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Festival lets you be yourself

Perhaps one of the greatest delights of living in Stouffville is that it allows you to abandon the tiresome veneer of Eighties' sophistication and just be yourself.

Nowhere is this more evident than during Strawberry Festival, which has become the ultimate community gathering, offering an incredible array of events and a wonderful opportunity to meet friends and neighbors in what has rightly been called the friendliest town in Ontario.

As well, it brings back the innocence of a less frenetic age, with its baby contests, baking competitions and, dare I say, the Miss Whitchurch-Stouffville Pageant; an event which probably would have been banned long ago in a more culturally aware bastion of the new era of puritanism.

We may think we live in an enlightened age, but that view only applies as long as you subscribe to what's socially ac-



KATE'S CORNER

Kate Gilderdale

ceptable, which right now would tend to rule out pageants for teenage girls.

Such events are generally described by such overworked adjectives as "inappropriate" or "sexist."

Isn't it strange that, in a society which claims to cherish the idea of individual freedom, there are so many social reformers who want to ban what they personally disapprove of?

The young women who take part in the pageant presumably do so of their own free will and quite obviously enjoy doing it. Why would anyone want to stop them?

It puts me in mind of some survey results I read recently, which shocked experts by showing that the majority of young teenage girls were more preoccupied by their boyfriends than their future careers and that some of them were so spaced out they thought they could get married, have children and then stay at home to look after them.

Interestingly, no one seems to have asked similar questions of teenage boys, but I wouldn't mind betting a fair number of them are more interested in fast cars and attractive girls than in the Toronto Stock Exchange.

Doesn't it seem ironic that this desire for such mature views among the young should be demanded by the generation that, in its own youth, brought us free love, a mistrust of big business and the beginnings of the drug culture?

Getting up in front of a capacity crowd, parading up

and down a runway and performing a song or dance does require a certain amount of courage, confidence and talent, even if it won't get you a university degree.

And anyone who can stand on stage and answer a question with intelligence and without hesitation, as these girls did last Wednesday evening, has my undying admiration.

Of course pageants don't appeal to everyone, but neither does major league baseball, which is a male-only preserve and which, as far as I'm aware, no one has tried to ban on the grounds of sexism, never mind inappropriate behavior — something not unknown in the ranks of highly paid professional athletes.

The Strawberry Festival is not, after all, meant as a deadly serious endeavor. It's about friendship, fun and frivolity. It's also one of the reasons this family plans to be in Stouffville for many years to come.

York group boosts reading skills

Thanks to the efforts of 106 dedicated volunteers, 118 people are currently discovering the advantages of literacy in the York Region-South Lake Simcoe area.

Literacy Council York Simcoe has just celebrated its fifth year as an organization dedicated to teaching illiterate adults how to read.

But according to the council's administrator, there are still many challenges to be met by the organization.

"We are always looking for tutors," says Florence Winterkorn, a Lake Simcoe area resident who heads up the council from its Newmarket headquarters. "And although we are funded by the Ontario Ministry of Skills Development, we are underfunded, and need donations so we can expand and initiate new programs."

The program is based on that of a missionary in the Philippines, who, discovering that illiteracy was the biggest problem there 50 years ago, initiated a reading system based on the phonetic approach.

The system, called "The Laubach Way to Reading Series," is named after Frank Laubach, the Philippines missionary.

"The majority of our students are in their 40's, are blue-collar workers and have families," according to Mrs. Winterkorn. "They are not slow, but they just didn't accomplish when they were in school."

There are currently eight students and seven tutors residing in the Stouffville area. Students are referred by the various social service agencies in York Region and the south Lake Simcoe area.

While tutors don't need any special qualifications, they are required to attend a 12-hour workshop to become certified Laubach tutors.

As well as teaching native Canadians and mentally healthy individuals, the council is making an effort to help both im-

migrants, via an English as a second language program, and mentally handicapped people to give them the freedom and power of the written word, says Mrs. Winterkorn.

Tutoring is mobile, she claims, and can be done either at the student's home, or at the home of the tutor.

The next tutor training workshop was announced for late September.

Mrs. Winterkorn, who has worked on a volunteer basis with the Big Brothers organization and the Brampton Women's Institute, asks that anyone interested in becoming a tutor call her at (416) 853-6279.

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