

Weekender

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A dump truck loaded with 20 tonnes of sand collided with a loaded school bus on Brock Rd. north of Claremont Thursday but miraculously no one was hurt. Damage to the two vehicles is estimated at more than \$100,000 and Durham Regional Police are still investigating. More photos on Page 7. — Chris Shanahan

Bus crash tests disaster plan

By CHRIS SHANAHAN
Staff Reporter

Uxbridge Cottage Hospital was planning a mock disaster this fall to test its emergency response system.

But hospital staff, ambulance attendants, firefighters, and police found themselves in the middle of a real-life disaster Thursday morning when a dump truck collided with a school bus carrying 45 children to an outing at Pleasure Valley park.

According to Durham Regional Police, a Ford truck was southbound on Brock Road when it struck the back end of a Charterways bus driven by Whitby's Ronald Henshaw, 30.

The truck flipped on its side and dumped a 20-tonne load of sand on the road south of the park entrance. Driver Daniel Henry, 44, of Holland Landing, was not injured.

Police said the bus was apparently turning around to re-enter the park at the time of the

collision, which caused more than \$100,000 in property damage.

Ambulances from Uxbridge, Whitby, Markham and Stouffville raced to the scene shortly after 10 a.m. and began tending to the passengers, members of the Whitby Youth Action group at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

The emergency vehicles transported a total of 23 people to Uxbridge Cottage Hospital, where doctors treated patients for abrasions, bruises and sprains.

None of the children were seriously hurt and all but three were released Wednesday, said director of nursing M. Catherine Renwick. Anna Abate, Paul Jarat and Sharon Pugh suffered head and other injuries and were held overnight for observation.

The rest were taken to Uxbridge Fire Hall to be picked up by their parents.

A stretch of Brock Road north of Claremont was closed off for 3½ hours following the accident, police said.

One of Pleasure Valley's three co-op education students, Paula Hadden, rushed to the site and coordinated the staff's relief effort. Ironically, two of her brothers were on the ill-fated bus trip that she herself helped book into the park.

About 10 staff members were among the first on the scene and they used their first-aid training to quickly help the injured passengers.

Those assisting and comforting children at the scene included Sharon Craig, Jeff Newell, Russ Thomas and Unionville sisters Karen and Susan Murphy, whose father Ken Murphy co-owns the outdoor recreation park and was himself close by throughout the ordeal.

"They did an excellent job... What we were pleased with was the initiative they showed," Mr. Murphy said of his employees. "They brought up coats, blankets and first-aid equipment all before

the fire departments and ambulances were here."

Uxbridge Fire Chief Norm James said "all the children were out of the bus when we arrived." His men, assisted by firefighters from Pickering, Claremont and Stouffville, rendered first aid and comforted some of the other shaken children.

Police commended the ambulance workers, firefighters and Durham Region employees for their "assistance and quick action" aiding the crash victims.

"We were coming out of the place (Pleasure Valley) to turn around, and we were just ready to turn around when the truck came over the hill," said Robbie St. Pierre, 11, a passenger at the front of the bus. "It wasn't even stopping and it hit the bus."

Following the rear-end collision, the boy said, "I was terrified... I couldn't stop shaking."

Nurse Renwick said the mishap was a successful test of the hospital's emergency response system.

"We were going to have a mock disaster in the fall to test our hospital plan. (But) we just did have a very effective test of our disaster plan," she explained after the accident.

A mishap involving more than eight people is considered a disaster situation, noted Uxbridge hospital administrator Rene Krizanc.

The bus-truck crash has prompted requests from some area residents to have the speed reduced on the 80-km-per hour stretch of Brock Road paralleling Pleasure Valley.

And the medical staff at Uxbridge Cottage Hospital has come out in support of proposed legislation to make seatbelts mandatory in all school buses.

"The consensus of the medical staff is that we probably wouldn't have had any of these children in hospital if seatbelt legislation had been in place," Mr. Krizanc said.

Police continue to investigate Thursday's accident.

WHAT'S INSIDE



Stan George
Flooding: extensive/14

Directory

Commentary: P4
Entertainment: P18
Children's page: P22
Church Page: P23
Sports: P24
Real Estate: P25

Claudette Trembley
Singing her heart out/18

