

New principal believes in open communication

By GREG COATES
Staff Reporter

After 25 years of schooling, John Nikifork has graduated to Markham District High School.

Mr. Nikifork, however, is not going into Grade 9. He's starting at the top — as principal.

The Aurora resident and former principal of Stouffville District Secondary School was recently named as successor to Wayne Houston.

Mr. Nikifork, 46, has worked in the education field for 25 years and has a variety of experience. He served as vice-principal at Woodbridge and Bayview high schools before going to Stouffville as principal.

Mr. Nikifork advocates open communication and wants students to be involved in their school as much as possible.

"I want students to look forward to and enjoy school," he said. "I want them to look at school as their home away from home."

Participation

A strong believer in collegial decision making, Mr. Nikifork plans to involve staff, students and the community in school activities.

"I feel this led to my success in Stouffville," he said. "People like to be active in some way. The more involved they are, the more committed they become."

With a teaching staff of 139 and a student body of about 2,200,

MDHS is considerably larger than the other schools Mr. Nikifork has worked in. But he views this as a challenge. A challenge, he noted, that he's looking forward to.

Admitting that he believes schools really shouldn't be as large as MDHS, Mr. Nikifork said communication will play a key role in maintaining the school's high calibre.

"It's hard to bring about a homey atmosphere when you have 2,200 kids, but I'm looking forward to the challenge," he said. "I'm certainly pleased to come to a school like this."

When it comes to discipline, Mr. Nikifork again believes in open communication lines.

"I prefer preventative and supportive means of discipline, as opposed to punitive," he said. "Let's sit down and discuss it, find out what the problem is."

Clear expectations

He added, however, that student expectations will be clear.

"As long as they're realistic, we expect that they'll be met," said Mr. Nikifork. "And if they're not realistic, we'll have to examine them and see that they're changed."

Mr. Nikifork noted that one advantage of having a large school is the wide variety of programs — both academic and non-academic — that can be offered.

"My philosophy is that there should be a nice blend between

academic and non-academic endeavours," said Mr. Nikifork. "Non-academics are just as important in their (students) learning."

To show his support, the new principal plans to attend as many student functions as possible. He also enjoys taking time to talk to students.

Early in the school year, Mr. Nikifork plans to have both staff and students fill out a short, two-answer questionnaire. He wants them to name two things they like most about the school and two things they would do to improve the school.

Very helpful

"A questionnaire like this can be very helpful," he explained. "Staff and students have a different perspective. You get a lot of good ideas."

Having just been at the Markham school for two weeks, Mr. Nikifork is still getting oriented.

"I'm just trying to get to know the school, staff and procedures," he said. "I have a lot to learn."

Mr. Nikifork said he'll miss Stouffville, but is very happy to be in Markham.

"Stouffville was just great," he said. "The staff and students were super. I couldn't have asked for a better place to start as a principal."

Mr. Nikifork and his wife, Eve, have two children, Rob, 16, and Kim, 15, and live in Aurora.



New Markham District High School principal John Nikifork prepares for the upcoming school year. Mr. Nikifork comes to Markham from Stouffville where he served as principal of Stouffville District Secondary School for three years. — Greg Coates

Doctor opposes town's control

Doctor Harry Brown and colleague Larry Freemont have vowed to fight for development rights on land they own near the Markham Stouffville Hospital site.

An application by the pair for exemption to a temporary bylaw that controls uses on the land was turned down by Council Tuesday.

Lawyer Brian Bucknall, on behalf of the doctors, will bring the issue before the Ontario Municipal Board for judgment.

Dr. Brown purchased the 9th Line land last year with the intention of constructing a medical clinic there because of its proximity to the future hospital.

However, the Town passed the interim control bylaw two days after his application was re-

ceived, leaving the proposed medical clinic in limbo.

"Expansion of urban uses in this area is a commitment of this Council already," said Mr. Bucknall. "Our application is simply in accordance with that."

Council's passage of the bylaw was an attempt to study land issues around undeveloped boundaries. Mayor Bell said it allowed Council "a little bit of a breathing space."

Regional Councillor Ron Moran raised concerns about the proposed 24,000 sq. ft. clinic and the lack of sewage hook-ups in the area.

"When you talk about a proposition as big as this on a septic tank it gives me a lot to worry about," remarked Mr. Moran.

Pickering airport

Squatter's rights refused by federal government

By STEVE HOUSTON
Staff Reporter

Markham resident Doug Cook has no home to bring his newborn child into.

The 21-year-old apprentice block layer was recently threatened with eviction from a vacant 17th Ave. house on the Pickering Airport lands only days after he moved in with his expectant wife.

She has since given birth to a boy and now the trio have no home to call their own.

Despite his efforts to claim squatter's rights at the house, he found himself up against a formidable foe in remaining there — the federal government.

The young couple moved out on their own last week after the eviction threat from the Public Works branch of the government and into a trailer in a Gormley friend's backyard.

And in all his efforts to meet halfway with landowners he still found himself trying to see through the smokescreen he said officials left him with.

He cut the grass around the vacant house, did some work inside and tried to make the house home — to no avail.

"I found out there were no places to live affordably in Markham," said Mr. Cook. "Ontario housing has nothing and no one wanted to accept any responsibility for us."

He went through due process originally with landowner Transport Canada and entered his name on the obligatory waiting list.

After six months and no answers he decided to challenge the land administrators and move in.

The Public Works branch is

sympathetic to Mr. Cook's situation but adamant that he wait for an available house in the same manner as other applicants on the list.

A spokesman said there are two-year waiting periods in some cases.

"If we have something that comes available that fits his needs we will get in touch with him," said Public Works Site Manager Murray Richardson. "It is unfortunate but we can't bend the rules for one or we have to bend them for all."

Mr. Richardson estimated it would cost his department \$5,000 to properly renovate the house for occupancy and said it could become available as soon as the end of August.

However, that house may not be the one offered to the Cook family. In the meantime, he'll commute

to his job from the backyard trailer his family currently resides in.

"Basically the government is throwing us out into the street — I think it's negligent on their part," said Mr. Cook. "If money is the issue why don't they just sell the houses back to the original owners?"

If that were to happen, he said, his family would be the first occupants — the previous owner promised them the house if he became landlord again.

In the eyes of Public Works, the entire matter was an open and shut case. Doug Cook moved into the home illegally.

"He just moved in prematurely," said Mr. Richardson. "We have lots of applicants that we screen for occupancy. He had applied with us but decided to move in on his own."

Ed and Claudette



I'm not too keen on the sound of your new cuckoo clock, Claudy.



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