, it was so thoughtful. I almost teared up."

For someone who has played in international stadiums, that moment at

home carried its own weight.

Today, Kennedy speaks about leadership as much as she does performance. Having experienced starting roles, bench roles, national team call-ups, and long injury recoveries, she sees her responsibility as bigger than herself.

"I've been through a lot of different stages as a player," she says. "I just want to support my teammates, take younger players under my wing, and win again."

When I ask her what advice she would give to young athletes dreaming of playing professionally, her answer is simple: "Always believe in yourself. You're going to face obstacles, injuries, setbacks, coaches who don't see your value. But if you see it in yourself and you put in the work, you'll be okay."

Then she adds something that feels especially fitting.

"Keep the joy," she says. "Remember why you started. At the end of the day, it's just a game, have fun."



From early mornings watching soccer with her dad to representing Canada on the world stage, from devastating setbacks to a championship return, Kennedy Faulknor's journey is still unfolding.

But no matter how far the game takes her, she remains rooted in the same community fields where it all began, inspiring the next generation simply by stepping back onto them.

And for Stouffville, that's something worth celebrating. 🏆

BOTTOM PHOTO BY SARAH AMELIA | TOP PHOTO BY NORTHERN SUPER LEAGUE

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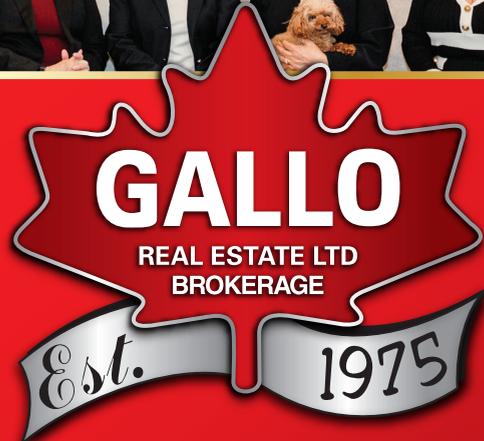


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## Jim Thomas, signing off...

After 75 years of insight, storytelling, and dedication to his readers, *OTR* is honoured to share Jim Thomas' final column and celebrate a legacy that has shaped Stouffville's journalistic landscape for generations.



by Jim Thomas  
thomas-jim@rogers.com

Seventy-five years. It seems like only yesterday.

Fresh out of high school, I stood on the wishful edge of a journalist career, but with no positions in sight.

So, with newspaper in hand, I tramped the streets of Toronto, only to receive negative responses at every turn.

"Sorry, nothing here," were continuous replies until, at the point of hitchhiking home, I spotted an ad of interest placed by the T. Eaton. Co. They had openings. Racing back, I squeezed through the main doors at closing time. And was immediately hired. My starting salary was \$15 a week.

Employment at Eaton's lasted only six months. My weekly wage by then had increased to \$30.00. However, my mother saw no future for me there.

"Go back to school, to business school," she urged, "learn typing and shorthand." While initially resistant, I later gave in.

While hitchhiking back and forth from home to school, I noticed an ad in the Stouffville Tribune that read: "Part-time sportswriter wanted. Apply in person to Charles Nolan, publisher." I did and was hired.

Thumb-travel from Toronto to Stouffville. Covering baseball games was relatively easy. The weather was warm. Hockey coverage during the winter proved difficult. There was little traffic

and the weather was frigid. One night, I walked a cold ten-mile distance via Hwy. 48, arriving home at 5 a.m., just in time to help milk cows.

My pencil-writing was done atop the dining room table. Stories were then placed in a road-side mailbox, picked up by a postman driving a horse-and-buggy and delivered to The Tribune. The system, for me, worked well.

Then it happened. Mr. Nolan met with me one afternoon at the intersection of Yonge St., and Hwy. 7, Langstaff. He asked if I'd be interested in joining the newspaper's staff full-time. Disbelieving, I immediately agreed.

The first couple of years were uneventful with much of my time still spent in Stouffville's Memorial Park and the Arena. However, it was then common in the field of journalism, for beginners to 'cut their teeth' on writing obituaries and Mr. Nolan followed this practice. He sent me to the home of a deceased to conduct an interview with the family. But write an obituary? I didn't know how! Business school had never taught me that. So my mother, who accompanied me, wrote it for me, a wonderful story. Mr. Nolan never knew and I never told him. However, after that I was on my own.

In 1954, everything changed. I'd saved enough money to purchase a new car and a Graphic camera. The two put me on top of the local news world.

Soon, area police and fire departments were calling requesting photos. So did rural news managers on staff of the Toronto Telegram and Globe and Mail. A gifted police radio filled a gap. I was going day and night.

"Come as fast as you can," Markham Police Chief Harvey Cox would say, "it's a car crash and a bad one." Speed limits were ignored.

When necessary, I'd sleep overnight at the police station in Buttonville, then deliver my film to The Tely in Toronto the next morning. What a fun job.

Unfortunately, this all changed in 1972 when both York and Ontario

County's went regional. Each police department acquired its own professional cameraman (or woman), so needs for my assistance ended. Yet, for The Tribune, I still kept chasing police cars and fire trucks.

It was May 1989, after four years as publisher-editor at the Markham Economist and Sun and ten years back at The Tribune, I decided to retire. However, two hours later, I changed my mind. It was a phone call from the publisher of the Stouffville Sun.

"I just heard the news," he said, "would you walk your column across the street and give it to us?" Without hesitation, I agreed and remained until the paper's closure.

But there was one more step. Glenn Jackson, editor of the Town's popular magazine, 'On the Road', welcomed me on board. I've remained there until now. This month's edition is my last.

So, what over the past 75 years have been three of my most memorable highlights?

The beginning - In 1950, Charles Nolan invited me to join The Tribune's full-time staff.

The tribute - Through the newspaper and St. James Presbyterian Church, a 'Student Music Scholarship Concert' committee was established that's lasted three decades. Through this, more than 6,000 vocalists and instrumentalists, grades two to 12, have performed on stage at Stouffville District Secondary School, before audiences exceeding 9,000 proud parents. In addition, a \$500 scholarship has, each year, been awarded to one student excelling in music. I had the privilege of being the concert committee's leader.

The honour - thanks to Stouffville's Jim Mason, in 2023, I was nominated and later received the 'Ontario Community Newspaper Association Hall of Fame' award.

Now, with this farewell, my column writing concludes.

It was a pleasure. 🍷



# Hey, It's Hannah

Through sport, friendship, and routine, Stouffville's Hannah Catalano is building a life full of purpose.

by Cassandra Papas

By the time Hannah Catalano steps off the bus after work in the late afternoon, the day is far from over.

Most people might head inside, settle onto the couch, and call it an evening. Hannah heads for the weights. It's a routine she knows well. A short strength workout comes first, using the seven-pound weights her brother Sam gave her for Christmas.



Then it's back out the door and off to basketball practice, track and field training, rhythmic gymnastics, or whichever sport happens to be on the schedule that day.

The rhythm suits her. Hannah thrives on routine, and her calendar is carefully structured around the things she loves: work, sports, music, friends, and time in the community.

At 25, the Stouffville resident lives a life that is both busy and deliberate.

Hannah also has Down syndrome, a genetic condition caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21. While people with Down syndrome may experience developmental differences, their lives – like anyone's – are shaped by their interests, ambitions, and the opportunities available to them.

Spend even a short time talking with Hannah and one thing becomes clear: her life moves at a pace all its own.

When asked to describe herself, she doesn't hesitate. "Strong," she says. "Loving. Fun."

## An Early Start

Hannah's connection to sport began early. Around the age of five or six, she started bowling at Stouffville's now-closed but still beloved bowling alley, where her mother Sheri was already a regular.

Soon after came Timbits soccer, and by the time she was six or seven, she had joined All Sports, a program designed to introduce athletes to a wide range of activities in a supportive environment.

From there, the list grew quickly: basketball, baseball, swimming, golf, hockey, track and field, rhythmic gymnastics, and more.

Trying new sports has never intimidated Hannah. When asked if she ever gets nervous starting something unfamiliar, she simply shakes her head.

"I just get excited," she says.

For Hannah, the appeal of sport goes beyond competition. "I like competing, friendships, and lots of camaraderie."

That sense of connection is what keeps her returning to the gym, the track, or the field week after week.

## Competition and Community

Over the years Hannah has competed in numerous Special Olympics events.

In 2017 she won a silver medal at the Peel Regional Softball Tournament. At the 2024 Provincial Games in Waterloo she earned a gold medal in rhythmic gymnastics. At the 2025 Summer Provincial Games she brought home three silver medals and a bronze.

But the moments that stick with her family are often the ones that happen away from the podium.

After receiving one of her medals at the 2025 games, Hannah ran straight toward her friends to show them – so excited to share the moment that she missed the official podium photo.

It's a detail her family now laughs about, but it also says something about the culture surrounding Special Olympics. While the competitions are meaningful, the friendships built around them are often just as important.

Travelling for competitions is one of Hannah's favourite parts. Provincial events often begin with athletes saying goodbye to their parents, boarding a bus, and heading off for three nights alongside fellow athletes and teams from across Ontario – sometimes as many as 600 competitors.

Hotel stays become gathering places where athletes, families, and coaches share the excitement and nerves that come with competition.

"There's a real sense of understanding among everyone there," Sheri says.

That community has helped Hannah grow in confidence over the years.

## Discipline and Routine

Hannah's achievements in sport are built on consistency.

Her schedule leaves little room for idle time. She plans weekly meals, attends community cooking classes on Thursdays, takes guitar lessons, and rarely misses Sunday mass at St. Mark's.

She also navigates York Region Transit independently to get to work at a local thrift clothing store, where she works Tuesday through Thursday. Before that, she worked at Tim Hortons.

"Hannah manages it really well," Sheri says. "I'm always in awe of her."

Hannah is the youngest of three children, with an older sister, Haley, and brother, Sam. Her parents, Sheri and Mike, have watched her schedule grow busier over the years.

Watching competitions still brings a mix of pride and nerves.

"When they're out there on their own,

I know how much work she's put into learning every move," Sheri says. "There's nothing I can do from the stands, and she just does it on her own."

Along the way, several coaches have played an important role in Hannah's athletic journey. Track and field coach Alison Rumball as worked closely with her over the years, while Dan Banks has coached her in basketball and baseball and also leads adaptive CrossFit sessions she attends regularly. In rhythmic gymnastics, she has been coached by Janet Mitchell and Heather Pepe, who help guide athletes through the sport's precision and discipline.

## Life Outside the Gym

Athletics are only one part of Hannah's life.

She completed a five-year online program through Frontier College's Literacy for All initiative during the COVID years, an accomplishment that required patience and persistence.

Her free time often revolves around friends and shared interests. Hannah and her best friend Ruby have attended concerts together featuring Katy Perry, Pitbull, and the Jonas Brothers. Their next outing will be to see Bruno Mars.

She also enjoys camping, biking, dancing, working out, chatting on the phone with her boyfriend Alessandro, and catching Toronto Blue Jays games whenever she can.

## Looking Ahead

Hannah's next goal is to compete at the national level in Special Olympics.

Given the discipline she brings to her training schedule, it feels like a realistic next step.

For Sheri, watching Hannah grow into the person she is today has been a reminder of what can happen when people are given the opportunity to participate fully in their communities.

"She just glows," she says.

"And she makes other people glow too." 🌟

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T H I N G S

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FAVOURITE DRINK:  
**Vanilla iced coffee**

FAVOURITE SPORTS:  
**Basketball • Baseball •  
Track & Field • Rhythmic  
Gymnastics**

BEST PART OF  
COMPETING:  
**Friendships and  
camaraderie**

FAVOURITE TEAM:  
**Toronto Blue Jays**

FAVOURITE MOVIE:  
**Fast & Furious films**

FAVOURITE SONG:  
**"No One" – Alicia Keys**

CONCERTS SHE'S LOVED:  
**Katy Perry • Pitbull • Jonas  
Brothers**

NEXT CONCERT:  
**Bruno Mars**

FAVOURITE TEACHER:  
**Mrs. Grandison**

HOBBIES:  
**Camping • Biking •  
Dancing • Guitar •  
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**"I like competing, friendships, and lots of camaraderie."**

- Hannah

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHERI CATALANO

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## True Path Yoga

### A Sanctuary for Mind, Body, and Soul



by Susan Tucker  
OTRtipoff@outlook.com

True Path Yoga has been a cornerstone of wellness in Stouffville, Ontario, for over a decade, offering a welcoming space where residents can explore yoga, Pilates, and Barre in a supportive community environment. Located at 20 Freel Ln., Units 11 & 12, the studio is celebrated as the town's longest-standing yoga facility, drawing clients from Stouffville, Markham, Uxbridge, and beyond with its hybrid approach to mindful movement.

Owner Diane Kurm has guided True Path Yoga since 2017, turning her personal passion for wellness into a thriving local business. Diane didn't stumble into this role by chance. A certified Pilates instructor through STOTT PILATES and a STOTT Merrithew Total Barre specialist, she had already built years of experience teaching Pilates in the broader Markham area before taking the leap to own her own space. When she acquired True Path Yoga, she saw an opportunity to blend her expertise in precise, strength-building movement with the broader, breath-centered world of yoga. The result? A hybrid studio that feels both grounded and expansive, where classes flow seamlessly between traditional yoga flows, invigorating Pilates sessions (including mat and reformer options), and the upbeat, sculpting energy of Barre.

Before opening the studio, Diane built a career in the travel and tourism industry spanning more than 15 years. Recovering from a back injury prompted her to try Pilates in 2008. The practice proved transformative...physically strengthening her core and alleviating discomfort, while mentally providing a much-needed outlet to release stress and "let everything go." This newfound vitality allowed her to stay active with her two children and inspired her to pursue formal training. She earned her Sol Pilates Certification in 2012 and followed it with STOTT Merrithew Total Barre Certification in 2014, honing her expertise in technique, posture alignment, mat work, and equipment-based Pilates.

Diane's journey naturally expanded to include yoga and Barre, which she now

integrates seamlessly into the studio's offerings. Motivated by a desire to help community members achieve their physical and emotional goals, Diane took over True Path as a sanctuary for authentic, accessible wellness practices.

Yoga Fusion at the studio mixes different styles. You start with gentle stretches to wake up your muscles and improve how you move. Then it shifts to fun, standing cardio moves to get your heart pumping. After that, you add resistance work to build strength in your arms, legs, and core. It ends with deep stretches and a relaxing rest to help you feel refreshed.

Barre classes add a playful yet challenging layer, blending ballet-inspired postures with small, isometric pulses that leave muscles trembling in the best way. Whether it's a restorative yoga practice paired with sound healing or a stronger Yoga Strong session, the schedule reflects Diane's belief that movement should meet people where they are – busy parents squeezing in a lunchtime class, retirees seeking gentle mobility, or newcomers curious about that first downward dog.

The studio's name reflects its philosophy: encouraging each person to follow their own "true path" to health and balance, without pressure or judgment. True Path stands out for its humble, authentic vibe – an intimate setting that fosters connection rather than competition. Pilates emphasizes precise, controlled movements to build strength and improve posture, while Barre fuses ballet-inspired elements with yoga and Pilates for a graceful yet challenging workout that tones and energizes.

What sets True Path apart is its inclusive programming...the schedule accommodates various levels, from newcomers to experienced practitioners.

Over the years, True Path has built a loyal following, and students describe the space as nurturing and non-intimidating, with many crediting the classes for improved mobility, reduced stress, and a renewed sense of well-being.

As True Path continues into its second decade under Diane's leadership, it remains committed to evolving while staying true to its roots. In a fast-paced world, the studio offers a quiet haven for



reconnection – reminding participants that wellness is personal, sustainable, and deeply rewarding. Whether seeking relief from back pain, building strength through Barre, or simply finding calm on the mat, True Path invites everyone to step in and discover their path.

In a world that often prioritizes speed over self-care, Diane Kurm and True Path Yoga remind us that true strength comes from within. Whether you're recovering from an injury or simply seeking serenity, this studio invites you to step onto your own true path. For more information, schedules, trials, or more details, visit [truepathyogastouffville.com](http://truepathyogastouffville.com) or call 905-642-4600. 🧘‍♀️

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# Bend Not Break: Natalie Leung's Journey in Aerospace

by Cassandra Papas

**For Natalie Leung, engineering has never just been about machines or equations.** It has always been about possibility, the idea that thoughtful design and determination can shape a better future.



Originally from Stouffville, and now a licensed professional engineer at Pratt & Whitney Canada, Natalie is already helping shape the future of aerospace. Her work has included projects aimed at creating a greener aviation industry, including assessing engine capability of running on 100 percent Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF). Her efforts led to the achievement of the first flight in history with 100% SAF on a regional commercial aircraft. During an internship with the National Research Council of Canada, she also worked on a novel aircraft

wing design focused on improving fuel efficiency.

"I feel like it's such an interesting and exciting time to be in aerospace engineering right now" she said. "There is currently a trending interest for hybrid electric or alternative methods of propulsion. I'm not just working on improving traditional engines. I also get to work on projects that could shape the next generation of flight."

There's a fascinating truth about airplanes that many people don't realize: aircraft wings are designed to bend.

When a large plane flies through turbulence, its wings can flex several meters upward. Engineers design them this way so they can absorb stress rather than snap under pressure. A rigid wing would actually be more likely to fail.

In many ways, Natalie's journey reflects that same principle.

Growing up in Stouffville, Natalie's curiosity and love of learning set her apart early on. At Stouffville District Secondary School, she was awarded the Governor General's Academic Medal (Bronze) in 2014 for achieving the highest academic standing.

But success in demanding fields like aerospace engineering rarely comes from rigid perfection. It comes from persistence, adaptability, and the willingness to keep learning, even when the path shifts.

Natalie has embraced that mindset throughout her career. While she began working as a mechanical designer, she later transitioned into electrical design to broaden her engineering expertise and deepen her understanding of complex systems. At the same time, she continued pushing herself academically, completing a Master of Engineering in Aerospace Studies while working full time.

"What I love about being in a technical design role is that I get to learn something new every single day," she said. "I seek challenges at work so that I am forced to embark on that learning curve. It can feel intimidating at first, but so rewarding when everything finally clicks. I calm myself initially by reminding myself that I will understand it eventually. That statement hasn't failed me yet."

Her dedication and leadership were recently recognized with the Rising Star Award from the Northern Lights Aero Foundation, an honour celebrating emerging leaders in Canada's aerospace and aviation sectors.

Yet what makes Natalie's story particularly meaningful is how she shares that journey with others.

At Pratt & Whitney Canada, she has served on the STEM subcommittee of the Women's Leadership Committee, helping create educational materials and outreach initiatives aimed at encouraging young women and girls to explore careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

She has spoken in elementary and secondary school classrooms, participated as a panelist at Toronto Metropolitan University's Sustainable Engineers Association, and shares her experiences with students at events like Dreamer Day.

"I want young women and girls to see that it is possible to build a career in STEM. I am proud to be a living example of exactly that. Someone they can look to for a reference point."

Like the wings she once studied, Natalie Leung's journey shows that strength isn't always about rigidity. Sometimes, the ability to bend, adapt, and keep moving forward is exactly what allows us to soar. And for Natalie, the sky is only the beginning. ✨



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATALIE LEUNG

**"I want young women and girls to see that it is possible to build a career in STEM. I am proud to be a living example of exactly that."**

- Natalie Leung

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# Get involved to support MSH



There are plenty of ways for you to support our hospital and be part of our community. Take a look at the listings below for upcoming events that make a difference.



**Tim Hortons Smile Cookie Week**  
April 27 – May 3



**Run for Women Markham**  
May 24



**Radiothon for MSH**  
June 4



**Stouffville Main Street 5K**  
June 21

For more information about these events and Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation, please visit [mshf.on.ca](http://mshf.on.ca) or follow [@supportMSH](https://www.facebook.com/supportMSH) on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn!



## HEALTHY TOGETHER Speaker Series



### DR. ELIZABETH MUI

Family Physician,  
Oak Valley Health



### KATE WHEELER

Host & Moderator,  
Canadian  
Broadcast Journalist



### DR. RAZA NAQVI

Geriatrician,  
Oak Valley Health



## GUIDING THE GOLDEN YEARS

Join Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation for an engaging conversation on what it means to age well and how we can better support the caregivers who make it possible.

COMPLIMENTARY REGISTRATION



[www.mshf.on.ca/events/26healthytogether](http://www.mshf.on.ca/events/26healthytogether)  
[mshfoundation@mshf.on.ca](mailto:mshfoundation@mshf.on.ca) | 905-472-7059

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2026**  
FROM 5:30 TO 7:30 P.M.

**The Bridge Markham**  
5440 16th Ave, Markham, ON L3P 3J3

# The Power of Young Voices: Shaping the Future of Stouffville



by **Nikiita Kumar**  
[townofws.ca/YAWG](http://townofws.ca/YAWG)

While it may seem that small towns have little to offer for youth, Stouffville proves that this is far from the truth. The Town of Stouffville provides meaningful opportunities for youth to begin growing their passions into lifelong projects that benefit their local community. By acknowledging areas of growth within the Town, young people can develop a vision that helps shape the place they call home for the better. The ideas and perspectives of youth are essential to our Town's continued success, ensuring that Stouffville remains a community where everyone can thrive.

Firstly, it is important to recognize that no community is entirely perfect. There are always areas that can be improved, ranging from citizen well-being to available career opportunities. As youth in a small town like Stouffville, it is no secret that our perspectives often go unnoticed amidst ongoing development projects. With limited opportunities that cater to the diverse needs of young people, advocating for our needs becomes

crucial. Whether it be a new sports club or a fundraising committee, giving voice to the experiences youth want and deserve can help shape our Town's future. Advocacy is the first step toward having youth perspectives valued, ultimately strengthening the sense of belonging young people feel within the community.

Additionally, by pairing passion with future aspirations, youth have the chance to create meaningful change. It is often difficult to turn a vision into reality, but our passions are the key to doing so. They allow us to develop innovative initiatives that address areas of growth within our Town, projects that can have a lasting impact. When we truly care about a cause, it fuels our commitment to seeing it succeed. In this way, youth can spark meaningful change in Stouffville by developing projects that reflect the growth they want to see. One great example is the Stouffville Youth Advisory Working Group (YAWG), whose members work tirelessly to make Stouffville a place young people can truly call home.

I joined YAWG after realizing that youth lacked opportunities in Stouffville. When I first moved here, I was surprised by the limited number of experiences

available to young people. Rather than overlooking this area of growth, I chose to acknowledge it. I began searching for opportunities to work alongside Town staff to create new initiatives for youth, which led me to YAWG. As a youth-led committee, YAWG works closely with the Town to ensure young people feel like an integral part of the community. We have already developed several youth-focused events, including Youth Movie Nights and Summer Youth Roller Skating Nights. My passion for leadership and sustainable development continues to thrive in this environment, and I take immense pride in the positive impact we are having on youth in Stouffville.

In summary, living in a small town is truly a privilege for youth. We have the opportunity to shape our Town's future while acknowledging the areas where growth is needed. By channeling our passions into causes we genuinely care about, we can create meaningful, lasting change. To any young person interested in beginning their changemaking journey, consider joining YAWG's Spring Workshop - YAWG Launch Lab: Idea to Impact. This youth-designed entrepreneurship workshop will teach participants how to turn ideas into concrete solutions that reflect their interests. Young voices do not have to remain in the shadows, they deserve to be heard, and that movement begins with you. For more information on YAWG Launch Lab, visit [townofws.ca/yawg](http://townofws.ca/yawg).

## YAWG Launch Lab: Idea to Impact

April 13th - May 11th • \$80

YAWG Launch Lab is a 5-week interactive workshop series designed for youth who are curious about entrepreneurship, career pathways, and professional skill-building. Participants will explore what it takes to turn ideas into action, develop real-world skills, and build confidence for future opportunities. Sessions blend hands-on activities, guest insights, and practical tools to help youth prepare for what's next... whatever that may be! Whether launching a business, building a resume, or exploring career interests, this program helps youth take their next step with confidence.



# With Love, Shania & Anya.

BY RUBY VASANTHAN

As a young woman of colour finding my place in the world, I am always moved by women who turn their lived experiences into something larger than themselves. Sisters Shania and Anya Bhopa have done exactly that. Their journeys read like a gentle love letter to Stouffville, shaped by the places that raised them and the community that believed in their dreams.

## From, Shania

There is something unmistakably familiar about the way Shania speaks about growing up here. She remembers the Friday nights, the gatherings after school, and the simple joy of sitting in the McDonald's parking lot with ice cream and french fries. She carries these memories with a kind of reverence, as if each one planted a seed that would later grow into her understanding of joy, play, and the work of filling her own soul.

Shania has built a life that many would call extraordinary. She earned her PhD in Global Health, is now pursuing her Doctor of Medicine, has written a children's book, and speaks across the world about health, equity, and empowerment. She has facilitated workshops at Harvard Business School, collaborated with Microsoft in their Changemakers storytelling series, co-founded The Canadian Courage Project with her sister, and founded Do It All, a global women's empowerment community offering tools and resources for confidence, wellness, and leadership.

Her accomplishments are impressive, but she is the first to remind us that doing it all is not the same as having it all. Fulfillment, she explains, is both in achievement and in being. It is found in long hikes in Patagonia, in painting, in triathlons, and the acts that nourish the spirit. "You are not thinking about the workdays on your deathbed," she said. "It is the moments with your people that make life full." It is also found in using the privilege of opportunity wisely. To her, that is the heart of purpose.

What struck me most was her honesty about the early years. She laughs remembering her 52% in science before dropping the class entirely, and still she went on to pursue a path in health. She followed her intuition, trusted her interests, and let curiosity guide her. She tells young girls that the dreams placed on their hearts are there for a reason and that moments in time do not determine their future.

In her message to the next generation of young women in Stouffville, Shania returns to one truth: she learned early from her parents that you must ask for



Shania Bhopa

what you want, and that confidence begins with finding the courage to use your voice. She credits her mother, her sisters, and the close circle of strong women who helped shape her resilience. She speaks about the importance of surrounding yourself with women who reflect the confidence you hope to grow. She has built her life through relationships, kindness, and the courage to take up space.

Even her decision to freeze her eggs at 25 was an act of courage. It taught her that we are allowed to take control of our future in the ways that feel most true to us. "Nothing is guaranteed," she said, "but having options is empowering." It also showed her that gender norms still shape the world, and that shifting culture requires doing things differently.

When I asked what she hopes this article becomes, her answer was clear. She wants moms to rip it out of the magazine and slip it into their daughters' lunch bags. She hopes it serves as a love letter to her younger self and to every girl who feels small inside a dream that feels too large. She believes exploration is essential, even if it takes you away from Stouffville for a while. "Bring the world back home," she says. Learn from its wisdom, then return to serve your community.

Shania's story shows that dreams are not reserved for perfect grades or perfect paths. They belong to the girls who ask questions, who try again, and who imagine themselves in places no one in their family has been. "If I can do it," she told me, "You can do it ten times better."

## From, Anya.

Anya's story begins with compassion. In grade eight, she started volunteering at the Ontario SPCA in Stouffville, where she saw firsthand how financial barriers forced families to surrender the pets they loved. "Pets are part of our family structure," she said. "I did not want any young person to have to choose between a meal and their animal companion." Even at that age, she carried a maturity and empathy beyond her years. Those early



Anya Bhopa

moments stayed with her and shaped the remarkable purpose and person she would grow into.

Alongside her sister, she co-founded The Canadian Courage Project to support youth facing homelessness and their animals through wellness kits, education, and community programming. Working closely with veterinarians deepened her understanding of the gaps in both human and animal healthcare and inspired her to pursue veterinary medicine. Now, as she works toward her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, she hopes to return to suburban and rural communities, including Stouffville, to offer accessible care where it is needed most.

She told me that growing up in Stouffville shaped her confidence in ways she carries proudly. It taught her that leadership begins with service, and that community is not a backdrop but a force that lifts you. When she and Shania first started The Canadian Courage Project, the support from the Town helped her believe that young women could build something meaningful, even without experience. "Community is everything," she said. "It gave me the courage to begin."

Her recognition by organizations like Aerie and RBC Women of Influence encouraged her, but it also reminded her why the work is necessary. She dreams of expanding the organization across the country so that no young person feels alone in their struggle.

When she speaks about representing Stouffville, her pride is unmistakable. She loves sharing the beauty of the Town, its values, and the way it nurtures empathy. She calls Stouffville a hidden gem, a place that quietly cultivates people who want to make things better.

Her perfect day in Stouffville is simple and full of heart. It begins at Red Bulb with coffee and a pastry, followed by a walk down Main St. She hopes it is a farmers' market day, filled with local vendors and familiar faces. She would hike with her dogs in the Eldred King Forest Tract, spend time with neighbours who have become dear friends, and end

the evening with dinner on Main St. She loves the way the Town comes alive in the summer, with flowers in bloom and people walking, talking, and smiling at one another.

To young women who hope to lead or create something new, Anya offers quiet but powerful advice. Find mentors. Lean on support. Trust that you are not alone. Balancing school, service, and leadership is not always easy, but remembering why keeps her grounded. "The impact stories are what fuel me," she said.

## P.S.

Together, Shania and Anya carry the Town of Stouffville with them wherever they go. Their stories rise from the same place, shaped by the same streets, the same schools, and the same community that taught them to lead with heart. They remind us that Stouffville does not just raise its young women. It prepares them to shine in the world and return with something meaningful to offer. This love letter is theirs, but it is also for every girl growing up in the Town. May you see yourself in these pages. May you trust your voice, follow your curiosity, and believe that your dreams matter. And may you carry Stouffville with you, wherever you go. 🌸



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**Supporting Our Community Hospital, One Step at a Time**



This Father's Day, Sunday, June 21st, spend time together in a meaningful way at the Stouffville Main Street 5K benefiting Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation. This early morning, community-fueled event brings families, friends, and neighbours together in the heart of Stouffville. Whether you're running, walking or cheering from the sidelines, the event is all about community spirit and supporting local health care.

Proceeds from the event support the Markham Stouffville Hospital Foundation, helping fund vital equipment, new technology, and important patient-care improvements. As our town continues to grow, supporting our hospital helps ensure that quality care remains close to home for everyone who lives here.

The Stouffville Main Street 5K welcomes participants of all ages and experience levels. From seasoned runners aiming for a new personal best to families looking to start a new Father's Day tradition, everyone can take part.

Local businesses are at the heart of this event. Sponsoring the Stouffville Main Street 5K is a powerful way to show your commitment to community wellbeing while engaging with more than 1,500 runners, walkers, volunteers and supporters. It's not just sponsorship; it's stepping up for our community hospital in a big way!

**Stouffville Main Street 5K by the numbers**

- 1,300+** Runners
- 25+** Teams
- 179,800+** Impressions
- 70** Social Posts
- 120** Volunteers

Join us on Sunday, June 21st as we celebrate community, health, and giving back. **Register for the race or find event details at [townofws.ca/5k](http://townofws.ca/5k)**

PHOTO BY VALERIA MITSUBATA

To learn more about sponsorship opportunities, please contact [Brandi.Pickering@townofws.ca](mailto:Brandi.Pickering@townofws.ca)

# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

AN UPDATE BY GLENN JACKSON

## Proposed Main Street Lounge Taking Shape

Over the past month, the Downtown Revitalization design team, led by Accardi Engineering Group, continued to advance the detailed design phase of the Main St. project, building on the work completed in January. The focus remained on incorporating feedback from the Town and residents, with several elements moving from conceptual ideas toward clearer definition and technical coordination.

Streetscaping features continue to be refined, with a tight collaboration between the landscape architect and the Town being central to the progress.

A key highlight is the proposed Lounge Area on the north side of Main St. at Stouffville Creek, which has progressed beyond an initial concept. Preliminary layout refinements and early coordination have helped define its potential role as a welcoming public space, generating continued positive interest from stakeholders. Further detailing and evaluation will take place in the next phase.

Community feedback has remained a guiding influence. Following the third open house on January 29th, where over 75 members of the public attended, the team reviewed and consolidated input from residents and business owners. The feedback has been integrated into the ongoing design and preliminary construction planning.

In addition to questions raised during the open house, several follow-up emails were received and are being carefully tracked. These included concerns related to side-street visibility with new curb bump-outs, potential traffic impacts from changes to Blake St., issues raised by residents along Church St. South, and the design of pedestrian crossings.

Each of these considerations is informing the evolving design, ensuring that improvements to Main St. enhance safety, accessibility, and overall community experience.

Construction is anticipated to begin in the fall of this year. In the meantime, each edition of *On The Road* will include an update on the project's progress.

**Get project updates**

Follow this project and sign up to receive the eNewsletter at [townofws.ca/downtown](http://townofws.ca/downtown)

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# Dog walking banned from Town cemeteries

Short-term rental by-law updated; townhouses coming to Ballantrae



by Glenn Jackson  
glenn.jackson@townofws.ca

## Updated Cemetery By-law

On March 11th, Council approved a new Cemetery By-law that modernizes and clarifies how the Town's licensed cemeteries are operated and maintained. The updated by-law replaces the existing 2012 version and reflects changes to the Town's responsibilities.

The new by-law was developed in accordance with the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002 and followed a required public notice and consultation period. Feedback received during that process resulted in minor housekeeping revisions to improve clarity for residents and cemetery users, including updated definitions, adjusted monument and marker standards, and revised interment scheduling provisions.

Consistent with a previous Council direction, the by-law confirms that animals are no longer permitted in Town cemeteries, with limited exceptions for service animals and family pets participating in a funeral or burial service.

Council also received the Town's cemetery maintenance standards, which outline how cemetery grounds are cared for using income from the care and maintenance trust fund.

Following Council's approval, the by-law was forwarded to the provincial Registrar, pending approval to be brought into effect.

## Short Term Rentals

At the March 11th meeting, Council approved draft updates to the Town's Short-Term Rental (STR) By-law to strengthen enforcement, improve clarity, and better align the program with existing legislation and administrative practices. Since the by-law was introduced in 2024, staff have reviewed its effectiveness in addressing concerns related to licensed and unlicensed short-term rentals, including neighbourhood impacts such as noise, parking, garbage, and guest behaviour.

The review confirms the program has been successful in increasing compliance, educating property owners, and providing



On March 11th, Council updated the Town's Cemetery By-law which confirmed that animals are no longer permitted in Town cemeteries.

Municipal Law Enforcement with clear tools to address violations. As of this update, the number of licensed STRs has increased, while enforcement activity has resulted in multiple penalties, suspensions, and ongoing investigations where needed. The By-law will come forward on April 2nd for enactment.

Council also directed staff to report back with detailed recommendations on short-term rental enforcement, including additional enforcement measures, past enforcement history and costs, licensing fee analysis, and the potential for a municipal accommodation tax.

## Townhouses in Ballantrae

On February 18th, Council approved an Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment, and Draft Plan of Subdivision to allow a 90-unit townhouse development at the northwest corner of Aurora Road and Highway 48 in Ballantrae.

The approved plan permits 90 three-storey townhouse units within 12 blocks, supported by an internal private road, parking exceeding municipal requirements, and a shared on-site amenity space. Two additional blocks will be conveyed for road widenings along Aurora Road and Highway 48. Council also approved the redesignation of portions of the site to the Highway 48 Corridor Residential Area and rezoning to accommodate medium-density housing.

Council's decision reflects staff's conclusion that the development is consistent with provincial, regional, and municipal planning policy, including the Provincial Planning Statement, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Town's Official Plan. Outstanding technical matters will be addressed through conditions of draft approval and the site plan process.

## COUNCIL & PUBLIC PLANNING MEETINGS

### Upcoming Council Meetings:

Wednesday, April 15 - 1 PM  
Wednesday, May 6 - 1 PM

### Next Public Meetings:

Wednesday, April 15 - 7 PM  
Wednesday, May 6 - 7 PM

Agendas for Council and Public Meetings will be available on [townofws.ca/council](https://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](mailto:clerks@townofws.ca) for more information.

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# talk of the town

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## RECREATION

### Spring Card Show

Apr. 11 | 10 AM - 3 PM

Admission is free with a donation to the food bank.

[townofws.ca/cardshow](https://townofws.ca/cardshow)

### Earth Day at the Leisure Centre

Apr. 25 | 10 AM - 2 PM

Celebrate Earth Day with hands-on activities, crafts and local environmental groups. Help with a community clean-up and enjoy this free family event.

[townofws.ca/earthday](https://townofws.ca/earthday)

### 4 for 3 Student Fitness & Aquatics Membership

Apr. 1 - May 15

Students can enjoy four months of Fitness & Aquatics membership for the price of three. Register at the Leisure Centre, 2 Park Drive.

## MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

### Candidate Information Session

Apr. 9 | 6 PM

Attend the Candidate Information Session at 19 on the Park to learn about running for Mayor, Ward Councillor or school board trustee in the 2026 Municipal Election.

### 2026 Municipal and School Board Trustee Election

Oct. 26

Vote in the 2026 Municipal and School Board Trustee Election for Mayor, Ward Councillor and school board trustee offices. Nominations may be filed by appointment from May 1 to August 20.

[stouffvillevotes.ca](https://stouffvillevotes.ca)

## MUSEUM

### Museum Workshop: Barrel Stave Candle Holders

May 2 | 10 AM or 1 PM | \$45

Create your own candle holder from authentic barrel staves in this small-group workshop. Materials and light refreshments included.

[townofws.ca/museumevents](https://townofws.ca/museumevents)

### Whitchurch-Stouffville Heritage Awards

Nominations open May 6 - Jul. 10

Celebrate outstanding conservation, adaptive reuse and built heritage restoration in our community.

[townofws.ca/heritage](https://townofws.ca/heritage)

### Doors Open Whitchurch-Stouffville

Jun. 6 | 10 AM - 4 PM

Explore historic homes, modern landmarks and cultural sites during the 22nd annual Doors Open event.

[townofws.ca/doorsopen](https://townofws.ca/doorsopen)

### Museum Birthday Party Packages

Saturdays | 10 AM - 12 PM or 1 - 3 PM

Celebrate with interactive themed parties for ages 4-10, including Pirate Treasures, Silly Science and Crafty Corner.

[townofws.ca/museumparty](https://townofws.ca/museumparty)

## EVENTS

### Victoria Day Fireworks

May 15 | 8 PM

Celebrate Victoria Day with food trucks, live music and a spectacular fireworks show at Memorial Park

[townofws.ca/victoriadayfireworks](https://townofws.ca/victoriadayfireworks)

## 19 ON THE PARK THEATRE

### Line Dancing Social (19+)

Apr. 23 | 7 - 10:30 PM

From beginner-friendly instruction to open dancing, enjoy a lively night on the dance floor. Also offered June 4.

### Summer of '69: A Bryan Adams Tribute

May 14, 2026 | 7:30 PM

Rock out to favourites like *Run to You*, *(Everything I Do) I Do It for You* and *Cuts Like a Knife*.

### Patio Series - Save the Dates

Jun. 25 | Jul. 23 | Aug. 13

This popular Patio Series returns with live outdoor summer concerts. Lineup announcement coming soon.

[townofws.ca/19otp](https://townofws.ca/19otp)

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### Planning Our Future

Apr. 20 | 7 PM | 19 on the Park Theatre

Join the Open House to learn about ReZone + ReDesign Stouffville and share your input on new housing options.

### Have Your Say

Take the community survey and help shape the future of Stouffville.

[townofws.ca/rezone](https://townofws.ca/rezone)



Stay in the loop on projects shaping Stouffville, visit [townofws.ca/projects](https://townofws.ca/projects) to explore the initiatives helping build our community's future.

## Helping **Stouffville Homeowners** Rent Their **Secondary Suites** for Income

**Secondary suites** such as basement apartments and other additional residential units (ARUs) can help homeowners **generate additional income** when times are tight.



This year, I'm assisting up to **five Stouffville homeowners** market their existing secondary suites to secure tenants at no cost for my services.



This initiative is focused on **existing ARUs only**.



Landlords simply **cover the co-operating brokerage commission** if another agent brings the tenant.

**This initiative supports homeowners while helping add more rental options within our Stouffville community!**

### UPCOMING EVENTS

SELLER'S SEMINAR

BUYER'S SEMINAR

BOARD GAME NIGHT

MOVIE NIGHT

APRIL 9  
MAY 21  
JUNE 18

APRIL 23  
MAY 14  
JUNE 11

APRIL 16  
MAY 21  
JUNE 18

APRIL 19  
MAY 29  
JUNE 14



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