

# ROASTED



The many faces of Stouffville Tribune Editor Jim Thomas during last Thursday's roast at the Deer Park Inn. The event marked 40 years of service at the Tribune.

## Jim 'Scoop' Thomas

# Tribune editor on the hot seat

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Staff Reporter

Jim Thomas couldn't hide behind his camera or notepad last Thursday night. He sat helplessly while friends, colleagues and family-members roasted him.

A crowd of about 150, made up of friends, colleagues, politicians and family members, were invited to roast Jim 'Scoop' Thomas at centre stage of the Deer Park's dinner theatre.

The event, organized by local businessman Ged Stonehouse, marked 40 years of journalistic service by Mr. Thomas in the Stouffville area.

A night of laughs, lighthearted insults and reminiscences followed, while the veteran newsman dutifully sat in his roasting throne taking notes, his trademark camera nearby.

What emerged in the course of the evening was a clear picture of Mr. Thomas as seen by the people in his community. His colorful and varied history in covering the Stouffville area is filled with images of a job that was mostly well done.

But there are some days he'd rather shelve, as his roasting committee so dutifully pointed out.

Like the time he unwittingly invited the company of two Toronto 'working girls' while waiting in his car to meet his son while downtown.

Or the year he misspelled the word excellence on the front page of his newspaper. The occasion was a story about an award presented to the paper for its outstanding typographical qualities.

But the editor has changed since his days as a brash young sports reporter who occasionally fell asleep at his typewriter in the wee hours of 1948.

Today, the community is monitored by the consummate newspaper editor who occasionally falls asleep at his word processing computer terminal.

But, say his colleagues, his fire brigade journalism philosophy, and his search for the elusive "scoop" have held his readers in good stead.

Stouffville Mayor Fran Sainsbury summed things up in presenting Mr. Thomas with an antique scoop:

"I'd like to present this rare antique, from an antique, to an antique," the mayor offered.

Tribune co-worker Bruce Stapley, after claiming Mr. Thomas attended the same journalism school as Buffalo television news anchor Irv Weinstein, also capsulized his image of the editor.

"What can you say about a small town newspaper editor who looks like he just walked out of a Norman Rockwell print?" he asked.

Stouffville Councillor Wilf Morley, the only local politician never to have been misquoted by Mr. Thomas, offered a simple, yet accurate account of the role of a small town newspaper editor.

Stouffville, says Mr. Morley, is a place "where everyone knows what everyone else is doing, but they read the paper to see who got caught at it."

He concluded his tribute by presenting Mr. Thomas with a microwave cookbook and apron. The quick-cooking oven, says Mr. Morley, will save the editor time for professional pursuits.

A musical intermission and song by Bob Davies about the editor provided roasters with a chance to regroup and prepare the second wave of humor.

Former colleague Don Atanasoff forwarded tidbits about the Jim Thomas of yesteryear.

In those days, when Mr. Thomas wasn't referring to Unionville's busy new library as a "bush" library, he was defending himself from verbal onslaughts aimed at him from Inland Publishing Ltd. President Douglas Bassett.

But it was Stouffville Reverend Herb Gale who solved the riddle regarding the editor. Just how, everyone wanted to know, did he cover everything that happened.

The answers lies in an obscure 1929 birth notice where a Mrs. Thomas gave birth to quadruplets, said Rev. Gale.

Therefore, he concluded, there is not one Jim Thomas, but four.

Other roasters, including Markham historian John Lunau, Mr. Thomas' brother Don, competing Stouffville Sun Editor Jim Mason, and Stouffville Tribune Publisher Bruce Annan, recalled their memories of an untiring Mr. Thomas.

Recollections of the local newsman as a young hockey player with a knack for injuring his teammates, or as a polite young reporter with a passion for news, testified to his regard in the community.

His hard-nose approach have made for some interesting introductions to an irate customer or two, noted Mr. Annan.

And the publisher has learned, as general manager of two growing newspaper divisions, to steer clear of Mr. Thomas.

But he did tell it like it is.

"He's really been an inspiration to many young journalists...he's also inspired a number of young journalists to leave journalism," Mr. Annan noted.

However, any mention of the word retirement is taboo with Scoop, he added.

"I asked him once what he thought about retirement and he said 'I could quit anytime I wanted,'" he recalled.

Further words of congratulations from York-Durham MPP Bill Ballinger and York Regional Chairman Eldred King followed before the man of the hour rose, to a standing ovation, and tried feebly to defend himself.

And the man who once crusaded to preserve his town's name, the man who once donned a pair of pants backwards in his haste to get the details of a raging fire, humbly offered his thanks.

"I've never looked upon it as being work," he said in closing. "It's an enjoyment."

Presentations included a framed cartoon by Pat Wheeler, and a weekend trip for two. Proceeds from the evening will be given to a charity of his choice.

Family members present included wife Jean, sons Barry and Neil, daughters Susan and Cathy as well his mother-in-law Susie Pascoe and son-in-law Ron McMullen. Besides brother Don and his wife Doris, others present were brother Bob and wife Edna and sister Betty Tapscott and her husband Norman of Epsom.



Singer/musician Bob Davies composed a song in Jim Thomas' honor and sang in at the roast last week. The longtime newspaper editor was honored for his service to the community and received his share of good-natured ribbing from friends and family.



Family members in attendance at the roast included, (from the left), Jim and Jean Thomas; Mrs. Susie Pascoe, Neil Thomas, Ron and Susan McMullen; Mary-Lynn Thomas, Cathy Thomas and Barry Thomas.



Whitchurch-Stouffville Councillor Wilf Morley also took some shots at Jim, then presented him with an apron and a microwave cookbook.



Don Thomas entertained the audience with humorous stories about Jim Thomas' hockey escapades. — Sjoerd Witteveen photos