

Main Street Markham

Meet ambassadors Fritz and Ford

By PAUL PIVATO

Instead of a briefcase and a hearty handshake, this ambassador sports a monkey named Fritz and a shoulder-slung guitar.

Stephen Ford, Markham's Main Street Ambassador, entertains strollers by giving street tours, dishing out candy and strumming musical favorites.

At any given moment Stephen might break into song, belting out a raspy rendition of the Beatles' We All Live in a Yellow Submarine or Sweet Molly Malone.

"People are shy," says the 18-year-old Markham high school student. "You've got to catch their curiosity."

Sometimes, though, he has a dark urge to sing one of the subversive tunes written by his punk band The Underground.

But, admits Stephen, such melodies are better suited for a "smoky bar" than the mild ambience of Main Street.

"It's unbelievable how many people have gotten to know me by name," says Stephen, who often stops and chats with senior citizens from Thomson Court.

Many of the strollers on Markham's historic business strip are tourists who come mostly from the British Isles, the U.S. and Japan.

On his guided tours Stephen points out the street's historical landmarks, outdoor restaurants and shopping boutiques.

"You always have to be smiling," he says. "The ambassador's job is to give the town a homey atmosphere."

In the mornings Stephen dons a pair of overalls and scours Main Street with a broom and shovel, picking up debris.

In the afternoons he straps on his guitar and takes to the street with his puppet monkey.

Since he works for the Old Markham Village Business Improvement Association (BIA), Stephen often does business surveys for the local merchants.

Recently he collected petitions for the BIA to stop large trucks from using Main Street. The BIA, a merchant organization, claims that heavy commercial traffic detracts from business and shatters the tranquil atmosphere of the street.

Stephen points out that a commercial strip like Main Street, with its historic character, has attractions that mammoth shopping malls cannot offer.

"A shopping mall is cold, like a box," says Stephen. "But Main Street has character."



Stephen Ford is Markham's Main Street ambassador.


— Sjoerd Witteveen

Markham winners

No more windows, no more floors, no more messy bottom drawers...it was a full year's free housecleaning service from Mini-maid for Geoff Oliff, of Reginald Crescent in Markham. Geoff won first prize in the "You've Got It

Maid With Lansing" draw prize run to celebrate the company's 35th anniversary.

Second prize went to Elaine Legault, of Marcus Crescent in Markham, who won the Omnibot 2000 household robot.



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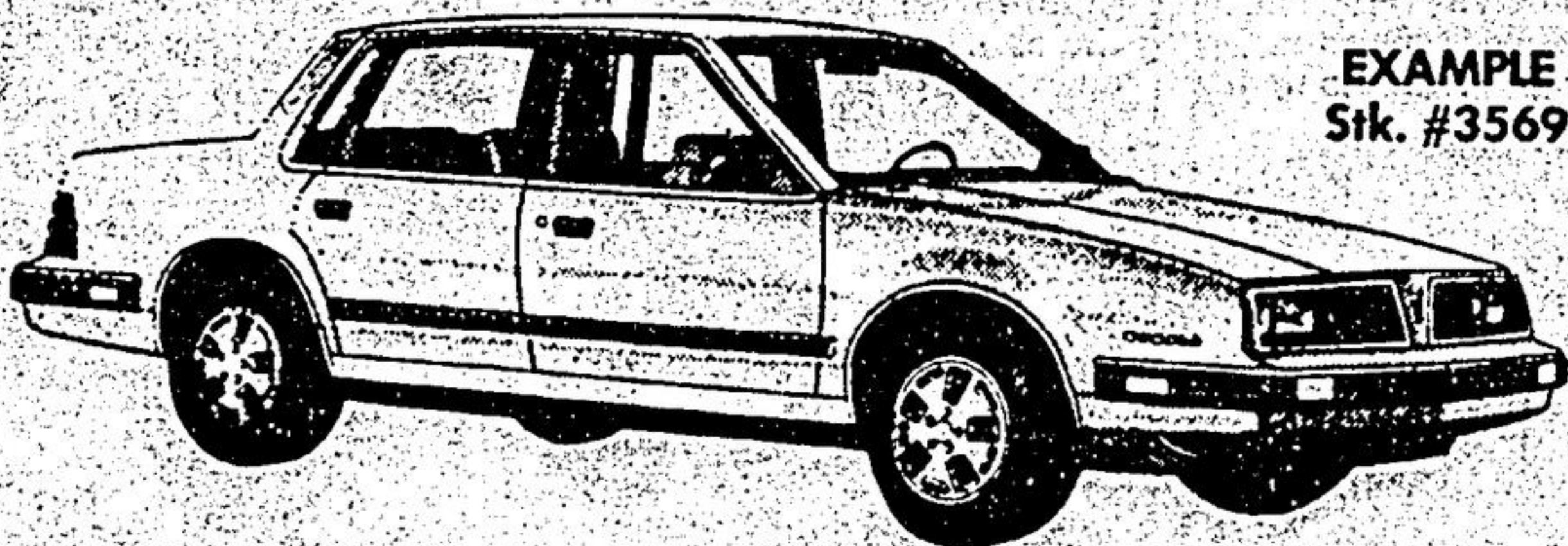
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