



Stouffville's Glen Smith makes the tricky climb to the top of the Stouffville clock tower to ensure the clock is keeping the correct time.

## A family tradition

# He keeps the clock ticking

By BRUCE STAPLEY  
It's 8:30 on a damp Thursday morning in Stouffville, and Glen Smith heads out of his Rupert Avenue home in his jeans.

Not exactly the required dress code for a funeral director who works for the Dixon-Garland Funeral Home in Markham, but on this particular morning, Glen must tend to a duty — not a tradition — that he has had since taking over from his father in 1974.

Glen is the keeper of the Town clock, the classic time piece donated by the Percy family in 1931. It is housed by that red brick Clock Tower that finds its way onto every piece of promotional literature produced by Stouffville and its institutions.

Glen, whose father Jake is a legend in Stouffville because of his mastery of the art of clock building and repair, is responsible for winding the big clock, making sure it keeps good time, and oiling the gears so as to keep the mechanism running smoothly.

So every 10 days or so, he comes by, takes the aluminum ladder out of the Town office storage room, and makes the long climb to the upper level of the 75-foot tower.

On this particular spring morning, he chats briefly with Dave Francis, who is busy chipping away at the bricks at the base of

the tower, bricks that must be replaced to guarantee that the tower will stand indefinitely.

And then he makes his way up to the first platform, about 12 feet up, after which he shimmies up the next three levels on wooden ladders bracketed to the brick walls, the rungs of which are worn smooth from years of service.

He finally reaches the top, takes the old crank, and goes to work winding the gears that bring both the 250 pound striker weight, and the 500 pound time weight, back up to the top.

He checks his own watch, then looks at the brass dial which sits in front of the old clock's inner workings. "She's out about seven minutes," he announces.

"It's not the easiest thing to get this clock to keep the right time," he states, acknowledging that there are some town residents who will occasionally take him to task for the clock being out 5 or 10 minutes.

"There's so many things that seem to affect its accuracy. The heat, the cold, and the humidity. And sometimes the ice will stop it in the winter."

He points to the nameplate attached to the front of the assortment of gears, pinions, and pallet arms. It shows that the clock was made by an English outfit. "Gillette, Johnston, Croydon, England" it reads. "By Royal War-

rant, Clockmakers & Bellfounders to H.M. King George V. The serial number, 9404, is stamped below.

The manufacturer, apparently, is no longer in business. "My father wrote to them several years back, but he got no reply," says Glen. "There's a worn pinion we're going to have a problem with eventually. It's going to bind."

When it is suggested that his dad may be just the man to forge the replacement part, Glen just smiles. "There's not a whole lot of people around who could do it," he agrees.

The winding complete, he climbs to the upper level to check the bell, which also bears the inscription of the English clockmaker, along with the words, "Stouffville, Ontario - via Montreal."

Then one last short climb sees him perched atop the structure, along side the fire siren. "You don't want to be up here when the siren goes off," he warns. "Even when you cover your ears, it drives you nuts."

He points to the hooks and the old pulley used to hang the firehoses up to dry in the days when the Town firehall was located immediately to the east of the tower.

Then he surveys the magnificent view afforded him by his ele-

vated position, and sights the spruce tree which adorns his own Rupert Street home.

Now 38 years old, Glen reflects upon how he would make the same climb with his father when he was in charge of keeping the clock running. "I guess I've been coming up here ever since I was old enough to make the climb."

"I sometimes wonder why I do it," he admits. "But then I try to imagine just who they would get to do it if I were to stop."

As he climbs back down, he points to the drive shafts of the four faces of the clock, and to the central gear. "That little mechanism keeps all four faces showing the same time," he says.

He explains how the renovation done twenty years ago resulted in the construction of the upper platforms, and then he notes how a problem with pigeons had necessitated the installation of shutters, covered on the inside by chicken wire, to keep the birds out of the area of the clock mechanism.

"The whole clock assembly was rebuilt by my father back in 1981," he recalls. "It's definitely a one of a kind."

And then it's back down and off to work for the man who is continuing the family tradition of keeping the bell ringing on time in the Stouffville Clock Tower.

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