

Community

# Close-Up



## Laughs anyone?

# Stouffville native is man of 1,000 voices

BRUCE STAPLEY  
Correspondent

Listening to the hilarious imitations of Jerry Howarth, Arnold Schwarzenegger and soap opera character Victor Newman on CKFM Radio's fast-paced morning show these days, most people would be oblivious to a strong Stouffville connection.

Yet Mike Richards, the man

behind the program's irreverent 25-voice arsenal, made his mimicking debut at the Sleepy Hollow Golf and Country Club in 1978 as a 15-year-old Stouffville District Secondary School student.

Mr. Richards, who is actually Mike Rehill, son of SDSS teacher Jim Rehill, has experienced the type of explosive success most entertainers only dream about.

His contribution to the Gerry Forbes Show has helped it become the fastest rising phenomena on radio, with consultants visiting from other areas of Canada and the U.S. to pay tribute.

With Mr. Forbes playing the straight man, Mike provides a cast of characters that turns the program into the "Saturday Night Live" of radio. And his impressions are accurate, outrageous and hilariously funny.

But it almost didn't happen.

Mike knew from his first impromptu Sleepy Hollow gig that he wanted to pursue a career as an impressionist. He combined his SDSS Variety Show antics with appearances at the Soho Club (now the Rivoli) and Yuk Yuk's Comedy Cabaret in Toronto.

But his grades suffered, and his plans to study radio and television arts at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute seemed to be at a standstill.

When he was booed by a surly Yuk Yuk's audience one night in the early 1980s, he decided enough was enough. His future looked uncertain.

"It was the first time I'd been heckled," Mike recalled. "I was just too young to be a stand-up comic. I'd had enough."

But an appearance at a benefit during the Stouffville water crisis a short time later led to his being spotted by Dick Young and Robert Payne of CKEY Radio, who suggested he consider a career in radio.

He eventually qualified for entrance into Ryerson by taking a year at Fanshawe College in London.

He landed a summer job at a Barrie radio station, filling the late-night airwaves with "every cheap sound effect, every voice imaginable."

He applied to CHUM Radio in Toronto, was accepted as an operator, and never returned to school.

"Radio is entertainment. You don't get a degree in funny, or in clever. You can't learn that in school," he notes.

He learned the radio business

at CHUM, while getting the chance to do more 'on air' work at night on the weekends.

He also started doing radio and television voice-overs for commercials on a freelance basis.

"My big break came when Gerry Forbes, who was with CHUM then, went on holidays this spring," he says. "Jack Dennis said he would only fill in for him if I could help out on air. He gave me the freedom to do anything I wanted."

It was after that two-week stint that CKFM came calling. Soon, Mr. Forbes switched stations as well, and the two were hooked up for the first time on Mr. Forbes' morning show.

"We hit it off right away," says Mike. "I realized right away that this is what I was supposed to be doing. People think we've been a team for years, but it's only been six weeks."

"I think we can be number one in Toronto in a year or two," he continues. "I'll keep doing it as long as it's fun."

Mike is riding high, receiving calls every day from people asking him to do commercials using one of his vast repertoire of voices.

While the job isn't without its demands, he maintains that he's having the time of his life.

"At times, I think of it as pressure. (There are) 13 and 14-hour days, lots of benefit work, and I'm only 26 years old," he says. "But most of the time, I'm having fun. I have a fantasy life."

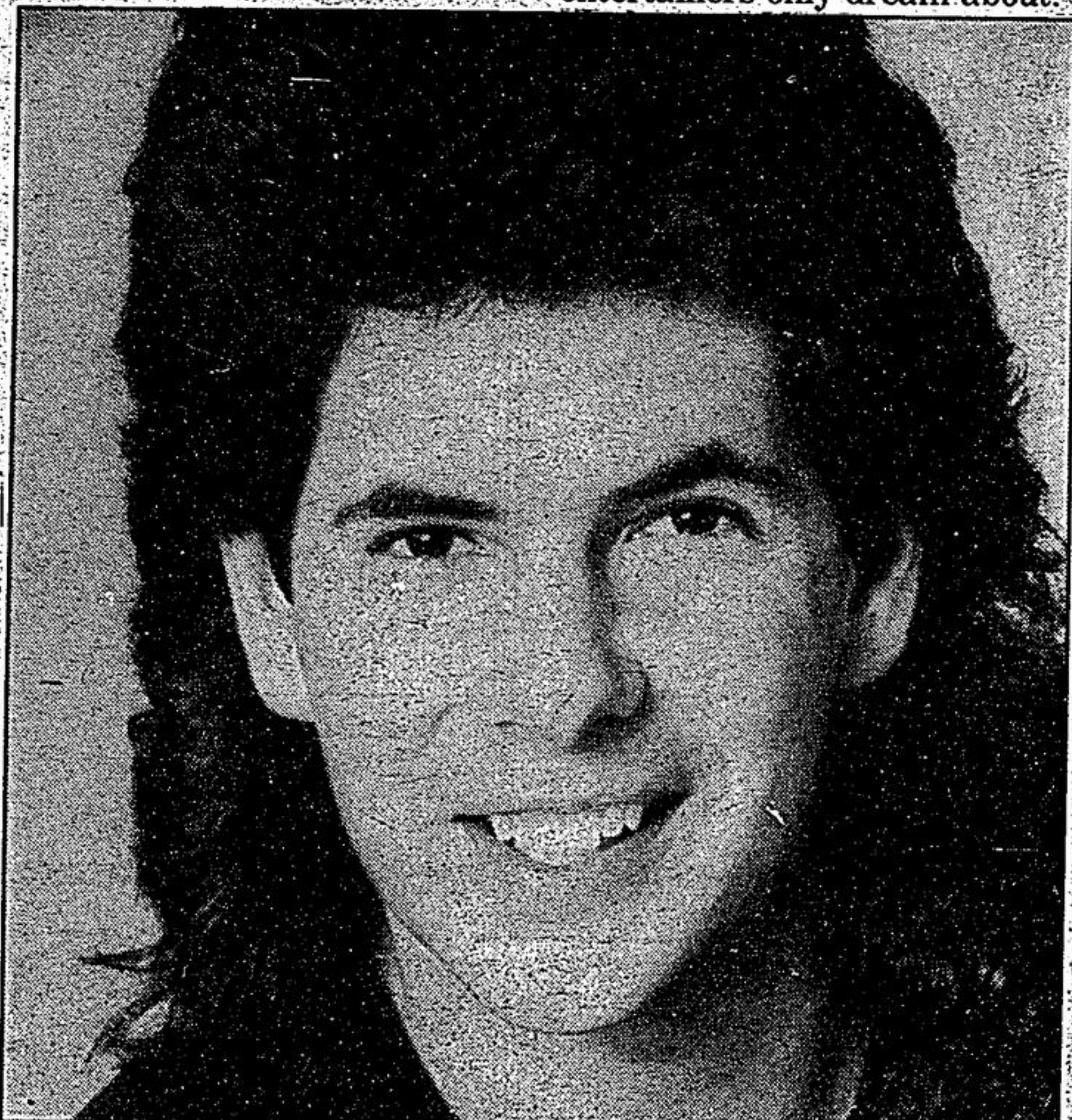
Mike lives in Scarborough with his wife, Linda, whom he met when she was a teller at a Stouffville bank in 1986. The couple is currently expecting their first child.

He says Stouffville is still a vital part of his life and he visits his parents and friends regularly.

"I come up and see my dad when he's not busy, and my friends from Stouffville are the most important thing in my life," he notes.

As for the future, Mike is content for now to ride his ever-increasing wave of success. But he admits he may eventually be drawn to even bigger things, that the day may come when he roams much farther from the town where it all started for him as a teen.

"I still would like to go south of the border some day," he says. "But I'm in no hurry."



Toronto radio station personality Mike Richards (a.k.a. Mike Rehill) started his career in comedy as an SDSS student in 1978. Mike's star is rising fast on the Toronto radio scene and the morning show he co-hosts is a huge success. A true Stouffville native, he says his local friends and family "are the most important thing in my life."

## Pets benefit in rabies clinic

A local veterinary clinic is participating this month in a program to control rabies.

The Stouffville Veterinary Clinic at 456 Main St. West in Stouffville is taking part with a number of other York Region veterinary offices to offer low-cost rabies shots for pets.

This year's clinic takes place Saturday, Oct. 21 from 1-3 p.m. The fee is \$6 per pet that is vaccinated. Vaccination certificates and tags will be issued to pet owners who attend the clinic.

For further information on the local clinic, call 640-1641.

## York residents needing care aided by program

A new placement co-ordination service for York Region residents needing long-term care was announced last week by Ministry of Community and Social Services MPP Charles Beer.

The York Region branch of the Victorian Order of Nurses will receive annual funding of \$175,745, plus start-up costs of \$23,750, to establish and operate the service.

Placement co-ordination services ensure that residents are referred to the facility "which best serves their individual needs," said a release from the provincial health ministry.

"A co-ordinated service for long-term care placements will

significantly reduce the difficulties and stress involved in finding the appropriate facilities for York residents who require such care," said Mr. Beer in the release.

The service begins operating this later this fall. It will maintain an inventory of all long-term care facilities and programs in York Region including nursing homes, homes for the aged, chronic care hospital beds, home care and related home support services.

It is estimated that approximately 2,400 York Region residents per year will require the service, the release states. The addition of the York Region Placement Co-ordination Service brings the total in Ontario to 21.

# I'm unfit for obsessive '80s adults

If you're anything less than a human dynamo, it's really difficult to find role models in the lean, mean and disgustingly keen '80s.

Everywhere you turn, people are extolling the virtues of purity of body and mind frowning with Victorian ferocity on even a modest amount of decadence.

I'd resigned myself to staying firmly in the closet with a few other, unsung reprobates until I read a heart-warming article in the Toronto Star which compared the lifestyle of two couples whose attitudes to modern living were diametrically opposed.

In a reversal of youthful rebellion, the older couple are the tearaways. They admit with charming candor that they enjoy a drink or two and they're unapologetic couch potatoes and



kate's corner

kate gilderdale

vociferous readers.

Their most arduous form of exercise consists of a stroll to the neighborhood restaurant for a large and delicious brunch, full of dangerous dietary pitfalls.

At the other end of the spectrum their son and his wife, superbly fit, are models of '80s restraint with a wholehearted commitment to self-improvement.

There is now, says their son, "a stigma to looking unfit" in his business circles. "I'm surrounded by guys who are conscious of

their physical appearance." Alas, his observations only serve to strengthen my empathy with his parents.

Both couples adopt a live and let live attitude towards each other, but that's a rare phenomenon. People who work hard at anything, including strenuous workouts, certainly have my undying admiration. I'd be the first to admit I'm simply too lazy to make the effort.

It's just that I can't help feeling a few of them take the whole thing a bit too seriously.

Spending several hours a day honing my body to the perfect proportions which will help me get ahead in business isn't something that appeals to me.

I love my free time, and I'd rather use it to be with my family, my friends, or a stimulating book. Not that I'd dream of shunning the fabulously fit; I figure I'd actually be doing them a service hanging around them, because they need people like me to emphasize their sleek torsos.

Looking back on this decade, a word that comes often to mind is obsessive. People have become obsessive about their appearance, what they eat and how they live.

They're obsessively concerned about what everyone thinks of them, something which wouldn't worry them if they realized how

little anyone does, the people they're trying to impress are all too busy being obsessed with themselves.

If we were perfect people in a perfect world, no one would drink, smoke, drive cars or fight.

There'd be no one and nothing to criticize, because everyone would be without fault. Hockey players would only take off their gloves to shake hands and rock stars would all emulate John Denver.

Perhaps that's why I'm grateful that the human race thrives on struggle, argument and a never-ending search for an elusive Utopia. Being mere mortals, we can't even agree on what form it should take, but the debate will probably be far more interesting than actually finding what we're looking for.