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Town lawyer first on scene

Markham blast remains a mystery



A devastated Susan Bates, co-owner of INTRA Village Lanes Travel, walks away from the site of Thursday's early-morning explosion at Markham Village Lanes with York Regional Police Sergeant

Bill Powell. Police and forensic experts are continuing their investigation to determine the cause of the blast which caused an estimated \$5 million damage to the Main St. plaza. — Bill Lanning

By JIM THOMAS and CATHY CARTER

"An enormous explosion—we felt the pressure—it shook the house." That's how Paul Mingay, solicitor for the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, described Thursday's early-morning blast that caused an estimated \$5 million damage to the Markham Village Lanes, a unique shopping mall on the Main Street of Markham.

Paul and Rena Mingay live only a few doors north of the plaza site. Mr Mingay was one of the first on the scene.

On his arrival, he discovered Roy Whiston, co-owner of Lindner's Fine Dining, standing on the sidewalk. He had just locked up for the night and was walking to his car. The force of the explosion knocked him to his knees.

Initially, Mr Mingay attributed the cause to a gas leak. His opinion changed, however, when he observed no fire or smoke and smelled no fumes. Also, the 'official' personnel that arrived on the scene made him realize something out of the ordinary was going on.

"I woke up with a terrible start," said wife Rena. She too thought it was a gas explosion.

Nancy Gowland lives immediately adjacent to the mall. "It was some blast," she said, "I had no idea what was going on." At first she thought it was on her own property. However, except for several broken windows, damage to her house appeared to be minimal.

Blanche Tran at 50 Joseph Street said the explosion, pin-pointed at around 1:15 a.m., shook her bed. Even apartment residents as far south as The Dublin and The Village Squire, heard the thunder-like boom.

As late as Friday, forensic experts were still sifting through the rubble searching for clues. A bomb is suspect.

"It's quite apparent some type of explosive substance was used," said York Regional Police Inspector George Kydd. He refused to speculate as to what kind.

Detective Sergeant Barry Delaney said the device was activated at the lower level near the front of the Markham Village Women's Club, a ladies' fitness centre.

"It blew straight up and in all directions," Mr Delaney explained, "fortunately no one was killed or injured."

Much of the damage was confined to the rear of the plaza. However, most of the courtyard shops and boutiques suffered some loss.

None of the stained-glass windows were broken in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church across the highway, Rev. Allen Embree told The Weekender.

"Everything seems fine," he said.

The scene, on location, was one of devastation with glass fragments and twisted pieces of metal everywhere. One store-owner described it as "like a war zone".

Police revealed that Manny Elkind, owner of the mall, had received a threatening phone call at his residence on Old Forest Road, Toronto, only a short time before the explosion. Mr Elkind has since hired a private party to protect his wife and children.

Tony Silverthorn, a head waiter at Lindner's said that had Mr Whiston parked his car had the rear of the plaza instead of the front "he'd have walked right into the blast."

"Roy's lucky to be alive," he said.

"Unbelievable," was the way Samantha Bates of Intra Village Travel described the scene. "It's like something you'd see on the set of Hill Street Blues—it's like something you go to the movies to watch."

Evan MacDonald, owner of Markham Village Grocer, went home early Wednesday night. Often, he works well past the time when the bomb went off.

He estimated the value of meat in his freezer at \$30,000. He said that while losses in this regard would be covered by insurance, "it won't come close to covering the length of time it takes to build up a business and develop customers."

Markham Mayor Carole Bell surveyed the devastation early Thursday morning. "I'm in a state of shock that something like this can happen in Markham," she said.

Some plaza merchants broke down and cried openly on surveying the damage.

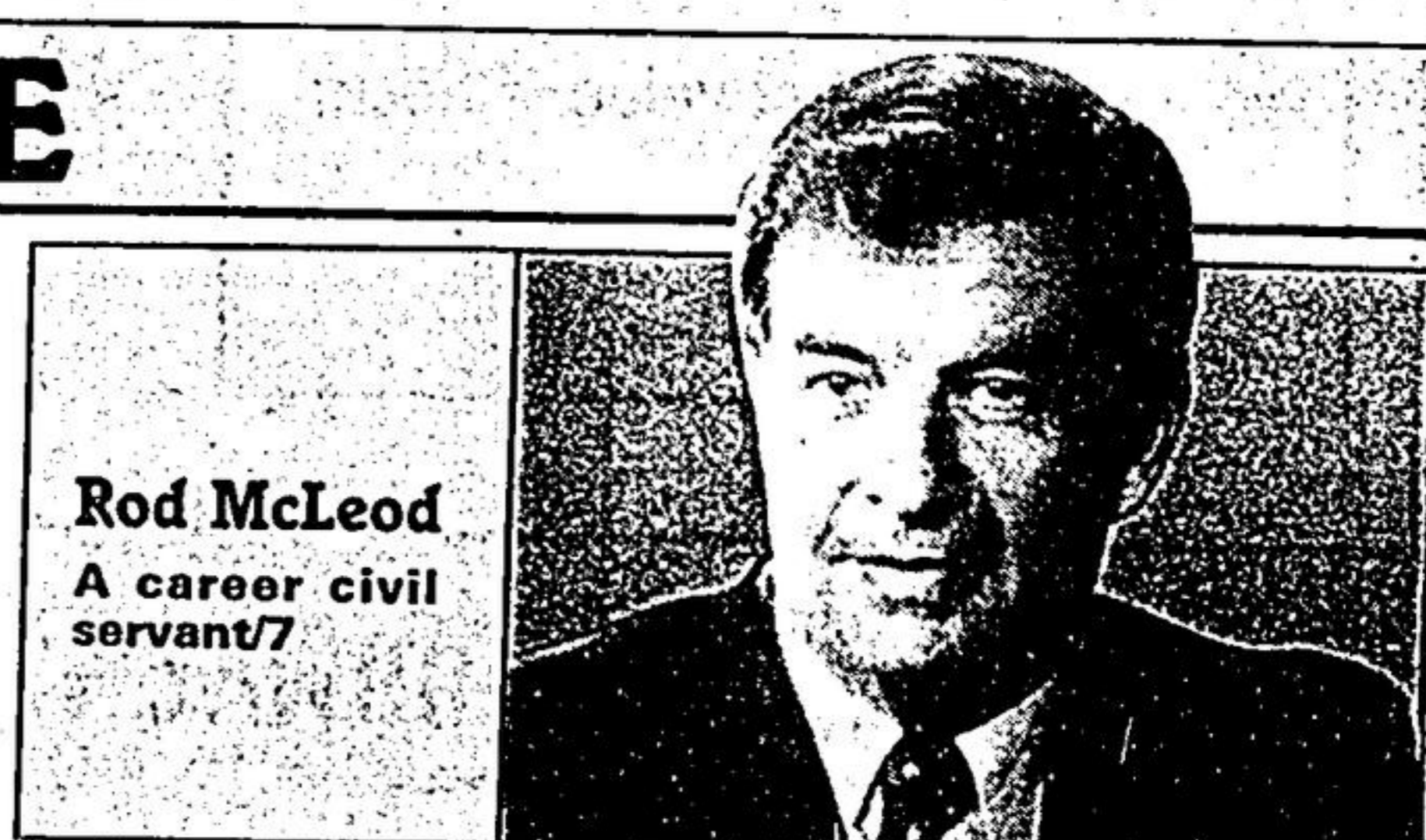
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