

Train whistle may sound good times for Stouffville

On July 1, 1871, the Toronto and Nipissing Railway sent its first train into the brand new station in Stouffville. The anxious residents of the village founded by Abraham Stouffer some 65 years previous were anticipating that the coming of the railway would finally afford Stouffville the type of economic growth experienced by Markham to the south.

A hundred and twenty some odd years later, things have come full circle in Stouffville. While towns like Unionville, Markham, Uxbridge, and Port Perry have watched their central business districts flourish, or at least keep pace, over the past several decades, Stouffville's has managed to consistently fall just a little short.

And once again, Stouffville's business community is looking to a railroad to give the town the boost it needs to make it a flourishing place in which to do business. The York-Durham Heritage Railway, with its charter having recently been granted by the provincial government, is about to become a reality.

It certainly won't be an instant fix. The first train won't pull out of the station and head towards Uxbridge until some time after 1995. There's still much preparatory work to be done, according to the backers of what will become only the third heritage railway in Ontario. An operating agreement still must be worked out with the province; lining up and repairing passenger cars, as well as a steam locomotive to go with the diesel they already have; and training people to operate the trains.

But according to several retail merchants in the downtown Main Street core, just the prospect of the railroad setting up in town has them thinking this may just be the answer to their prayers. For years, the business types have wondered how to take advantage of the endless stream of traffic which goes through the town enroute to the famous Stouffville Flea Market each weekend. Some have suggested the car count is simply too high, and that setting up a Main Street bypass would open things up a little and encourage only the people who want to see the town to drive through. This would also make it easier for local residents to venture out without being forced to endure tiresome traffic jams just to travel a half a mile or so.

Others have insisted the traffic is a blessing, and that it's simply a matter of finding a



From Where I Live

Bruce Stapley

way of flagging the cars down. The merchants have combined with the local council to take advantage of business improvement area (BIA) grants

in recent years. Sidewalks are now interlocking stone, flowers hang from lamp posts in summer, and the posts themselves are reproductions from days gone by, complete with traditional lamps.

Several of the established merchants are experiencing a certain measure of success, although many agree the lack of a consistent theme has definitely impeded the progress of the business core in general.

All seem to be in agreement the heritage railroad will be the attraction necessary to stop existing motorists, while at the same time drawing to town the types of people looking to spend some time, and some money, in a quaint rural environment.

Once operational, the train will run through Goodwood and on to the historic Uxbridge depot. The railway is the dream of a group of local citizens who plan to run it as a volunteer

venture. It has an air of romanticism and nostalgia to it that most people are sure to find irresistible. The sound of the train whistle blowing, and the look of the peaceful woods and fields going by out the window, are sure to take people back to the days of the friendly branch-line passenger train.

Now if they could only arrange to have Johnny Cash drop by to sing a few train songs on a Sunday afternoon...

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